

**Committee on Natural Resources
& Committee on Foreign Affairs
Joint Oversight Hearing
2172 Rayburn House Office Building
September 26, 2019
10:00 a.m.**

Oversight Hearing on
Sustaining Insular Relationships

Questions from Rep. Sablan for The Honorable Randall G. Schriver, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Indo-Pacific Security Affairs

1. You note in your testimony that the U.S. Air Force is planning on building a divert airfield in Yap, Federated States of Micronesia to be used should Andersen Air Force Base in Guam become unavailable. Is this the same type of divert airfield currently being developed on Tinian in the Northern Mariana Islands? Will more divert airfields be needed for the region? DoD is also planning on developing live-fire training ranges on Tinian and the island of Pagan in my district to be used for joint-level exercises, amphibious movements, and bombings. These plans for live-fire training ranges are quite unpopular with many of my constituents. Does DoD also plan on building training ranges in the Freely Associated States? If so, perhaps there won't be a need to proceed on the planned live-fire ranges in my district. Please share DoD's plans for developing training ranges in the region.
2. Considering the importance of Kwajalein to the United States, what is the Defense Department doing to address the threat of rising ocean levels and other effects of climate change, and how will that impact Kwajalein?

Questions from Rep. Sablan for Ms. Sandra Oudkirk, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Australia, New Zealand, and the Pacific Islands Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs

1. In 2010, the United States and Palau reached an accord to extend economic assistance for another 15 years, although it was not fully funded by Congress until

FY2018. If economic assistance for the Marshall Islands and Micronesia is renewed in 2023, what might be the impact of a similar delay in congressional approval and funding?

2. A basic element of the 2003 Compacts was setting up self-sustaining trust funds to replace annual grants. GAO reports that the trust funds are unlikely to meet that goal. Is it going to be one of your goals in negotiating Compact renewals to adequately capitalize those trust funds, so they can replace the annual grants?
3. The Presidents from the three FAS states met with President Trump in a first of its kind meeting last May. This historic meeting came on the heels of statements from various U.S. officials about concerns related to FAS economic viability and U.S. security in the region if the economic provisions of the Compacts are not renewed in 2023. Can you update us on the process you are engaging in for extending the Compacts? Will there be a Special U.S. Negotiator appointed by President Trump as was done for previous Compact negotiations? Is there a timetable for completion of discussions?
4. To what extent have China or other countries sought to gain influence in the FAS? Are China's efforts similar to its activities elsewhere in the Pacific? How might a negative turn in U.S.-FAS relations open opportunities for China to gain influence in the region?

Questions from Rep. Sablan for Mr. Nikolao Pula, Director, Office of Insular Affairs, U.S. Department of the Interior

1. Both State and Interior are represented on the FSM and RMI trust fund committees. Considering repeated reports that, under the current trust fund structure, after 2023 the funds may have years where they cannot disburse funds – even while holding millions in their accounts – what are the trust fund committees doing now to address the trust funds' structure? What fixes to the trust fund agreements do the trust fund committees propose?
2. The Special Education grant for the Freely Associated States replaced many federal education programs. However, it was not made a permanent appropriation and has

never been fully funded. Thousands of students are only able to attend school for half the day because of insufficient education funding in the FSM. Schools are unable to feed students lunch. What is your plan for making sure education gets reliable funding when compact renegotiations occur?

3. What have been the strengths and weaknesses of the U.S. relationship with the FAS? What, if any, issues in the relationship should be addressed?
4. Should economic assistance for the RMI and FSM be extended after 2023, would it resemble current support in terms of sector grants, U.S. program assistance, and oversight through the joint economic management committees? Should self-sufficiency still be a goal of Compact assistance?
5. How is oversight currently conducted? Should oversight mechanisms be reformed?

Questions from Rep. Sablan for Dr. David Gootnick, Director of International Affairs and Trade, U.S. Government Accountability Office

1. GAO's 2018 report noted that the FSM and RMI compact trust funds face risks and will likely not provide disbursements in some future years. Has GAO estimated how much additional contributions are need to reduce the risk of no disbursements?
2. The issue of the Compact migration and the cost borne by certain jurisdictions where Compact citizens migrate is one that will need to be addressed as we move forward with the question of extending the Compacts. For example, there has already been a call from Governor Leon Guerrero for Guam to be heard during re-negotiations of the compacts. Has GAO has done any analysis and made recommendations on how the cost associated with compact migration could be addressed? Would GAO be able to formulate a proper tool to accurately define and measure the number of COFA migrants and the actual costs of hosting migrants for each state or territory?

Questions from Rep. Sablan for His Excellency Gerald M. Zackios, Ambassador to the United States, Republic of the Marshall Islands

1. The Freely Associated States are among the countries most directly threatened by climate change. Please describe your views on climate change and sea level rise. How does the Trump Administration's view differ, if at all, from this perspective? And how do the Administration's views on climate change affect the RMI's relationship with the U.S.?
2. The RMI is in serious danger of disappearing in the years ahead due to climate change and rising sea levels. I have to think that reality must be in the minds of many Marshallese and may influence what you want to achieve in the compact renegotiations. Please tell us what your government is thinking about for your future, given the threats of climate change. What would you want the U.S. to do?
3. As you mention in your testimony, there is great concern over the possible leakage of the Runit Dome on Enewetak Atoll. The site which sits at sea level is used to store over one-hundred-thousand cubic yards of nuclear waste. But the dome was never meant to be permanent. It was not properly lined before nuclear waste was stored there. There are now reports that seawater has seeped in and climate change and rising sea levels are predicted to affect the dome. The House-passed 2020 NDAA requires the Secretary of Energy, the EPA, and Defense to report on the status of the Runit Dome, which will hopefully give us a clearer picture of the danger it poses. Can you please share your concerns about the current situation on Enewetak Atoll. Are there issues associated with nuclear testing that should be kept in mind in a Compact extension?
4. Ambassador Zackios, how is China developing influence in the RMI and what more can the U.S. do to demonstrate its commitment to the region?

Questions from Rep. Sablan for His Excellency Akillino H. Susaia, Ambassador to the United States, Federated States of Micronesia

1. Ambassador Susaia, during the hearing we heard of the importance of sustaining the relationship between the United States and the Freely Associated States. As we look ahead to 2023 and beyond, how can our Committees and Congress be more helpful and are there any recommendations you would like us to consider?

2. What would you say are the most promising economic sectors in the FSM and what challenges do they face? How should the next Compact term address economic development issues in the FSM?