

Committee on Resources

Witness Testimony

Antonio R. Unpingco
Speaker and Senator

Twenty-Fourth Guam Legislature
Testimony in support of H.R. 100
Guam's Commonwealth Act

Guam: A Hundred Year Old Baby; Set Us Free To Blossom.

October 23, 1997

Chairman Young and Members of the Committee on Resources:

I am Antonio R. Unpingco, Speaker of the Twenty-Fourth Guam Legislature and a Republican Senator for over twenty years. Over the course of this long political career, I have held offices as the Chairman of the Committee on Rules and the Committee on General Governmental Operations, Military and Veteran's Affairs. You and I had the pleasure of meeting together with the late Congressman Antonio B. Won Pat many years ago, during a Congressional visit to Guam in the late 1970s. I wish to thank you for affording me the opportunity to offer testimony in support of Guam's Commonwealth Act, H.R. 100.

If you recall, we presented this same case before Congress in 1989 during the Congressional subcommittee hearing in Hawaii. The issues are the same. The contents of the bill are the same. The only difference is the bill's number and a new Congress. Three administrations, several congresses, and millions of dollars later, nothing has changed except some of the faces.

I do not want to speculate on what may be said at this hearing or reiterate what was said during the 1989 hearing.

What I do want to stress is the question everyone wants answered. Is Guam's quest for commonwealth realistic or are we just spinning our wheels as usual before an unsympathetic United States government?

I think we all know the answer. No one is taking our quest for commonwealth seriously ... and unless there is a major change in attitude, Guam's political status will remain the same.

It is bureaucrats in Washington, D.C. that govern Guam, not Congress and the President. Perhaps this is because of the inherent nature of the system relative to protecting bureaucratic turf. The policy makers have little or no knowledge about the desires and sentiments of the people of Guam. They rely primarily on information provided by bureaucrats which is often inaccurate or incomplete. It is Congress and the President that decides Guam's future, not bureaucrats.

Mr. Chairman, after nearly a century of American colonialism and albeit the fact that the Chamorro people of Guam have become American citizens, the people of Guam have remained a colony subject to the whims of the federal bureaucracy. As citizens, we are not equal to other Americans because of our status as a colony. This was evident during the recent United Nations' Fourth Committee meeting which discussed the status of the remaining colonies of the world, which included Guam. It was clear during those discussions that the United States refuses to respect the rights of the Chamorro people.

We know that Guam's current political status was a creation of Congress through the Organic Act and that it could only be changed by Congress. After the 1989 Hawaii hearing, Congress directed that an

Administration-led task force on Guam's Commonwealth Act and Guam's Commission on Self-Determination work out their differences. We have seen no progress of any significance made. Is this because we have been dealing with bureaucrats whose jobs would be eliminated if the political status of Guam is changed?

Such a task force was in place during President Reagan's Administration. Then, we dealt with another task force under President Bush's administration. This was followed by President Clinton's Administration. Ten years later, we have seen few results. If anything, we moved several steps backwards as a result of President Clinton's fundraising fiasco which tied in Guam's Commonwealth quest with illegal campaign contributions.

This is now history and we must move forward. Having seen the lack of progress in our political relationship with the United States, I am very pessimistic of any major political changes if decisions are left to the Washington bureaucrats. Guam has emerged as an economic powerhouse in the Western Pacific and the United States has refused to release its political grip. Guam has already poised itself to be the hub of telecommunications, finance, and a captive insurance domicile that will rival Bermuda and Vermont. Guam's strategic location has also become America's bridge to the booming economies of Asia.

We have more than demonstrated our ability to be economically self-sufficient. We have weaned ourselves from military dependency. Our economy is tourism based and we have made significant progress in diversifying it. Take, for example, the 1995 BRACC closures of the Naval Ship Repair Facility and the Fleet and Industrial Supply Center. The people of Guam were totally stunned to learn of those closures. We stood strong through the test, a test administered by the U.S. to see if we could withstand the wrath of American military power. We have found ways to rebound and build our island's future with the military assets we have received.

It must be acknowledged that because of Federal limitations imposed on Guam, we can only go so far in securing our future. If you can relate to how a child develops and outgrows its clothes, as well as its parents; so too, Guam has outgrown Federally imposed rules and restrictions. Guam is ready to cut the umbilical cord. We are not the children we were nearly a century ago. We have grown, matured and are ready to leave our mother's arms. It is strange how Federal laws aimed at protecting the economic interest of Corporate America have a profound negative impact on an unincorporated island 12,000 miles removed from Washington, D.C.. It is obvious that the Federal Government and Corporate America are sleeping together.

Given Guam's booming economy, as compared to many places in the United States, it remains a mystery why the United States is reluctant to loosen its grip on Guam. Certainly, American taxpayers are concerned where and how their tax dollars are being spent. And I venture to guess that not too many Americans are aware about Guam, or even where Guam is located. So, after examining this and considering how Congress is tightening the Federal budget, why is the United States hesitant in cutting Guam loose from Federal control and spending? Only Congress can truthfully answer that question.

Surely, if Guam is making great strides in becoming self-sufficient, it would be logical that there is no better time than the present to give the people of Guam a new political status with less Federal red tape and Federal monies.

Autonomy for Guam seems to have changed or is being changed by the bureaucrats in Washington. The word political self-determination has scared a lot of people. They seem to be going in another direction which is still colonial rule. Rather than political colonialism, it is probably more appropriate to describe it as economic colonialism. These are strong words. But, there is no other way to describe how Guam has been treated for nearly a century. Each time we seem to make progress which would be extremely beneficial to our people and our economy, big brother, a.k.a. the United States, intervenes and places an obstacle in our way.

One prime example which immediately comes to mind is Guam's once viable garment industry. In the early 1980's, a private company, Sigallo-Pac Ltd., operated a garment factory, which produced sweaters for export. Several years later, lo and behold, the Federal Government stepped in, saw things otherwise and changed its ruling on Guam as a domestic point of origin. In the end, the federal government placed quotas on this local industry, ultimately destroying it.

In this example, the rules of the game were set and all players had a clear understanding of how to play by the rules. Guam, as a player, was smart and used the rules to its economic advantage. Yet, the big bully, a.k.a. the United States, unilaterally decided that the rules placed the large political contributors, the mainland garment industry, at a major disadvantage and changed them in mid-stream. The result was the end of what could have been an economic success for this island. This experience served as a clear reminder of Washington's wishy-washy attitude towards the people of Guam. On some occasions, Guam is considered as foreign as the plague. On other days, we are as domestic as apple pie.

Economic colonialism has always existed. When the U.S. Naval government had control of Guam, restrictions were in place which halted any economic development. Federal acquisition of the most prime properties -- which over the past 20 years remained largely unused -- came under the guise of national defense, thereby placing a stranglehold on development. Guam always had the potential for a booming island economy. Yet, it wasn't until 1962 when President Kennedy lifted Guam's designation as a Defensive Sea Area and Airspace Reservation that Guam began its political, social and economic journey to where it is today.

This is part of the ugly American attitude that I described earlier. Whenever the people of Guam try to get ahead, the Federal Government kicks us in the stomach. We have been kicked around too many times. I say enough is enough! We are tired of being treated as second-class citizens. We have all the tools needed to advance our island and our people. We no longer need subsidies from the federal government to survive. What we need is Congress' vote of confidence by passing Guam's Commonwealth H.R. 100. We will then become a full and contributing member of the American family.

When all else fail and the people of Guam overcome all the obstacles and intrusions of the motherland, the Federal Government becomes desperate and strikes at the heart of the Chamorro people -- **Self-Determination**. Yes, Chamorro self-determination is the heart of the debate between the Administration and the Chamorro people. This is the last and only issue they can use to keep us from our quest for complete autonomy.

This control, which the federal government has struggled to keep, has infringed on the Chamorro people's right to self-determination. During the October 10, 1997, United Nations hearing, the United States' representative, David Scott, made the following statements before the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee):

"It is the view of the United States, that the right to self-determination of the territory of Guam must be exercised by all of the people of Guam not just one portion of the population. The speakers you have heard today seem to seek to disenfranchise a majority of the population of Guam. It is hard to imagine the UN associating itself with an exercise in self-determination in which a majority of those to be covered by the result could not participate in the exercise based on their ethnicity (sic).

The United States is a nation in which all persons are provide equal treatment under the law. Our constitution does not allow for elections in which a portion of the population is excluded based on their ethnicity (sic). The United States is a nation in which all persons are provided equal treatment under our law. Furthermore, we cannot endorse a process under which the rights of some groups are held to take precedence over the rights of others, again just based on ethnicity (sic)."

These statements made by the U.S. representative to the United Nations are another example of the ugly American attitude that has been displayed in the Western Pacific for almost a century. The arrogance that they are the supreme beings of this earth will no longer be tolerated by the Chamorro people.

Let's take the statement that all U.S. citizens are treated equally. You and I know that there is no truth to that. The Chamorro people are proud to be U.S. citizens. We are so proud that we have time and time again borne arms to serve the interest of the United States in perpetuating world peace and prosperity. But, we remain an unequal partner, and an alienated member of the American family. We do not have the right to vote for the President of the United States; Guam's Delegate to Congress, Robert Underwood, does not have the right to vote on the floor in Congress! Are the people of Guam truly Americans? The answer is a resounding NO!

There is concern that U.S. citizens who reside on Guam would be excluded from voting on self-determination. Sure, they are U.S. citizens. But they originally immigrated to the United States via our small island, which the U.S. so proudly claims as a possession. They came from other countries looking for a better way of life, the American way. These immigrants have had the opportunity to have self-determination in their own countries. They are again allowed to exercise self-determination a second time when they were allowed to migrate to Guam. It is only right and just that the Chamorro people be allowed to exercise the same right.

Slowly, the Federal Government has made Chamorros a minority in their native homeland. Maybe this has been the plan all along. This is a problem created entirely by the United States. Mr. Scott accuses the Chamorros of disenfranchising the majority of Guam's population. Well, I ask that someone please tell Mr. Scott that the United States has disenfranchised the Chamorro people for almost a century, long before the so called majority ever came to Guam.

God forbid if we should ever infringe on the rights of our fellow U.S. citizens. Yet the basis for self-determination is embodied in Article 73 of the United Nations charter of which the United States is a party. It is the United States which placed Guam in the list of non-self-governing territories in the first place.

There has never been concern for the Chamorro people's interest. The only interest that has been protected here is that of the United States. America has shirked its responsibility and time has caught up on America. Now it is time for America to right the wrongs it has committed.

The U.N. Charter was ratified and adopted by the U.S. Senate. Well, the Federal Government does not even want to honor this, but expects all other member nations to do so. This is the same body which was created under the guidance of the United States. And, when all else fails, the United States has attempted to abolish the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee) under the guise of U.N. financial constraints. If this attempt had been successful, it would have meant that colonialism had been eradicated, which couldn't be further from the truth. It is obvious that America will stoop to the lowest level possible to avoid the issue of Guam, Commonwealth and self-determination.

As Guam looks to our neighboring islands of Micronesia -- the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas, the Federated States of Micronesia, and the Republic of Palau -- we recognize that all of these islands have had the opportunity to determine their political destiny with the United States. Yet, Guam has been completely avoided by Congress and numerous administrations. Let's be honest. Guam is just too valuable as a military outpost, despite the military's attempt to appear as if they are downsizing their operations in the Western Pacific. We are not stupid. The opening of Department of Defense schools on Guam was a clear sign of Guam's future as a military stronghold in the Pacific. We know just how important this small island is to American military might. It is unjustifiable to use this as an excuse to exploit the Chamorro people, their land and their inalienable right to self-determination.

We are just as concerned about global peace, as much as the United States. At the same time, however, we are concerned with the future of our Chamorro people and our culture. That is something that can never be replaced. When the United States negotiated new political status with our neighboring Micronesians, there were contingencies set aside in the interest of military needs. We are open to negotiate similar provisions in our Commonwealth Act.

The people of the United States exercised their right to choose when they declared their independence. They chose to start a new nation. Those naturalized U.S. citizens on Guam chose to leave their country to find a better life, to live the American dream. In the same respect, Chamorros must and will exercise their right to choose. These ideals which we have embraced are strikingly similar to the Republican movement that has swept the United States and Guam this past year. Consider the passage of this legislation as an affirmation of Republicanism and a fulfillment of the Contract with America.

It is our wish that we become a member of the American family through the Commonwealth Act. However, we will not wait forever. There are other options available to us and we will exercise those options if and when it becomes necessary. Next year will mark a long century of American colonialism on Guam. It is with God's help that I hope 1998 will be the start of a new relationship with the United States. If not, then we must part ways and continue this journey alone.

In closing, I ask for your support of H.R. 100, Guam's Commonwealth Act and request that Congress expeditiously pass this piece of legislation by next year as a symbol of the United States' commitment and promise to eradicate colonialism worldwide.

Respectfully,

Antonio R. Unpingco
Speaker and Senator (R)
Twenty-Fourth Guam Legislature

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