

Committee on Resources

Witness Testimony

Tony Artero

[tony@netpci.com]

Testimony on HR 100 - Guam's Commonwealth Act

Honorable Don Young, Chairman, and Honorable Members of the Resources Committee, greetings from Guam where summer is forever:

Introduction

I'm Tony Artero. I had no idea I'd grow up to be fighting our own government. I have done always what I think is right and I have never accepted the status quo. I think I'm this way because of my up bringing. My parents taught me many things including that my actions will be the judge of my character. Credit also goes to my school teachers, things I learned in the Navy and the real estate industry. The lesson I learned from our Founding Fathers is simply: The greatest form of patriotism is standing up against the wrong doings of one's own government.

Also, I have always liked the song, "There's a Star Spangle Banner Waving Somewhere" and I believe that it's been waving in my heart since I was in pre-kinder. I did not exactly join the Navy, after high school, serving 21 years in the Submarine Force just because I needed a pay check or was crazy for arduous duty. I am patriotic and obviously not a bit ashamed to admit it.

My grandfather Pascual Saez Artero, through hard work, acquired ownership of real property on Guam and operated various businesses prior to World War II. My father Antonio Cruz Artero was his right-hand man who managed to harbor Mr. George Ray Tweed, the Navy radioman who, like some of us, endured and survived the Japanese occupation of Guam from 8 December 1941 through 21 July 1944. I am providing you with my testimony a copy of the book written about that ordeal.

My father received a Congressional Medal of Freedom after the war, but he considers the medal a slap on the face on account of the land takings that destroyed our livelihood, robbed us of our future, and charged us property tax on the remainder that was used as a military dump site. We are also obligated to pay Social Security Tax, yet, we have been denied the economic use of our land to this very day for no-good reason.

Testimony

Commonwealth for Guam - Another Veil by Local Governmental Leaders by **Tony Artero**

Once Upon A Time, before WWII, the Stars and Stripes was proudly waving over the little island of Guam. Guam was a model democratic community in the middle of the vast Pacific Ocean. The name "Guam" is believed to be a derivative of "Guaha ham," meaning, we have. Corn, citrus, tropical fruits and vegetables, sugarcane, and even tobacco and cocoa were grown. Chickens, pigs, other domesticated livestock and wild games were usually in surplus. Viable commercial ventures included copra, cattle grazing, a slaughter house, auto repair shops, and even a sawmill, to mention a few.

At the same time, the land, the streams, the beaches, and the drinking water were clean, without the myriad of laws we have today that seems to only enlarge the problem. The native people were industrious, resilient, and lived a healthy long life on an island that was in balance with nature. No one needed to be on foodstamps, welfare, or in public housing as the islanders took great pride in their ability to bounce back, on their own, from any and all natural or manmade disasters.

The balance today, if any, found in our political status quo of more than 50 years, is only in the argument by some that they are owned by our federal government, which resulted from the destruction of private property interests since the end of WWII when federal welfare handouts got a political foothold. Those people have actually given up totally and have acquired the belief they are conquered. I question, however, their definition of being a "free" American on American soil.

In fact, many people on Guam since WWII have been in a constant struggle between two conflicting orientations: The common belief that a person must earn his or her keep v.s. the pervasive influence of government handouts, which now includes concrete homes for a dollar, and land for a dollar a year for 99 years for a chosen few.

Those are the products of "hard work" by government "leaders" without any planning, yet, are all considered "politically correct," even if fraudulent like that of the "I Ta-No-Ta Land Use Plan." "I'm from the government and I'm here to help you" as reported by the Pacific Daily News front page story of February 23, 1997, on public housing. "People are lucky. They're well-taken care of, they live here until they die. The only thing I can do is help provide the facilities for their success, hoping to promote self-sufficiency." quoting a Government official.

With handouts? It's got to be the joke entering the new millennium. These unfunded mandates together with abortion, the wetland and wildlife regulations, are a cancer slowly eating away our family and community values. I view this abuse as a naked aggression driven by greed, the culprit in the ruin of the cohesiveness of the beautifully structured Chamorro culture of pre WWII Guam and the reason why people today are screaming for help. Our "leaders" have been very consistent in maintaining the integrity of the status quo since WWII, swelling the government and handouts.

All our life, we hear, "Guam Is Where America's Day Begins." But Guam is also where injustice, waste, and abuse begin. That has been the true state of Guam since WWII, regardless of which party is in office. The actions of those in power are repugnant, to say the least, to freedom loving people everywhere. The deck has always been stacked against the working class, which is why many people today have grown bitter and are questioning the celebration of Independence Day and Liberation Day. To add insult to injury, our government provided opportunity and tax rebates to the Japanese, our former enemy, so that they can improve their quality of life, while suppressing the economic freedoms of our own people and showering them with handouts. Democracy is a sacred trust for future generations. However, for American taxpayers on Guam, there is no trust and the future is in doubt. Those in power have made a travesty of our fundamental rights and equal justice.

The government has no business in business, yet, government is the biggest business on Guam since WWII. GovGuam now owns the largest real estate dealership headed by a retired career politician. Similarly, the Navy owns a very profitable McDonald's fast food restaurant, off-base, on land taken by force, not to mention without just compensation, taking business away from the private sector. These are the "Thank Yous" to our parents' sacrifice of life and property in the wars America was in.

We paid our dues, but, today, there is no sense of a future for Western democracy. Guam, to this very day, is denied aviation and ground transportation safety with the airport to be at Northwest Field and a spine highway inland, extending north-south. The excuse has always been, "We cannot afford it." Yet, billions of dollars have already been wasted, the problem ignored, and has compounded. A really comprehensive land use plan would have addressed safety, conservation in land use, development in harmony with the environment, a sustainable economic growth for the future, and the preservation of our democratic values.

The belief that one is owned by our federal government contradicts President Lincoln's words, "We cannot have a society when one man owns another," and more so when the government taketh away. Being chattel is as absurd as the forceful land-taking by a government that champions freedom. I will never accept that I'm conquered. And I will continue to fight and will fight to the finish, if necessary, for my economic freedom.

Changing Guam's political status to that of commonwealth, statehood, or even independence is no magic bullet for curing more than 50 years of common greed still running rampant. I regard this push for a change in Guam's political status as nothing more than buying time to maintain the status quo. Isn't ten years long enough? Guam's dilemma requires Americans to unite and in one voice shout, at the government, 'Right the Wrong. Restore and protect the Sanctity of Private Property,' with or without Commonwealth status.

Let me point out, the most recent governmental arrogance and insensitivity is the reoccupation of Tiyan, a potentially lucrative money making asset. Hundreds of billions of revenue dollars could be created with the private use of the old NAS land. Guam is not as crowded as other places, yet, we feel hemmed in and crowded while thousands of acres are held hostage. On Guam today toxic landfills threaten the supply of drinking water, which shortens our life span. Guam's highways are dangerously engineered traffic hazards and too many people are dying pointlessly. Increasing crime and failure of the criminal justice system only encourages lawlessness.

This is all evidence that federal and local governmental actions are fraudulent and particularly in dealing with the legacy of Guam's native people and with private property interests on Guam. We are well aware that since WWII, the people who are benefiting and prospering from the present U.S. status, are those in power. Indeed, we have met the enemy and our enemies are career politicians and bureaucrats who force the native people of Guam into subservient lives of quiet desperation generation after generation.

There have been numerous scoping meetings on Guam conducted by federal officials over the years. The conclusion on every one of them suggest inexplicable barbarism. In fact, I heard the good Senator Dan Inouye from the State of Hawaii, after one of such meetings said, "Guam is crying out for justice." Not so much where are the indictments of all those investigations, but why does the problem continue to be ignored? Is it because people at the top are involved in the land scam? After more than 50 years of finger pointing between local and federal government officials, protecting each other's turf, the excuse on the land issue now, amidst the downsizing, is that the federal government will not return land to its rightful owner, only to another government entity. But we also know that to be false because many people have already had their lands returned. That explains how GovGuam becomes the largest real estate dealership on Guam. Because privately owned lands were taken by force and orchestrally covered up all these years, the question for the new millennium is simply: Can anyone find in any of the documents that America and Guam hold sacred that when Party A (the federal government) takes property from Party B (the Guam property owners), then gives it to Party C (GovGuam), Party B is now reconciled? Of course not!

What makes anyone think that a new political status adds to anyone's long-term good health, wealth, and to

the island a holistic land use plan? India was decolonized more than fifty years, but government greed remains intact, which made the largest democratic country in the world the epitome of impoverishment, in spite of all its natural resources.

Both history and reason suggest that individual liberty is the key to social progress. The greater the people's freedom, the greater the chance of discovering better ways of life. The lands must be returned to the rightful owners now! If no one is demanding, then I am demanding that our elected "leaders" stop ignoring the problem and take this wake-up call seriously once and for all before we find ourselves amidst a civil war on Guam where America's day will end.

Present and future leaders of our country must understand that land is vital to life regardless of who you are. Without property rights, liberty, and justice there is nothing safe anywhere because order is absent as in the Dark Ages. Everything we have been hearing on Guam since WWII is political rhetoric that is full of baloney, similar to all the talk about commonwealth status. "Leaders" having anything to do with Guam have abandon ideals and have compromised principles. No one has yet to deal with Guam in a balance way. The only thing that will be accomplished from these talks in Washington D.C. will be more time and money spent, at the tax payers expense for naught.

Governmental leaders must understand that the love of democracy is that of equality, liberty, and justice for all and it begins at our homeland, not at political status talks. You must remind yourselves the purpose of the Boston Tea Party, of John Paul Jones, of Susan B. Anthony, of Martin Luther King, Jr. and of the Constitution of our great nation. Stay the course and keep it noble. Help foster a greater understanding of private property rights in our country and help right the wrongs of the past. What is good for Guam is also good for the nation as in the goose and the gander. Helter skelter development on Guam is government's doing and is prompted by greed, not by the lack of a political status. Greed must be replaced by a plan that is wholesome and complete in order to restore any kind of a balance. Understand that with economic freedom, liberty, and justice Guam will have sustainable economic growth and prosperity, law and order. All the above will help balance the budget. The reverse is terrifying.

We can do what is right on Guam just like what the ancient Chamorros did without the help of a Commission of Self-determination, a Chamorro land Trust Commission, an Ancestral Landowners Commission, a Decolonization Commission, and many other commissions, authorities, bureaus, and agencies doing absolutely nothing, but spending the tax payers' money while serving their own interests.

In closing, I wish to repeat that changing Guam's political status to a commonwealth will not magically remove the dilemma caused by more than 50 years of common greed still running rampant. Solutions are now fragmented and even the experts are confused. Still, the wrong, of fraudulent land-taking and abusive use of the land have to be righted before we can genuinely "Move Forward," regardless of what flag is flying over Guam.

Thank you for your attention.

Tony Artero, REALTOR / Submariner-U.S. Navy, Retired

#