

Testimony of
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TESTIMONY ON H.R. 1595

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Buenas yan Hafa Adai.

As a former Member of this Committee, I appear before you with another former Member from Guam (the distinguished Ben Blaz) in the hope that this will be the very last time that anyone needs to recount the story of the people of Guam during World War II in this room. In carrying out your responsibilities as a Member of the Committee on Resources, there are occasions when the grievance is so severe, the cause so just that you have to suspend the usual concerns about bureaucratic objections, setting precedents or even financial considerations. This is one of those occasions. Honoring the people of World War II generation of Guam is the final chapter in recognizing the sacrifices of the only civilian American community that was occupied by an enemy nation during World War II.

We have all taken the time to honor most of America's greatest generation, but we have let one group fall through the cracks. And the failure to recognize them in war claims in the way other Americans were is made more egregious when we understand that Guam's greatest generation was different. They didn't fight in uniforms. They huddled together in rags. They didn't come from places like New York, Iowa or North Carolina. They came from Hagatna, Hagat and Dededo. During times of danger, they didn't think of families left behind, they had to carry their infants in their arms and their grandparents on their shoulders. And unlike others in the greatest generation, they were never given full national recognition for their suffering, their devotion to duty and their participation in the struggle against the enemies of World War II.

Through the legislation the Committee is hearing today, we can rectify this. HR 1595 represents the latest attempt to bring final resolution to this unconscionable injustice. General Blaz and I have traveled this road in the past and we came close on a couple of occasions. We are now at the final point where this Committee can be the deliverers of justice, where you collectively can bring solace and peace to a community.

In the past, we were told that we can not set new precedents. In the past, we were told that the people of Guam already received some war claims. In the past, we were told that some elements of the federal bureaucracy objected, particularly in the Department of Justice or, more appropriately, Injustice on this issue. We were told it was too much money. All the time, we knew that if they really understood the issue and heard the testimonies of Guam's greatest generation and America's greatest generation who went to Guam as liberators, that there would be no real question about the justice of this cause.

So we created a Guam War Claims Review Commission in order to study the issue, in order to hear the testimonies and in order to arrive at recommendations that reflected an independent understanding of the matter. That work has been completed; recommendations have been made and are embodied in this legislation.

There may need to be some changes made in order to perfect the legislation and I hope that the Committee considers those changes as the legislation moves through the process. But that should not be the central focus today. The central issue is will we let bureaucratic concerns derail this process one more time. Will nay-sayers from Interior, State or Justice prevail again? I hope that you will not let them. The apparent failure of the federal bureaucracy to appear today except as note-takers may be taken as a positive sign that while they will not openly support, they will not openly oppose.

It would be preferable and a bold stroke for justice if the Administration appeared today in support of the Commission that they appointed. It would be a comforting sign of progress if the federal agencies that produced the recommendations and reviewed them during the past nine months were here in full support. But their absence only puts the burden of leadership more firmly on the very broad shoulders of this Committee and you Mr. Chairman.

I know that you will give the legislation the attention that it deserves. I know that you will give appropriate honor and recognition to Guam's World War II generation. I know that the causes for which the greatest generation fought and sacrificed for will not be dishonored by members of succeeding generations. In the name of those who marched at the point of a bayonet, in the name of those who worked all day for a scoop of rice when they were lucky and in the name of those who were beaten or beheaded, let us do the right thing today.

I congratulate Delegate Bordallo and her staff for their diligent efforts and I stand ready to move this legislation ahead.