

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

February 14, 2013

The Honorable Eileen Sobeck
Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary for Insular Areas
U.S. Department of Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Ms. Sobeck:

Thank you for the invitation to submit issues that could be addressed in the context of the Interagency Group on Insular Areas. I look forward to the annual meeting scheduled for February 26, 2013.

The following seven items are being proposed because they involve cross-agency cooperation of the kind the IGIA is designed to induce or because they may require a commitment to action from the White House Office of Intergovernmental Affairs:

1. **Retain Assistant Secretary for Insular Areas position.** The Assistant Secretary focuses on implementing the Administration's policies and commitments in the U.S. insular areas of American Samoa, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, and U.S. Virgin Islands, as well as in U.S. affiliated island nations. I urge the Administration to recognize the continuing value of having an Assistant Secretary with this specific responsibility by retaining the position, which is now vacant, and by appointing a person who has significant experience with the U.S. insular areas and with the issues of social and economic development which all generally face.
2. **Assess effectiveness of the IGIA process.** It has now been three years since President Obama renewed the working of the Interagency Group. I suggest that it would be timely for the co-chairs to provide an assessment of the IGIA process to determine in what ways it has proven effective at meeting the President's goals and in what ways it can be further refined to accomplish more.
3. **Extend the Commonwealth-Only Transitional Worker program.** Public Law 110-229 authorizes the Secretary of Labor, in consultation with the Secretaries of Homeland Security, Defense, and the Interior, and with the Governor of the Northern Marianas, to extend the current worker program, which expires at the end of 2014, for another 5 years. I would urge that the Secretary of Labor utilize the recent finding of the Department of Homeland Security in setting a cap for the number of workers in 2013 – namely, that the need for foreign labor in the

Northern Marianas may increase over current levels – and authorize the extension of the CW program through December 31, 2019.

4. **Parity of service among insular areas.** Four separate relationships have evolved between the Federal government and the insular areas for a variety of circumstantial reasons, leading to a patchwork of federal programs and services. It would be useful for the work of the IGIA to produce a matrix of comparative service levels among the four insular areas with a baseline comparison to the level of these services provided nationwide. Of particular interest are the following service agencies:
 - Department of Veterans Affairs,
 - Small Business Administration,
 - Department of Agriculture.

5. **Provide benefits in the Northern Mariana Islands on par with benefits provided nationally under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.** The Food and Nutrition Service of the Department of Agriculture administers a block grant for the nutrition assistance program in the Northern Mariana Islands in lieu of the national Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. Beneficiaries of this block grant receive considerably less assistance than they would under SNAP. The Secretary of Agriculture has been able to increase the amount of the block grant in the past in response to the need for a higher level of assistance. I would request that the Administration commit to a continuation of this practice and further commit to recommending funding for benefits in the Northern Mariana Islands on par with national SNAP benefits in the President's future budget submissions to Congress.

6. **Include fully the insular areas in national travel and tourism promotions.** Both the Department of Commerce and the Department of the Interior promote travel and tourism in the United States. Because tourism is such an essential of the insular area economies and because local budgets for marketing can be limited it is particularly important that these and other federal agencies fully include the insular areas in promotional activities and also that federal agencies collaborate to find means to promote the insular areas independent of more continentally oriented campaigns. Federal agencies should, as well, recognize that the sending markets supporting insular area tourism are not necessarily the same as those supporting tourism to the U.S. mainland and that acknowledging and targeting this distinction could increase travel and tourism to the United States as the President directed agencies to do in his January 19, 2012 Executive Order.

The Honorable Eileen Sobeck

February 14, 2013

Page 3

7. **Include fully the insular areas in national data programs.** Progress has been made with respect to data collection in the insular areas. Of particular note are the recent estimations of Gross Domestic Product in the insular areas conducted by the Bureau of Economic Analysis. Data collection remains deficient, however, compared to that in the 50 states. The Administration should, therefore, commit to full inclusion of the insular areas by a date certain and require that the Department of Commerce and other agencies that collect national data establish a timeline for incorporation of American Samoa, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, and the U.S. Virgin Islands in all relevant national data programs.

Thank you for the opportunity to recommend issues appropriate for consideration by the Interagency Group on Insular Areas and for your work organizing this effort.

Sincerely,



GREGORIO KILILI CAMACHO SABLAN
Member of Congress