



Office of the Vice Speaker

**TINA ROSE MUÑA BARNES**

*I Mina'trentai Siette Na Liheslaturan Guåhan*

**37<sup>th</sup> Guam Legislature**

*Chairwoman, Committee on Federal, Foreign & Regional Affairs,  
Innovation & Development, Human Resources & Public Libraries*

**Written Remarks for The Committee on Natural Resources  
Oversight Field Hearing  
United States House of Representatives**

***“Peace Through Strength: The Strategic Importance of the Pacific  
Islands to U.S.-led Global Security”***

Thursday, August 24th, 2023

**Tina Rose Muña Barnes**

*Vice Speaker, 37th Guam Legislature*

*Chairwoman, Committee on Federal, Foreign & Regional Affairs,  
Innovation & Development, Human Resources & Public Libraries*

Chairman Westerman, Committee Members, and distinguished Pacific leaders, I'm Tina Muña Barnes, Vice Speaker of the 37th Guam Legislature. As the longest-serving member of the Legislature, and a daughter of Guam, I extend a warm welcome and express gratitude for your visit to understand our challenges firsthand.

My testimony today is based on my personal experience from my travels throughout the region. As a former national athlete and now a policy maker for Guam, I've witnessed the rise of China's Soft Power diplomacy in our region. From airports to critical infrastructure, to government landmarks, and people-to-people exchanges, China has made it a point to make known their presence, open checkbooks, and influence, right here in our backyard.

I am the granddaughter of Colonel Juan Muña, whom the Guam Army Guard Headquarters is named after. He organized the Guam Militia, a voluntary force of Chamorros who risked their lives to fight alongside the Americans during World War II. My late husband is a United States Air Force Veteran, who spent his final days fighting for his life in Arizona navigating the bureaucracy that is the Department of Veterans Affairs. My son is an Air Force Veteran, and my grandson in law is deployed with the Army. While I may not be able to vote for my loved ones' Commander in Chief, I understand duty. This same sense of patriotism and duty is shared by many on Guam. I am not a defense expert, but I share with you some ideas on how the United States can bolster our capabilities in the region.

First and foremost, we need to come to an understanding that while Guam is a territory of the United States, we are home to about 160,000 Americans – both sons and daughters of Guam who serve our country, as well as your constituents stationed on Guam protecting democracy and promoting peace. Despite the nearly \$600 billion passed by Congress for infrastructure, our power infrastructure remains damaged from Super typhoon Mawar, causing daily outages. We're a vital defense point -- but lack proper resource allocation.

Esteemed members, I understand that some of you also serve on Committees that have oversight on Justice and Immigration. I come before you today cognizant of the issues you face at the southern border. Considering our small Pacific community's population decline, we lack skilled laborers and the growing DOD presence competes for a limited workforce. I urge support for more workers, especially for projects outside the fence, to tackle unaffordable housing and other infrastructure challenges.

Many of you remember the problems caused by COVID-19 on our supply chains. During this time, I noticed an uptick in loaded cargo planes from China landing on Guam to refuel. During the pandemic, when traditional supply chains were disrupted, Guam's strategic location posed as a solution to the supply chain issues. I passed legislation creating the Transshipment Task Force to study the success of such an industry on Guam.

Today, that study has been funded by the US EDA and is currently being conducted. Based on my research and conversations with US Commerce, there needs to be some policy changes to make this happen!

Imagine a world where China decides to cut off the US from their exports - this would leave us and our allies in the Pacific in limbo. Utilizing the deepest port in the West Pacific right here on Guam, would not only strengthen the American supply chain but create American jobs boosting the American economy. I hope to be able to count on your support to make this a reality. More importantly, especially with the growing challenges in our region, when DOD assets need critical supply to maintain force readiness, making Guam a regional hub for transshipment and trade would make for a better equipped military.

But this can't be done piecemeal. This would require a collective approach at examining our infrastructure, strategically investing in our island - the needs of the civilian population in Guam, while reaping the added benefit of equipping the best warfighters in the world.

Guam is the hub of the Pacific, and one way to demonstrate this is the jurisdiction of Coast Guard Sector Guam. Led by Captain Simmons, and his predecessor Captain Chase, I had the opportunity to learn exactly what they do for Guam and the region. The men and women of the Coast Guard pride themselves on being a "force for good" and the results speak for themselves.

Having a jurisdiction of almost 2 million square miles, Sector Guam ensures that all those who sail in our waters are responsible maritime partners. As you may know most of commerce into the Pacific comes through Guam. With their insights and genuine desire to curb illicit shipments, we passed legislation to implement a digital manifest, wherein Coast Guard intelligence can begin conducting their assessments on every container coming into Guam, regardless of their final destination in the Pacific. This has been one major deterrent for curbing illegal shipments to our homes.

Not only does Sector Guam provide a critical resource in protecting our maritime port, a vital hub supporting commercial and defense interests in the Pacific, but the impact that the Coast Guard has on the region is something that the entire Blue Continent takes to heart. Whether it be preventing boats with immigrants of our enemies from entering Guam and our neighbors illegally, or the countless successful critical search and rescue operations, I urge each one of you here today to consider furthering their capabilities here in Guam. The robust partnerships that the Coast Guard has brought to the region is evident in the regular successes we see right here before us.

I thank you for your time and look forward to the continued partnership. God Bless Guam, God Bless our Troops, and God Bless America. *Si Yu'us Ma'ase!*