

Political Reviews

*Micronesia in Review: Issues and Events, 1 July 2011
to 30 June 2012*

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GUAM

This year as in previous years, the economy and government finances were the dominant concerns in Guam. Perhaps in some ways these issues have helped assure the continuation and revitalization of Chamorro culture and cultural events—which had a strong presence this year—as a means to provide a sense of stability and to remind Chamorros and others of their survival as a people through thousands of years of challenges.

The central economic issue was the long-planned military buildup involving the redeployment of the US Marines from Okinawa to Guam. The year began with opposition in the US Congress to the redeployment from leaders like Senator John McCain (*PDN*, 1 Jan 2012).

Military plans for a firing range near the ancient Chamorro settlement of Pâgat Village, considered an extremely significant cultural site, were the subject of a court dispute. In 2010, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the Guam Preservation Trust, and the “We are Guåhan” organization filed a lawsuit against the US Navy to protect and preserve Pâgat Village. Dating to 700 AD, Pâgat holds the remains of prehistoric

structural stone foundations (known as latte), freshwater caves, and medicinal plants, as well as stone mortars, pottery, and tools of the Chamorro people. The National Trust and the Guam Preservation Trust asserted that a major legal victory had been scored in November 2011 when the navy publicly announced its intent to consider alternative locations for firing ranges (PreservationDirectory.com, 7 Dec 2011).

Another obstacle to the redeployment was the issue of the Futenma airbase in Okinawa. The transfer of US Marines to Guam had been linked to progress in relocating the Futenma facility to a less populated part of Okinawa. However, the Japanese government had difficulties securing the consent of Okinawans to the relocation plan. In February, both the US and Japanese governments agreed to decouple the transfer of the marines from the Futenma relocation issue (*Reuters*, 10 Feb 2012).

In April, the two governments announced that 5,000 marines would be moved to Guam in the coming years, and the military buildup price tag has been reduced to about \$8.6 billion. The original plan would have brought about 8,600 marines to Guam and cost at least \$10.27 billion. Despite the plans for the number of marines on Guam being reduced by more than 40 percent, the cost of the marine transfer only went down by about 15 percent. Also, although

Japan increased its cash contribution, Pentagon officials said that previously announced financing support by Japan is no longer necessary. Funding for some of Guam's civilian infrastructure projects related to the military buildup was supposed to have been drawn from this financing. But Guam's congresswoman, Madeleine Bordallo, characterized the move as a "better framework" for progress on the buildup. Senator Judith Guthertz, chairwoman of the Guam Legislature's Military Buildup Committee, echoed Bordallo's comments and said that the revised buildup plan is good for Guam. She went on to say that she still believed there would be a significant economic boost to the island from the buildup due to the civilian personnel and military families who would accompany the expansion of the current military presence (*PDN*, 25 April 2012). In May, it was further clarified that two-thirds of the marines redeployed to Guam would be on a rotational rather than permanent basis (*PNC*, 2 May 2012). That same month, the US Senate froze deployment funds, pending more information from the US Department of Defense on the expense of the move (*UPI*, 15 May 2012). Even so, US Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Plans Robert Scher stated that he hopes the marines can start moving to Guam as early as 2014 (*PNC*, 23 May 2012).

After years of determined effort, a meeting of the Guam First Commission was finally convened in April (*MV*, 16 April 2012). Senator Rory Respicio had in 2008 sponsored a law creating the commission in order to bring together all elements of the community so that Guam could speak as one

unified voice on the buildup and other issues (Guam Public Law 29-128). But because of possible conflicts with the Guam Organic Act, the entity was created pursuant to executive order by Governor Eddie Calvo.

By contrast, a controversy arose with the formation of a business organization called Guam USA Asia Security Alliance (*GUASA*) that aims to lobby for the Guam buildup in Congress through a US-based international law firm, K&L Gates. *GUASA* is paying \$25,000 per month for these services, which has sparked debate in the community (*Whitman* 2012). Senator Rory Respicio raised concerns that the use of a lobbying firm "could sidetrack all efforts to form a coalition of interests into a 'One Guam' voice" (*MV*, 22 May 2012). Also of concern to the senator was the history of K&L Gates. The company was formed in 2007 by a merger of Preston Gates & Ellis LLP with Kirkpatrick & Lockhart Nicholson Graham. Preston Gates was the law firm that employed Jack Abramoff, who pleaded guilty in 2006 to federal charges including wire fraud, conspiracy to defraud his clients, and tax evasion (*MV*, 22 May 2012). Abramoff and another former Preston Gates lobbyist, Michael Scanlon, who is currently in federal prison, have a history of meddling in Guam elections (*Wall Street Journal*, 31 March 2006).

The uncertainty in the military buildup combined with weakness in tourism contributed to a pessimistic outlook for Guam's economy for the coming year. In November 2011, the chief economist for the Bank of Guam, Joseph Bradley, noted that the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami disaster

in Japan and the global economic weakness in tourist markets such as China and Korea had adversely affected tourism. Bradley also warned about a potential increase in the cost of living due to rising petroleum prices (KUAM, 7 Nov 2011).

There was promising news with respect to tourism at the end of 2011, however, as arrival numbers for visitors from Japan bounced back from their drop earlier in the year. Also, in November, the US government began allowing visa-free entry for Russian visitors under certain circumstances (PDN, 1 Jan 2012). The Guam Visitors Bureau (GVB) moved aggressively to take advantage of the new opportunity with promotional efforts, such as establishing a Russian-language website, www.visitguamusa.ru (GTIN, 27 March 2012). In January 2012, the first Russian tourists arrived under the new visa program (GTIN, 25 Jan 2012). Although Russian visitors for the first half of 2012 only numbered in the hundreds, that represented an increase of over 300 percent from the same period last year (GTIN, 17 July 2012). In March, a GVB delegation led by Tourism Committee Chair Senator Tina Muña Barnes conducted a ten-day promotional visit to all major Russian media outlets and travel agents in the Russian Far East cities of Khabarovsk and Vladivostok. Pending federal approval is a China visa-waiver program, which Guam officials continue to pursue (GTIN, 3 April 2012).

Also, Guam's major air carrier, Continental, was merged with United Airlines. United officials stated that the merger will give customers access to new aircraft that will allow for an

additional 100,000 passengers this year (PDN, 1 Jan 2012).

In what many considered to be an opening salvo in the 2012 political season, an e-mail message from former federal buildup official John Jackson was released to the media. In that e-mail Jackson claimed that five Guam senators had "harangued" US Senators Carl Levin and Jim Webb about the buildup during a 26 April 2011 meeting on Guam, which he claimed directly led to the delay in the Guam buildup. Lawmakers strongly disputed Jackson's account, noting that he was not present at the meeting and that it had, in fact, been cordial and respectful. One senator who was at the meeting, Republican Senate Minority Leader Frank Blas Jr, stated: "There was no haranguing. There was no yelling. I didn't hear anybody say that they were not in support of the buildup. Concerns were brought up in wanting to make sure that the buildup was good for the military and for Guam." Blas further stated, "Our concern was that any infrastructure improvements and enhancements would not be borne entirely on the backs of our people. I don't think anybody, including the two senators, took away from the meeting that there was no support of the buildup." Blas said that Senator Levin himself did not know where the buildup was headed because he was waiting for a Department of Defense master plan (MV, 8 March 2012). Later in the year, Blas, along with Republican Senator Tony Ada, met with US Senator Webb, who expressed his support for the Guam buildup. Blas reiterated that the buildup delay was due to the fact that the Senate was waiting for the Depart-

ment of Defense to complete its master plan (MV, 12 June 2012).

As the year progressed, the US congressional race also ramped up for 2012 elections. Up for reelection for her sixth term was Congresswoman Bordallo. She had served previously as first lady of Guam during the tenure of her late husband, Governor Ricardo Bordallo, and won several terms as senator and lieutenant governor in her own right (Bordallo website). This year, the seventy-nine-year-old Bordallo was being challenged by twenty-seven-year-old Karlo Dizon in the Democratic primary. In criticizing the incumbent, Dizon has argued that Bordallo has had almost a decade in office to do something about Guam's economic situation but has delivered little (*International Business Times*, 21 July 2012). Senator Frank Blas Jr was running unopposed for the Republican nomination for the congressional seat (PDN, 3 July 2012).

The year 2012 is also a US presidential election year, and, although President Barack Obama was running unopposed for his party's nomination, in March there was a heavily competitive race for the Republican nomination. That month the Guam Republican Party held its convention to pick its share of delegates who will help select its nominee for president. Republican candidate Mitt Romney sent his son to the Guam convention and was rewarded with picking up all nine delegates that Guam will send to the Republican National Convention in Tampa, Florida (Politico.com, 9 March 2012).

Also making election news was the controversial 2010 gubernatorial election between Eddie Calvo and Carl T

C Gutierrez. The Guam Legislature, along party lines, passed legislation pushed by Senator Rory Respicio that would have reformed the election code and provided for an audit of the 2010 election (Guam Legislature Bill 413-31). The bill was subsequently vetoed by Governor Eddie Calvo, who was declared the winner of that election by a narrow margin. Calvo labeled the bill as more about politics than progress, singling out the provision for an audit of the 2010 election. Respicio said that the 2010 election was simply too close to ignore and that discrepancies needed to be addressed in order to reform Guam's election process. "I think the people deserve to know the truth," said Respicio (KUAM, 22 March 2012), who is seeking an override of Calvo's veto (Respicio, pers comm, 7 July 2012).

Meanwhile, the election lawsuit mounted by the Gutierrez camp was withdrawn due to lack of money to continue the suit, which had been stalled in procedural motions for a year. Gutierrez stated, however, that he was not giving up on his mission to have the 2010 election scrutinized. He said, "Totally, I believe in the merits of my case and I believe that should be looked into by the US Attorney and the Attorney General. Since those complaints have been verified and they're sitting on their desks, they're the ones that should be spending their resources instead of me as a private citizen" (KUAM, 13 June 2012).

In other court news, Guam's attorney general was moving to dismiss a lawsuit by Dave Davis against the planned self-determination vote for Chamorros. In June 2012, US Magistrate's Judge Joaquin Manibusan

recommended dismissal, and the matter has been sent to US Presiding District Court Judge Francis Tydingco-Gatewood, who will decide whether to accept Manibusan's recommendations.

Aside from the economy, government finance was the other major issue to dominate headlines for the past year. Despite having concerns about the additional debt, the legislature approved Governor Calvo's request for \$365 million in bond financing, primarily to pay past-due refunds. The first \$235 million was borrowed in late 2011. In December, 21,000 refund checks were distributed over a two-day period at temporary distribution centers set up in the island's three major shopping malls. Another 55,000 checks were mailed out soon thereafter (*PDN*, 1 Jan 2012). Using the balance of the debt authority required raising the government's debt ceiling to its maximum level. Arguing that paying tax refunds must be a priority, in February 2012, Senator Rory Respicio and eleven of his colleagues introduced legislation to adjust the ceiling and clear other legal obstacles to financing the refunds (Guam Legislature Bill 423-31). The legislation became law in March (*KUAM*, 19 Mar 2012). Later in the year there was increasing concern about the government's debt load, which, including the long-term debt of autonomous agencies such as the utilities companies, amounted to about \$2 billion. Of more immediate concern was the shortfall in revenues to support general fund expenditures. In April, Calvo created a task force to find \$43 million in cuts to the general fund expenditures. The administration's proposals were to be announced in the summer before the legislature

acted on the fiscal year 2013 budget (*PDN*, 9 May 2012).

On the health care front, the Guam Memorial Hospital maintained its full accreditation and hired a new administrator, Joseph Verga, who was slated to take over in July (*MV*, 16 May 2012). Senator Benjamin Cruz urged the hospital to adopt an electronic billing system that could save the hospital \$1.5 million per year (Cruz website, 7 May 2012). In the meantime, work continued on a new 130-bed private hospital, scheduled to be built in 2014 (*Saipan Tribune*, 14 Nov 2011).

After a yearlong search, the Guam Education Board chose Jon Fernandez as the new superintendent for public schools. Fernandez's background includes experience in local government and management-level jobs in Washington DC as well as a master's degree from Harvard University and a law degree from Georgetown University. Fernandez stressed his local roots, stating, "I am Chamorro, born and raised on Guam, married to a local girl" (*PDN*, 10 April 2012). Funding remained an issue for the Department of Education (DOE), as Senator Vicente (Ben) C Pangelinan called on Governor Calvo to restore funding taken from the DOE budget as a result of a 15 percent cut imposed by his administration (*MV*, 30 March 2012). In the meantime, Calvo was pursuing his education reform agenda including a standards-based curriculum and assessment, teacher professional development programs, and the acquisition of teaching resources based on the new standards (*MV*, 6 June 2012). The year 2012 also marked the sixtieth anniversary of the University of Guam, with the fourteen thousandth student

graduating from the institution at the end of the spring semester (ABC Radio Australia, 3 July 2012).

The year also saw extensive improvement work on Guam's highways, as well as the Hagåtña, Togcha, Talofofo, and Ylig bridges, primarily financed with federal funds (PNC, 2 June 2012). To accelerate this capital improvement work, Senator Tom Ada proposed using the federal highway fund revenue to finance \$75 million in highway projects (PNC, 12 June 2012). Another infrastructure milestone was reached in August 2011 as the Ordot Dump was closed and a new sanitary landfill was opened in Inarajan (PDN, 1 Jan 2012).

On the cultural front, in October 2011, the twenty-fourth annual Guam Micronesia Island Fair was held by the Guam Visitors Bureau for three days, under the theme of "Celebrating the Song and Dance of Micronesia." Represented at the fair were delegations from the Northern Mariana Islands, Palau, the Federated States of Micronesia, the Marshall Islands, Nauru, and Kiribati. Two delegations also ventured all the way from Japan. The fair featured demonstrations on traditional cooking and canoe construction, cultural performances, and an agricultural station with locally harvested produce (Stars and Stripes Guam, 21 Oct 2011).

In January 2012, the Guam Fishermen's Co-op and its various partners celebrated the fourth annual Chamorro Lunar Calendar Festival. The festival is a celebration of the significance of the moon for the Chamorro people, who first populated Guam and the Northern Marianas 3,000–4,000 years ago. The ancient Chamorro peo-

ple planned their daily activities based on the lunar cycles, and that tradition continues to this day with the island's fishermen. This year's theme was "Moonlight Talk: Surviving Climate Change through Chamorro Cultural Traditions and Values." The event featured free lunar calendars, "buy local" exhibits, cooking demonstrations, and entertainment utilizing the Chamorro language (PNC, 23 Jan 2012). The calendar contains tide charts and seasonal fishing predictions, which, hundreds of years ago, were passed on orally by Guam's first inhabitants. Its purpose is to raise awareness about the area fishery ecosystem plan and to preserve Chamorro vocabulary relative to fishing (GTIN, 11 Jan 2012).

Touted as the first of its kind, the Marianas History Conference was held on Saipan in June 2012. Jointly sponsored by the Northern Mariana Islands Humanities Council, the Guam Preservation Trust, Guampedia.com, and the Tan Siu Lin Foundation, the conference aimed to reunify the history of the Marianas, which has become fragmented due to the islands' political division (as a result of the Spanish-American War of 1898). The theme for the three-day conference was "One Archipelago, Many Stories." It featured keynote speakers such as Father Francis X Hezel, SJ, who spoke about "Setting the Agenda: Quilting the Patches and Stitching Them Together," as well as Dr Robert Underwood, who discussed "Leapfrogging Through History: Hayi Mañaina-mu" (*Saipan Tribune*, 14 June 2012).

US Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor visited in January to speak at a local legal conference (PNC, 25

Jan 2012). In December, “Marko” Gemar, who had been raised on Guam and became a finalist in the popular American TV show *So You Think You Can Dance*, returned to Guam, where his parents still reside. Gemar performed at several functions and held a number of dance workshops (PDN, 1 Jan 2012).

Among those who passed away during the year were Jeanette Tanos, a nurse who had held several health administration posts; former Umatac Mayor Jesus Aquinigoc; and former Tamuning Mayor Alfredo Dungca. Also passing away was Joe “Uncle Tote” Cunningham, who made many historical and important contributions to Guam’s art and entertainment industry, and Tony Sanchez, former Superior Court administrator and top aide to former Governor Felix Camacho (Guam Legislature website). Noteworthy also was the death of US Army Specialist Calvin Pereda, who died of injuries resulting from an improvised explosive device he encountered while on patrol in Afghanistan (PDN, 1 Jan 2012).

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UN DĀNGKALO NA SI YU'OS MA'ĀSE
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MARSHALL ISLANDS

The period under review for the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) saw a change in government, controversy over the largest-to-date proposed construction project in the country, and rising tensions with the United States over unresolved issues related to the nation's nuclear history and the Compact of Free Association. At the end of the period, however, it may be fair to ask what, if anything, changed other than the names of those in positions of power, as the new government continued to struggle to meet the basic needs of the people living in the Marshalls and seemed unable to

assist those who had migrated to the United States.

The most significant political event of the period was the national election held on 21 November 2011. In the run-up to the balloting, numerous members of then-President and Iroij Jurelang Zedkaia's administration (including the president) formed a new political party, Kien Eo Am (KEA, Your Government), and, in a break from previous attempts at party politics in the Marshall Islands, the group formalized its existence by selecting a party leader, Arno Senator Gerald Zackios. By the middle of October, KEA announced that it had thirteen members, which, although short of the seventeen-member majority needed to control the Nitijela (Parliament), demonstrated a coordination of political determination rarely seen in the Marshall Islands. This effort apparently was not counterbalanced by the opposition senators, most of whom were affiliated with the traditional ruling class from Kwajalein Atoll (MIJ, 14 Oct 2011).

Compared to the previous election in 2007, which by all accounts was the worst run in the country's history (Kupferman 2011), the 2011 election went off largely without a hitch. The only last-minute change to the ballot involved the senate candidates from Kwajalein. Ataji Balos, a former senator and longtime member of the opposition to Amata Kabua and the Kwajalein landowners, had been removed from the ballot in September by the chief electoral officer for failing to submit candidacy papers on time. However, on 11 November, the acting attorney general reinstated Balos on the ballot, thereby delaying the arrival