

HR 3940-To authorize the Secretary of the Interior to extend grants and other assistance to facilitate a political status public education program for the people of Guam

Testimony presented to the Subcommittee on Insular Affairs, Oceans and Wildlife, U.S. House of Representatives

by

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Madam Chairwoman and members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity to participate in his hearing on the introduction of legislation that seeks to clarify the authority of the Secretary of the Interior in allowing him to extend technical assistance to our island to facilitate an political status public education program for the people of Guam.

Guam's political status has been an issue of substantive debate in every decade since the 1930s. The People of Guam through its commission on self-determination held four referenda on the subject of our political status. Though a commonwealth document was drafted, ratified by the people of Guam and introduced in Congress four different times from 1989 to 1997; the document was never reported out of its Congressional Committee.

Since then, Guam and its tourism based economy has survived super typhoons, earthquakes, the bursting of the Asian economic bubble, a SARS epidemic, the turmoil in our nation's economy, and the H1N1 influenza virus. Each of these challenges has forced the government of Guam to meet our mandate of basic services amid a climate of ever dwindling financial resources. As this committee knows too well, governing amid tough economic times requires that we set priorities and make tough fiscal decisions.

Though the move of U.S. Marines from Okinawa to Guam will usher in a new era of economic prosperity for the people of Guam, much of the Guam Military Buildup Program's initial requirements will mandate a significant commitment of local resources – resources we presently do not have. This is why HR 3940 is so vital to our self-determination effort.

For the record, I believe that the people of Guam will choose a political relationship that brings Guam closer to the United States, and maybe one day, our brothers and sisters throughout the Marianas. In a time of global uncertainty, when our faiths collide just as easily as our weapons, I believe that Guam's strength will be found in greater unity, not in the old ways of division and political separation.

A recent poll conducted by the University of Guam, indicates that more than half of Guam's adult residents report having an immediate family member who has served, or is serving in the U.S. Military. We are an island of American patriots and I believe any future plebiscite will act as greater proof of that fact.

It has been more than two decades since Guam's last plebiscite on political status. And so, we must acknowledge that a new generation full of talent and vision is coming to prominence on Guam. I support HR 3940 because I believe that generation will finish the work we may leave behind. Finally, I believe that we share a responsibility to educate them well and assist them in their effort.

The technical assistance garnered by the passage of HR 3940 will allow the Guamanian electorate to make an educated decision concerning our political identity. I applaud the Chairwoman for her work on this issue, and on behalf of the people of Guam lend her our full support.