

Opening Statement  
Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources  
Hearing: Omnibus Territories Act and Palau Agreement  
July 11, 2013  
SD-366

- Today the Committee meets to consider S.1237, the Omnibus Territories Act and S.1268, a bill to approve the September 10, 2010 Agreement between the United States and the Republic of Palau.
- We have with us the delegates from each of the territories, the Resident Commissioner from Puerto Rico, and Eileen Sobeck from the Department of the Interior for our first panel on S.1237.
- Ms. Sobeck will also appear on the second panel, along with Vikram Singh from the Department of Defense and Edgard Kagan from the Department of State, to discuss the Palau agreement.
- Good morning and welcome to you all.
- I would like to start by saying a few words about S.1237, the Omnibus Territories Act.
- This committee has jurisdiction over matters relating to the territories of the United States. However, because the territories are not represented in the Senate, few legislative proposals dealing with the territories are introduced here .
- That is why Senator Murkowski and I asked Congressman Sablan to round up legislative proposals from the territories, and send them to us. Senator Murkowski and I have introduced those proposals as S.1237, the Omnibus Territories Act.
- Senator Murkowski and I introduced the bill “by request.” As many of my colleagues know, introducing a bill “by request” is a courtesy Senators usually provide to the Executive Branch. However it can be extended to others.
- It means that Senator Murkowski and I are not endorsing the bill, or offering support for all of its provisions. We are merely offering it for consideration at the request of others – in this case the elected representatives of the various territories.
- The Omnibus Territories Act contains a wide variety of proposals. Some have been considered by this Committee before, and others are new. Some are controversial and others have broad support.
- I want to take a minute to talk about just two of the proposals.

- Section 12 of the bill, Guam War Claims, has come before the Senate a number of times in different forms. And it has always been very controversial because of the high cost of the proposal.
- Few deny the heroism and steadfast loyalty of the citizens of Guam during WWII. Many of them were subjected to forced labor, tortured, raped and killed by Japanese military forces, often simply because they were Americans.
- However, the high cost of the proposed payment of reparations to victims and survivors has made it difficult to get the proposal passed.
- But Congresswoman Bordallo has tackled this issue by providing a way to pay for the proposal. The Guam War Claims would be paid using Guam tax dollars that are normally sent to Guam's treasury.
- I am hopeful that this creative offset will satisfy those who were worried about the cost of the proposal.
- One of the new proposals in the bill is Section 9, the temporary heating and energy assistance to the Virgin Islands, designed to help those hit hardest by the sudden spike in electricity prices on the islands.
- When the oil refinery on St. Croix closed last year, the islands faced a double whammy of massive job losses and a huge increase in the cost of electricity. The economy of the islands has been devastated.
- I know that Congresswoman Christensen, the Governor, the Departments of Interior and Energy and local leaders have been working hard to overcome this economic disaster. They are working to install a variety of renewable and traditional energy sources and increase efficiency. They are truly pursuing an "all-of-the above" approach.
- But it will take several years for these measures to provide relief. In the meantime, Congresswoman Christensen is proposing that the Virgin Islands receive a greater share of Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Act dollars. She is also proposing that eligibility be expanded to folks with incomes up to 300% of the poverty level.
- These would be temporary measures, meant only to help the Virgin Islanders through this disaster. I certainly look forward to hearing from the Congresswoman about her proposal.
- Before we get started I also wanted to say a few words about S.1268, to approve the September 10, 2010 Agreement between the United States and the Republic of Palau.
- This agreement has an enormous strategic value to the United States. I look forward to hearing from both the Pentagon and the Department of State on that this morning.

- It is difficult to place a dollar value on an unsinkable aircraft carrier in the Pacific, unchallenged authority over a huge swath of ocean, and a steadfast international ally. But we actually know the cost. It is \$165 million -- approximately the cost of one F-35 fighter jet.
- It is hard to overstate the value and strategic necessity of approving this agreement.
- I hope that the Administration will continue to work with this Committee to find an acceptable offset for the Palau agreement so that America can implement this important national security agreement.