



Testimony of
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before the

Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee

On H.R. 3079
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Good morning and Hafa adai honorable Chairwoman Donna Christensen, and Members of the Committee welcome to the beautiful island of Saipan. My name is Gregorio Sanchez Cruz Jr. President of Taotao Tano CNMI Association Inc. We would like to take this opportunity to extend our sincere gratitude and honor to testify on of this important piece of legislation H.R. 3079. To amend the Joint Resolution Approving the Covenant to Establish a Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Island. Madam Chairwoman, our home island is faced with economic and fiscal challenges, including social breakdowns. We have been addressing these issues with our government, legislative lawmakers, the public, and with respective Federal Agencies, specifically with the Office of Insular affairs.

Madam Chairwoman, we the local indigenous people of the Northern Marianas Islands acknowledge that the negative outweighs the positive in our current state. Our CNMI leaders have failed us in many ways and their failures has cause great harm; this is apparent , otherwise we the people of the CNMI would not be suffering to this day and I say this with great confidence. Their mismanagements, miscalculations, and unaccountability are the very reason we are in this predicament. It is a shame that these are our leaders whom we entrusted to deliver and serve in our best interest. They have failed to prioritize this daunting issue of our local labor and immigration system for so many years.

Presently the quality of life on our home island continues to shift downward. Unemployment rate is high, commodities are expensive, fuel prices are high, utility rates are outrageous while high unemployment rate is high and minimum wage low. As a result of this economic deficiencies and social decays, public services are low, public schools system is overcrowded, healthcare is unaffordable, and Government retirement fund is collapsing, withdrawals of medical health insurance, early withdrawals on retirement. Indeed, many of our people are moving off island to greener pastures, and the overall outlook of our economic condition is detrimental to our well being and stability of our island.

The administration's defiance and denial that they can pull our island out of this economic crisis is none but disheartening. We disagree with the administration's stance on the federalization of our Labor and Immigration, including the Attorney Generals defiance on the asylum refugee issue; a clear blatant ignorance towards the people of the NMI and the federal government and his ethics and conduct is questionable. Delayed submission of a Fiscal Budget is also a clear indication of failure in fiduciary duty, additional closure of garment factories, decline in visitor arrivals, government revenues declining, and the 20% rule of hiring locals just enforced at a critical time is a complete failure. Still the administration is optimistic and they have a recovery

plan. Their recovery plan is going to take years in the making while our People continue to suffer and are fast becoming extinct by leaving their home island.

Madam Chairwoman, currently there is 10% percent reduction in government payrolls, including budget cuts and a likelihood of continuance next year, but the administration is still optimistic. The administration and the business sectors opposed the newly installed federal minimum wage, which we all believe was long overdue. Our elected leaders then and now had the opportunity to correct what were wrong years ago but did nothing to address or rectify this forthcoming. The government's dependency on hiring lobbyist after lobbyist to bail our island out and keep the minimum wage down is pure self-interest. Hired Lobbyist, lavished on NMI's taxpayers money and for years they have been in business, earning thousands each year while the common people earned \$3.05 per hour barely surviving everyday living expenses.

The influx of thousands of non-resident guest workers has supplanted our local work force in the private sector, which created an unsustainable economy. This is a result of miscalculations and failures of our past and present leadership of not implementing an economic impact study years before. The lack of proper funding and priority of our educational system and implementation of a technical education in the field of Carpentry, Electrical, Masonry, Plumbing, Electronics, A/C technicians, Mechanics, Heavy equipments mechanics and operators, has proven devastating to our local workforce. As a result, many of our locals were left unemployed.

Recently while conducting our own research, our organization stumbled on a local issue with our Labor and immigration system. In 1995, our legislative branch passed a law that would have balanced the issue of employment benefits between local residents and non-resident guest workers employment benefits. Public Law 9-71 entitled the " The Resident Fair Compensation Act of 1995 " a law that is still currently in place as we speak, but never promulgated remained and shelved. The Fees collected from labor and Immigration Processing were appropriated to the Northern Marianas College in support of local resident training in the field of Technical skills but unfortunately funding was reprogrammed towards Tourism and Nursing curricular.

We the people of the Northern Mariana Islands have watched and witnessed non-resident guest workers conduct massive protests in front of the Federal Ombudsman and the Horiguchi Federal building complaining of being discriminated, exploited, forced into prostitution and so forth. These abuses should not be tolerated but the image painted is not entirely accurate. Who are these employers? Are they local businessmen? No Madam Chairwoman, no local resident owns a garment factory, a prostitution ring, or illegal gambling operations. They are solely owned by foreigners. Their own people abused their own; their abusive and exploitative practice has created the most disastrous image to our Commonwealth. However, these non resident guest workers should not demand citizenship. They have gone so far in their reasoning for citizenship to even include the use of children and religion as their front line is injustice.

In the early 1990's, an incident with one of the Garment factories concerning labor abuse issues surfaced and was televised nationwide. This garment factory paid a substantial amount of fines in the millions. However, the scars remained. It gave our island a permanent reputation from being a beautiful tropical destination, to an island Paradise of abusers. Since then, foreigners have been using these past issues to build a case to gain status, special treatments or prolong their stay in the Northern Mariana Island and we must end this type of abuses of our local labor and immigration system. It is unquestionable that our local officials have mismanaged our labor and

immigration to the detriment of the people of the NMI. A federal takeover is not a solution which will automatically award U.S. resident status to a select group of non-resident guest workers, solely based on the number of years spent in the Northern Mariana Islands. Such a proposal, without a more careful review can only lead to a greater detriment to our island. The United States must recognize the potential risks and problems if this was implemented.

We believe this Federalization issue is nothing other than National Security, especially with the Military build-up on the island of Guam. All do respect madam Chairwoman, our island is not a stepping stone. The United States government has a system in place concerning applications to citizenship. Their are steps and procedures that have to be followed to gain lawful citizenship and our weaknesses and loopholes of our local labor and Immigration system is not an excuse for anyone to take advantage and abuse. We the people recommend an advisory mechanism established to work alongside our local labor and immigration to foster a stronger and effective boarder control. Funding is essential to enforce a stronger and stringent boarder control and policy, an area of great importance for which our local government failed to recognize and prioritize for years until recent.

Madam Chairwoman, our silence has proven devastating. We the people of the Commonwealth are now wide-awake and armed with greater knowledge. We the people will ensure that our local control of our labor and immigration are prioritized and fully addressed. We will no longer sit back and ignore our elected leaders failures, for we the people, the voters, the taxpayers voted them in and we can vote them out if this measures are not addressed and prioritized immediately. It is time for a change and time to clean the house.

The future and destiny of our people are fast approaching and at stake. There is an urgent need for a course of action to correct the wrong and protect our indigenous population from losing the promise of achieving the American dream as intended in the Covenant. Our people fear political and social alienation as well as the loss of our core identity and existence of our home island.

Madam Chairwoman H.R. 3079 is a well thought piece of legislation, but we would like to point out a few, concerns and request;

1. We the people of the CNMI request a consideration of a STAY on this federalization issue of our local control on Labor and Immigration for we the people are as much victims of our past and present leadership mismanagements.
2. We acknowledge the non-residents guest worker contributions to our economy, infrastructures and development of our Commonwealth. Both the Commonwealth and non-resident workers have benefited financially and socially. Our Commonwealth must begin working toward self sufficiency in the workforce and someday we will no longer be dependent on the non-resident workers.
3. Sec. 6 (a) Immigration and Transition of H.R. 3079 calls for a 1 yr. Transition after date of enactment is a challenge and we the people request a STAY. Mass exodus of non-residents guest workers is of great concern for it will further cripple our ailing economy including business

establishments closing its doors. Our local work force is neither fully trained nor skilled in some areas that non-resident guest workers now occupy. A STAY will ensure that proper steps, procedures and regulations are promulgated and in place.

4. Sec. 6 (c) “(2) Family-sponsored Immigrant Visas: There is a need for compact impact negotiations or study, the local government is in no position to be shouldering cost of additional sponsored immigrants, this has been part of our failed economy.
5. Local House Bill 15-38 currently pending addresses some of these issues. This is a good start towards strengthening our local labor and immigration system with a few amendments on provisions required. Enforcement and funding is of a priority in order to move forward and correct the past issues that have haunted the NMI for years. Full enforcement of this bill if enacted is of outmost priority and we the Taotao Tano’s fully support this local bill, now with the senate awaiting passage.
6. Non - Voting Delegate: The CNMI’s potential economic development and growth are critically dependent upon a secure and sound relationship with the U.S. government. Justice, equality, and fairness for the people of the CNMI demand that we have representation in the U.S. Congress equal to those of other U.S. Territories, for the CNMI is the only self-governing commonwealth of the United States that does not have a Non-Voting Delegate to the United States House of Representatives.

In closing madam Chairwoman, The Taotao Tano group requests this sub-committee to recommend to the United States congress what is in the best interest of the people of the Northern Mariana Island. Whereas either side will provide results, the realization of H.B. 3079 will stifle the progress for our self-governance and will continue our dependency on the United States for support. On the other hand, the extension for a STAY on H.B. 3079 will provide us the opportunity to learn from our own mistakes and the Taotao Tano members have awakened to watch any undesirable leadership. We the Commonwealth have gone through the tough times and the journey we have taken has taught us a great lesson. Allow us to get back to the path that leads to self governance and sufficiency that is consistent with the intention of the Covenant.

Thank you, Si Yu’us Ma’ase, and Olomwaay.

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