

Political Reviews

*Micronesia in Review: Issues and Events, 1 July 2012
to 30 June 2013*

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The Contemporary Pacific, Volume 26, Number 1, 169–229
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Reviews of the Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, Nauru, and Palau are not included in this issue.

GUAM

National and local elections featured prominently in news stories in Guam this year, as local offices and Guam's nonvoting delegate to the United States Congress were on the ballot. The island's incumbent, Congresswoman Madeleine Z Bordallo, faced challengers in both the Democratic primary and the general election and prevailed against both. In the September primary, the five-term incumbent faced twenty-seven-year-old newcomer Karlo Dizon (*MV*, 14 May 2013). Despite Dizon's spirited campaign, Bordallo won 73 percent of the vote. Running unopposed in the Republican primary was the minority leader of the legislature, Senator Frank Blas Jr. Facing off against each other in the general election, Bordallo emphasized her experience and seniority while Blas said that he offered a "fresh perspective." Among the campaign issues debated were veterans' services, the proposed visa waiver for tourists from China, and Medicaid reimbursements. Blas was critical of the lack of progress in securing millions of dollars due to Guam in compensation for the impact of immigrant consumption of local government services, as provided for according to the terms of the Compacts of Free Association with the Federated States of Micronesia, Palau, and the Marshall Islands. Another

major issue was the military buildup resulting from the transfer of the US Marine units from Okinawa to Guam (*MV*, 28 Sept 2012). As in the primary, Bordallo won the general election handily, this time garnering 58 percent of the vote.

Democrats controlled the Guam Legislature by a 9 to 6 margin going into the November elections. When election results came in, voters had again chosen a 9 to 6 Democratic majority, although one-third of the legislature was replaced. The turnover in one seat was due to Frank Blas Jr choosing to run for the US Congress rather than for reelection to the legislature. However, four other incumbents were defeated, namely, Republicans Mana Silva-Taijeron and Sam Mabini and Democrats Judith Guthertz and Adolpho Palacios. Elected as freshman senators were Republicans Tommy Morrison, Mike Limtiaco, and Brant McCreadie and Democrat Michael San Nicolas. After a two-year hiatus, veteran Senator Frank Aguon Jr was also elected. When the new legislature was inaugurated, the Democratic majority retained the leadership of Speaker Judith Won Pat, Vice Speaker Benjamin Cruz, Legislative Secretary Tina Muna-Barnes, and Majority Leader Rory Respicio. Senator Tony Ada was chosen by Republicans to succeed Blas as minority leader (32nd Guam Legislature website).

Although Guam residents do not have the right to vote for president of

the United States, they do participate in the process by sending delegations to each political party's national convention. In August, Governor Eddie Calvo led the Republican (GOP) delegation to their convention in Tampa, Florida; he supported Mitt Romney (PNC, 29 Aug 2012), whose son had campaigned in Guam earlier in the year during the heated race for the GOP nomination (Politico website, 9 March 2012). Attending the September Democratic National Convention in Charlotte, North Carolina, the Guam delegation, led by Rory Respicio, supported incumbent President Barack Obama. Respicio explained that the delegation focused on promoting the island and addressing important Guam issues such as the military buildup, protecting Medicare, and access to federal programs. He also pointed out that the Democratic platform, approved in Charlotte, called for a partnership with Guam's people with respect to military matters including the buildup, supported fair treatment in federal programs for Guam and the other territories, and recognized Guam's right for self-determination (PNC, 6 Sept 2012).

Another 2012 campaign that received a great deal of attention was the race for the nonpartisan position of public auditor. Since its creation twelve years earlier, the post has been held by incumbent Doris Flores Brooks. In the run-up to the primary, Brooks had no opponent and reportedly lobbied the legislature to cancel the primary election for that office. This prompted former Governor Carl T C Gutierrez to launch a write-in campaign for the primary election in hopes of securing a spot on the

November ballot (MV, 18 Sept 2012). When the votes were counted, Gutierrez's write-in candidacy received 4,842 votes compared to 14,472 for Brooks. Later in September, the Democratic Party asked Gutierrez to withdraw his candidacy for public auditor in order to help with the upcoming legislative and village mayoral races. Gutierrez withdrew and explained that one of the reasons he had decided to challenge Brooks was to draw attention to what he felt was an often overlooked office; as he stated, "At least now the people of Guam know that there is this Office of Public Accountability that could be the third-party intermediary to find out what's going on with this government" (PNC, 14 Sept 2012).

Because of the nonpartisan requirements of the public auditor position, in August Gutierrez resigned his post as state chairman of the Guam Democratic Party (PDN, 7 Aug 2012), automatically making vice chair and longtime Democratic stalwart Gloria B Nelson the new party chair. Nelson was an elected member of the Consolidated Commission on Utilities and past chair of the elected Board of Education and the Election Commission (KUAM, 14 Oct 2012). But in October, she passed away. The party's Central Executive Committee then selected Darryl Taggerty to serve as acting Democratic chair until new elections in August 2013 (KUAM, 8 March 2013).

Aside from Nelson, other prominent members of the community who passed away during the year under review were educator and researcher Dr Dirk A Ballendorf, former senator and historian Dr Tony Palomo, former Chalan Pago Mayor Vicente Aguon,

former Umatac Mayor Dean Sanchez, and former Agat Mayor Jose San Nicolas (condolence resolutions, 32nd Guam Legislature website). In June, two Guam National Guardsmen serving in Afghanistan—Sergeant Eugene M Aguon and Specialist Dwayne W Flores—were killed when their convoy was attacked (*Saipan Tribune*, 22 May 2013). The deaths highlighted the deployment of more than six hundred Guam Army National Guardsmen to Afghanistan, which had occurred earlier in 2013 (*PDN*, 1 Feb 2013).

In February, in his State of Our Island address, Governor Calvo announced that the government's chronic deficit had been "eliminated." He attributed this to good management and spending controls, including a reduction in the number of government employees (*PNC*, 11 Feb 2013). Democratic leaders in the legislature, however, pointed out that this had actually been accomplished by shifting the deficit to long-term debt through the issuance of hundreds of millions of dollars in bonds (*MV*, 12 Feb 2013).

Guam's status as a major US military base drew attention this year for reasons other than the planned military buildup. As President Obama was delivering his 2013 State of the Union Address in February, two Russian bombers circled the island prompting the scrambling of F-15 jets from Anderson Air Force Base to intercept them. The bombers remained in international air space, and there was no incident (*NBC News*, 15 Feb 2013). In March, North Korea threatened to attack military bases in Guam and Japan, purportedly in retaliation for a US military B-52 flight in South Korea, issuing statements such as,

"The KPA [Korean Peoples' Army] Strategic Rocket Force has already been on A-class alert to wipe out the U.S. forces and reduce their bases in Guam and other regions to ashes" (*PDN*, 29 March 2013). In response, the United States deployed a missile defense system to Guam. The threats caught the attention of local residents, but there was no general sense of panic. However, in an interview with *CNN*, Governor Calvo noted that "one lucky shot from a North Korean missile could do a lot of damage to our island home" (*PNC*, 5 April 2013). Despite concerns about the impact of the threat on tourism, it seemed to have none (*PRI* 2013). In April, it was reported that 137,000 tourists had visited Guam in the previous month, breaking all records for the past fifty years for tourism on the island. Visitor arrivals for the year at that point were up by 9 percent over the previous year (*KUAM*, 9 April 2013).

As to the military buildup itself, Admiral Samuel J Locklear III, commander of the US Pacific Command, stated that current planning calls for completing the relocation of US Marines from Okinawa to Guam by 2020 (*PDN*, 6 March 2013). Pentagon officials eventually backed away from this date and admitted that the federal sequestration cuts would greatly slow down implementation of the buildup (*PNC*, 17 April 2013).

A controversy related to the buildup was caused when, in his last public appearance, the outgoing US Navy commander on Guam, Rear Admiral Paul Bushong, made several statements regarding Guam's history and the military buildup. For one, he called on local leaders to "man up"

with respect to the buildup. He also went on to dispute Guam's status as a colony, stating, "The United States of America never made Guam a colony and only put enough resources into Guam to make it stable." He also said that he was "puzzled" by the discussion of self-determination, noting that local leaders in 1950 had sought the passage of the Organic Act, which provided limited self-government and US citizenship, and therefore, in his estimation, "self-determination was made 65 years ago." These comments were repeated and endorsed by former *Pacific Daily News* publisher Lee Webber in his newspaper column (*PDN*, 2 Aug 2012).

This prompted a number of rebuttals, including from the family of late Speaker Carlos P Taitano, who was one of the leaders in 1950 who had fought to end US naval government rule and provide for a democratically elected government and US citizenship. In their response, the family asserted, "Contrary to how Bushong portrayed it, this was not an act of self-determination but a striving for civil rights and human rights. As our father explained to us, if you are in a desert and looking for water, that is not self-determination—that is just survival. Guam still has not determined its ultimate political status whether it be statehood, independence, or something in between. As painful as it is to consider, we continue to be governed by a President we did not elect and a Congress we have no vote in, which amounts to being a colony" (*PDN*, 11 Aug 2012). (Supporting this analysis, in January 2013, the United Nations General Assembly adopted Resolution 67/132, recogniz-

ing the right of self-determination for all entities on the UN list of non-self-governing territories, which includes Guam.) The Taitanos' rebuttal went on to sharply criticize Bushong for his lack of knowledge of the "true history of our island" and Lee Webber for characterizing Bushong's statements as accurate (*PDN*, 11 Aug 2012).

In January 2013, the issue of self-determination was again in the news when Guam's US District Court Chief Judge Frances Tydingco-Gatewood dismissed a lawsuit filed by local resident Dave Davis, who had claimed that his civil rights were violated when he was denied registration to participate in the planned self-determination vote on Guam's political status because he did not meet the definition of a native inhabitant of Guam (*PNC*, 9 Jan 2013). Davis subsequently appealed the ruling to the 9th Circuit Court, which had not accepted the case as of June 2013 (*PDN*, 3 Feb 2013).

The long-standing issue of World War II reparations came to the forefront in January when Congresswoman Bordallo reintroduced HR 44 to fund compensation for victims of the Japanese occupation of Guam during that war. In the treaty with Japan that ended the war, the United States had waived all claims, including those of the people of Guam, and assumed responsibility for war reparations (Guam Legislature Resolution 4-32). To fund payment of these claims, Bordallo's bill proposed to offset it with the annual Section 30 appropriation to Guam by the US Congress. Section 30 funds come from taxes collected from federal employees on Guam that are subsequently remitted to the local

government and are a major source of revenue. Senators raised concerns about the Section 30 provision and objected to it being used as an offset (MV, 8 Jan 2013). At a public hearing, Bordallo explained that the offset language was necessary in order to move the legislation through Congress but that she would work with the Obama administration to seek a separate appropriation for war claims without affecting Section 30 funds (PNC, 31 Jan 2013). Largely based on Bordallo's assurances, the legislature approved a resolution sponsored by Respicio supporting Bordallo's efforts to secure war reparations (Respicio, pers comm, 19 April 2013).

In November 2012, US Department of Interior Assistant Secretary for Insular Affairs Tony Babauta had been placed on administrative leave pending an investigation into his travel and grant decisions. Babauta, a Guam native, was the first Chamorro to have held this post (*Saipan Tribune*, 22 Nov 2012). Although no formal report of the investigation was released, Babauta resigned his post effective 1 February 2013 (*Washington Post* 2013).

The predominately Catholic community of Guam responded positively to the election of Pope Francis I. Archbishop Anthony Apuron noted that the new pope was a Jesuit like the Spanish priest Diego Luís de San Vitores who had brought Catholicism to Guam and is now a candidate for sainthood. Students at a local Catholic school, St Francis, were excited because the new pope had the same name as their school (PNC, 14 March 2013).

In a crime that shocked the com-

munity, in early 2013 Guam resident Chad De Soto plowed his car into a crowded sidewalk in the island's hotel district and then began stabbing people (Huffington Post, 14 Feb 2013). Three Japanese tourists were killed and a dozen other people were injured in the attack (PDN, 23 Feb 2013). Subdued by security guards and bystanders until police arrived (PDN, 27 Feb 2013), De Soto was charged with murder and held on \$2 million bail (Huffington Post, 14 Feb 2013).

In other crime news, island residents were riveted by an unfolding police corruption and human trafficking case as three police officers were arrested for their involvement with an illegal brothel known as the Blue House. The brothel owner, Song Ja Cha, had been convicted in federal court of twenty charges related to human trafficking and prostitution. The federal judge trying the case stated that Cha's crimes were "not far removed from slavery." In the course of the trial, a federal prosecutor asserted that Cha had used three Guam police officers as "tools" and "weapons" to create a "climate of fear" in order to control the brothel owner's victims. After a series of media stories about this case, the Guam Police Department (GPD) began an internal investigation, resulting in the arrest of three GPD officers, who were charged with promoting prostitution, conspiracy to commit kidnapping and rape, and attempted rape (PDN, 13 April 2013).

The new private hospital currently under construction ran into controversy when it applied for tax breaks under the Qualifying Certificate (QC)

program administered by the Guam Economic Development Authority (PNC, 27 March 2013). Health Committee Chair Senator Dennis G Rodriguez Jr and local physicians expressed concerns that a tax break for the new Guam Regional Medical City (GRMC) hospital would be “unfair” (KUAM, 23 Feb 2013). In the 2013 election many candidates expressed their opposition when stories began circulating that such a QC program may be considered (MV, 26 Oct. 2012). After the formal filing of their application to the development authority, GRMC CEO Margaret Bengzon asserted that her company was banking on approval of the QC program (PNC, 7 March 2013). In the meantime, legislation was introduced to earmark all additional tax revenue that the government would raise from the operation of GRMC hospital for the island’s public hospital (MV, 17 April 2013).

The top ranks of the Port Authority were thrown in turmoil in December 2012 when six employees were fired for alleged improprieties in the approval of a workman’s compensation travel request. Also losing employment in the process was Port Authority General Manager Mary Torres (who was also the wife of Supreme Court Justice Robert J Torres and sister of former Governor Felix P Camacho); she said that the actions taken against the employees were politically motivated and directed at getting rid of a perceived political enemy of Governor Calvo. According to Mary Torres, in a meeting with Calvo’s chief of staff, she was told that “this entire exercise was all about getting this employee fired, and you are ‘collateral damage.’” Torres was then

ousted and replaced as general manager by Department of Public Works Director Joanne Brown. Torres stated, “The real story is not about me. I am blessed with a loving husband and wonderful children and I will weather the storm. The real story is about the assault on the merit protection system and the failure of people who should know better to stand up for what is right” (PDN, 20 Dec 2012). The six employees have since taken steps to fight their removal through the Civil Service Commission and the courts (MV, 20 Dec 2012).

The 25th Guam Micronesia Island Fair was set to be the last one held in the month of October, as the Guam Visitors Bureau (GVB) announced that henceforth it would once again be held in May (PNC, 7 March 2013). At the October 2012 fair, delegations from the Federated States of Micronesia, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, the republics of Kiribati, Nauru, the Marshall Islands, and Palau as well as Guam were represented at the region’s largest annual cultural event. The fair featured master carvers, blacksmiths, fishermen, jewelers, weavers, dancers, musicians, and cooks. GVB General Manager Karl Pangelinan explained that the fair had been moved to October to “fill a historically slow month for arrivals to Guam.” GVB officials decided to move it back to May because rainy season weather affected the logistics of the event (PNC, 7 March 2013). When the fair came back in May 2013, it drew over 20,000 attendees, exceeding the numbers from 2012 (PNC, 20 May 2013).

Ground was broken for a \$27 million museum at Skinner Plaza in

Hagåtña. The three-story facility, known as the Guam and Chamorro Educational Facility, is funded with proceeds from hotel occupancy tax bonds (*MV*, 6 Feb 2013). Preparations also proceeded for a second Marianas History Conference. Entitled “One Archipelago, Many Stories: Integrating Our Narratives,” it was scheduled to be held at the University of Guam in August 2013 (*Saipan Tribune*, 3 April 2013). The first one was held in Saipan in 2012, with the goal of reunifying the history of the politically divided Mariana islands (*Saipan Tribune*, 3 May 2012).

Super-heavyweight judo competitor R J Blas made history at the London Olympics when he became the first Guam competitor to advance in a round by victory. His achievement as a competitor coming from a relatively small community made him a media sensation, attracting notice from *USA Today*, *Sports Illustrated*, *Yahoo Sports*, and *CNN* (*PDN*, 1 Jan 2013). Guam resident Jason Cunliffe, who started playing soccer for the local youth league at age five, also made the news for successfully becoming a professional soccer player for a team in the Philippines (*PDN*, 31 March 2013). Guam itself captured some attention from programs such as the CBS Morning News, which devoted an entire segment to educating its audience about the island (CBS News, 2 Sept 2012).

As the year came to a close, the community’s attention was focused on Legislative Bill 19. Although passed unanimously, the measure provoked considerable public controversy, as it utilized revenue from various forms of gambling to fund a number of

purposes, including paying down the liabilities of the Guam Memorial Hospital. In July, the bill was awaiting action by Governor Calvo to either veto it or sign it into law (PNC, 20 June 2013).

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UN DĀNGKALO NA SI YU'OS MA'ĀSE
(*thank you*) to Attorney Julian Aguon
and Shannon Murphy for their input
in the writing of this article and for
their review of an earlier version.

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MARSHALL ISLANDS

The period under review in the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) was focused largely on the impacts of climate change, both physical and political, as well as on preparations for hosting the 44th annual Pacific Islands Forum in Majuro in September 2013. Additionally, clear lines were drawn within the RMI national government, specifically in terms of government spending, as well as in the context of relations with the United States, which continued to be strained over the past twelve months largely due to tensions surrounding concerns about funding under the Compact of Free Association and a US Department of State report on human trafficking. One bright spot was the seeming progress toward a constitutional convention, which, while put on hold due to the upcoming Forum, appears likely to take place some time in 2014 and, unlike the climate-change situation, may give the Marshall Islands the opportunity to produce tangible results.

The topic of climate change was foremost on the minds of the RMI government, and especially Minister in Assistance to the President and Kwajalein Senator Tony de Brum,

who has apparently made the issue the primary focus of his cabinet portfolio. At the United Nations climate meeting in Doha, Qatar, in December 2012, de Brum announced that the theme of the September 2013 Forum meeting was to be climate change, and specifically how the Pacific Island heads of state can take a greater leadership role on the issue globally (*MIJ*, 21 Dec 2012). De Brum followed this up with an appearance at an “Arria-formula” meeting of the UN Security Council on 15 February 2013. (Arria-formula meetings are not officially classified as meetings by the United Nations, and records or transcripts of the proceedings are not kept.) Despite the informal nature of the meeting, which was organized by the United Kingdom and Pakistan, de Brum’s speech was available on the Internet and a video report about the meeting was picked up by the online video magazine *Slate V* (2013). In the speech (and repeated in *Slate’s* report), de Brum arguably made a dubious connection between the drought in the northern atolls that had begun in January 2013 and the water company’s rationing schedule in Majuro, which was unaffected by the drought at the time of the speech. The minister then announced the drafting of a Majuro Declaration, which he said would call on all nations to commit, through their own actions, to limiting global warming to less than two degrees (de Brum 2013). The Marshall Islands will present the declaration for formal approval at the 2013 Forum.

The drought in the northern atolls did worsen, and in May RMI President Christopher Loek’s cabinet declared it a disaster area, after which relief in the form of money and sup-