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**Committee on Natural Resources**  
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**Opening Statement of**  
**Chairman John Fleming**  
**Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife, Oceans & Insular Affairs**  
**On Tuesday, April 29, 2014**

**1334 Longworth House Office Building Oversight Hearing on the FY 2015 budget request for the Interior Department's Office of Insular Affairs and Legislative Hearing on H.R. 4296 & H.R. 4402**

"Good Afternoon. Today we will be discussing three different topics - the Fiscal Year 2015 Budget Request for the Department of the Interior's Office of Insular Affairs, H.R. 4296, a bill that will allow for the continued use of foreign workers for 5 years in the Northern Mariana Islands, and H.R. 4402, the Guam Military Training and Readiness Act of 2014, which would give the Navy the authority to close portions of the Guam National Wildlife Refuge.

The Office of Insular Affairs budget supports activities in the territories and the Freely Associated States. The budget notes that it strives to empower insular communities to allow them to overcome the challenges of economies that are small, isolated and generally dependent on one or two major income sources - three out of the four territories rely on tourism.

The territories are also adversely affected by high energy costs. The budget seeks to address these costs by developing alternative energy projects through the Department of Energy's National Renewable Energy Laboratory. I hope the witnesses can answer today if any ongoing subsidy would be required to make these projects economically feasible.

Currently, American Samoa, the Northern Mariana Islands, and the US Virgin Islands have declining populations and declining gross domestic products. Good news for American Samoa is the opening of a second cannery later this year. Guam has a positive story with a growing economy and a future relocation of marines to the island. Some concerns are whether or not the civilian infrastructure - roads, water and wastewater disposal - will be able to support the military population increase.

Today's hearing will provide an opportunity to discuss many of the issues facing the insular areas and ways the Office of Insular Affairs, through technical assistance, is trying to assist them.

H.R. 4296, introduced by Ranking Member Sablan, would extend the transition period that allows businesses dependent on foreign workers to continue using them for another 5 years, terminating in 2019.

The dependence on foreign workers has declined over the years, from 22,000 in 2009 to roughly 10,000 in 2013. However, it is unlikely the Northern Mariana Islands can go from 10,000 to zero by the end of this year without it adversely affecting its economy.

Under current law, the authority to use foreign workers would end in December of this year, unless the Department of Labor extends the transition period. A decision is expected by July 4<sup>th</sup> at the latest.

There are other provisions in H.R. 4296 that would be extended due to their termination at the end of the year and may be necessary if the transition period is extended. I look forward to discussing the need for the bill.

H.R. 4402, a bill introduced by Congresswoman Bordallo, would allow the Secretary of the Navy to close portions of the Ritidian unit of the Guam National Wildlife Refuge that fall within a surface danger zone connected to military training activities on a live fire training range on the Northwest Field of Anderson Air Force base.

The relocation of marines to Guam is dependent on there being a live-fire training range on Guam. Concerns have been raised with regard to the location of the live-fire training range. Of the 5 alternatives, is there another option that raises fewer concerns? The refuge and the overlay lands were created to protect listed species. The current proposal could impede the Service's ability to manage the refuge.

Today's hearing will provide an opportunity to discuss all of these issues, allow us to understand the need for the legislation and potentially develop a way forward.

I now will recognize our Ranking Member Mr. Sablan for his opening statement."

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