

IRENE SGAMBELLURI TESTIMONY FOR CODEL FIELD HEARING

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Hafa Adai, Members of Congress, leaders from the Pacific, and dignitaries: Thank you for coming to Guam for this important hearing to discuss the concerns our island has regarding the rising tensions with the People's Republic of China.

My name is Irene Sgambelluri, and I am 92 years old. I am testifying before you today as a daughter of a World War II veteran, mother, grandmother, great-grandmother, and World War 2 Survivor.

I love my island and I believe that this is the most beautiful place in the world, not only because of its natural beauty, but also because of what it represents. Guam is the center of American values in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. I am proud to testify before you today in this field hearing to signify the importance our island has in our nation. **[short pause]**

Almost 80 years ago, I lived through the worst conflict our island has faced: **World War 2**. I was just ten years old when on December 8th, 1941, the feast of Guam's Patron Saint, Santa Marian Kamalen, the Imperial Japanese military began attacking and invading our island.

In the early days of the War, my father was captured and was a Prisoner of War in Japan. I never had a chance to say goodbye and I feared I would never see him again. War ripped my family apart and took away every aspect of life I had knew up until that point.

During the day, my siblings and I were forced to attend Japanese school, where learning the Japanese language was mandatory. In the morning, student would face the sun, bow to the emperor, and then exercise. My brother and I were physically assaulted in school; they would pull my hair, drag me, and hit me.

When we were not in classes, we were required to work in the fields under the hot and scorching sun. We were deprived of food and water for hours.

Shortly After Liberation Day, my father returned from Japan. I was overcome with emotion to see that he had survived and that our family was reunited. He had suffered immensely, and I had hardly recognized him. He brought back with him a black book filled with the names of American Prisoners of War who were imprisoned with him. I have this book today and am proud to have this as a lasting memory of my family. **[hold up book; pause]**

The War was the most difficult and painful period of my life, and this is coming from someone with cancer. While I have told my story many times, I still find these memories agonizing. While I was one of the lucky ones to survive, I nearly lost my family, my home & the life I knew. **[short pause]**

History cannot repeat itself. In other words, Guam should never be the focal point of a violent and brutal conflict in the Pacific. Nobody should ever have to endure what I went through. I would not wish that pain and despair on my worst enemy. I cannot let this happen to my grandchildren, greatgrandchildren, and the people of this island. **[short pause]**

Japan attacked us because of our strategic and important location in the Pacific. With control of Guam, Japan could control the Pacific. China sees the importance of pacific islands as well; however, we will not let them have control over Guam and the Pacific region.

I will forever be thankful to the United States. When they liberated our island 79 years ago on July 21st, 1944, I was just 13 years old. I was proud and happy to see servicemembers land on Asan Beach. To me, their presence signified more than just the end of the Japanese occupation in Guam. It signified liberty, democracy, and freedom. **[short pause]**

These American values have been forged in our culture here in Guam and we are proud to be where America's day begins. The United States needs to take every possible action to ensure that these values remain a part of our lives no matter what.

The federal government has supported Guam for as long as I can remember. You cannot give up on us now. If there is ever a time to support the island, **it is now**. With your commitment to protecting Guam, I can sleep at night knowing my community, family, and friends are protected by the full faith of our armed forces and government. **[short pause]**

Un Dangkulu na si yu'us ma'ase, thank you very much, for having me this morning and allowing me to share with you my story and the trust I have in the United States.

God Bless you, God bless the United States of America, and God Bless Guam