

Senator Lisa Murkowski
Opening Statement
Omnibus Territories/Palau Hearing
July 11, 2013

Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding this hearing on two pieces of legislation that impact the territories and Freely Associated States. This is an area of this Committee's jurisdiction that may not generate as many headlines as other issues, but nonetheless is important to our nation's economic and physical security.

The first bill, the Omnibus Territories Act of 2013, with 20 sections is really a wide variety of issues ranging from the minimum wage to HUD programs to fishery endorsements and everything in between that may impact the territories individually or collectively.

While this bill was introduced by request, we made some changes to this bill compared to what was introduced in the House. I anticipate that further changes will need to be made should the Committee move forward on the bill and I look forward to working with each of the delegates on these matters.

With respect to the second piece of legislation, approving an agreement between the United States and Palau, I thank the Administration for transmitting this language to Congress so that it could be included in this hearing.

I will not go into all of the details of the Compact of Free Association between our two nations, but as a result of the close strategic and economic ties between our countries and our peoples, hundreds of Palauan citizens serve in all branches of the United States' Armed Forces. We greatly appreciate their willingness to serve in our Nation's military, in some cases giving their lives to defend our freedom.

Palau is a steadfast ally of the United States in international forums, whose support we should be mindful of and grateful for. Palau, along with Israel, votes with the U.S. in the United Nations more times than any other member. It is also important to recognize Palau's leadership in working with the United States to resettle six ethnic Uighurs who were detained at the Guantanamo Detention Facility. Palau was the first to offer its country as a future home for these detainees.

The key question, however, and a question that has gone unresolved since the Agreement was signed in 2010, is how to pay for it. I am not aware of any policy objections to the Agreement, but also acknowledge that, in my view, we have not seen an acceptable offset to the Agreement's cost.

I am hopeful that the Administration's witnesses today might offer some politically viable ways to move this Agreement forward.

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