

The Honorable Lourdes “Lou” Leon Guerrero
Governor of Guam

Håfa Adai, Chairman Lee, Ranking Member Heinrich, and Members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you on behalf of the people of Guam.

I have testified before committees like this many times over the past seven years. As I near the conclusion of my time as Governor, I do not know how many more opportunities I will have to appear before you. So let me speak plainly about what is at stake for Guam.

State of Guam

I came to this office as the first woman to govern Guam, and the first CHamoru daughter of the Pacific to lead any American state or territory. But I did not come to make history. I came to keep a promise; to leave our island safer, stronger, and more compassionate than I found it. Today I can tell you, with a steady hand, that Guam is stronger today than it was seven years ago. And I can tell you, just as plainly, that the strength of Guam is the strength of America’s defense in the Indo-Pacific. The two cannot be separated.

Guam’s Role in National Defense

Guam sits at the forward edge of our nation’s defense. From our island, the United States projects power, sustains logistics, supports humanitarian operations, and maintains the deterrence that keeps this century from turning dark. That role is now expanding through one of the largest military realignments in the Pacific since the Second World War; a war whose survivors—our *manåmko’*—I have had the privilege to see finally recognized by Congress.

But this buildup is arriving on a small island with finite land, aging infrastructure, and civilian systems already at capacity.

Guam is the tip of the spear. But the tip of the spear is only as strong as the community standing behind it. Runways do not function without roads. Bases do not operate without housing. Missions do not succeed without nurses, teachers, engineers, tradespeople, and families who can afford to build a life here. Our resilience is not a courtesy to the mission. It is the foundation of it.

Economic Adjustment Committee

That is why Guam has called for a whole-of-government “One Guam” approach, and why we ask again today for the reconvening of the Economic Adjustment Committee. A forum where the federal government plans with Guam, not simply for Guam. We are not asking for special treatment. We are insisting on alignment.

Labor

Alignment must also include workforce policy. Guam continues to face significant workforce shortages across construction, healthcare, skilled trades, hospitality, and other sectors that are essential to both civilian resilience and national defense. Guam currently benefits from critical H-2B workforce flexibilities, including an exemption from the annual H-2B visa cap and regulatory Temporary Need restrictions for work supporting projects with a nexus to the Guam military realignment, both of which are scheduled to expire in 2029. Without congressional action, Guam's available workforce could decline sharply at a time when federal and local demands on our island continue to increase.

I urge Congress to extend these workforce flexibilities and ensure that federal workforce policies align with the strategic mission Guam is being asked to carry. The United States cannot simultaneously expand its investment and military presence on Guam while limiting access to the workforce necessary to build and sustain it.

Healthcare

I am a nurse. So I would like to begin where the stakes are most human. Guam is nearly seven hours from advanced care on U.S. soil. In the Pacific, distance is not an inconvenience; it is a risk measured in lives. We have no neighboring state to absorb a medical surge. The Department of War has recognized Guam's role in forward medical readiness and civilian-military interoperability. We are now part of America's medical architecture in this theater.

And yet our only public hospital was not built for the mission now arriving. A modern, dual-use Guam Medical Complex in Mangilao would strengthen civilian care, military readiness, and regional response capacity all at once; a place worthy of the doctors and nurses we ask to serve here, that keeps families together instead of sending our loved ones thousands of miles away at the worst moments of their lives.

We are not standing still. We have committed local recovery dollars to the foundation of this campus and won a fight in our own Supreme Court to move forward. But Guam cannot build this critical infrastructure alone. What I ask of this committee is a durable federal commitment to invest in Guam's healthcare capital that matches the strategic weight placed on our island. I will say to this Committee what I have said at home: history will not ask who won the argument. It will ask why, when the opportunity was ours, we let it pass. I intend to be the Governor who answered that question correctly.

Power

The military mission on Guam runs on a civilian grid, one vulnerable to typhoons, aging lines, and aboveground transmission failures. Our recent brush with Super Typhoon Sinlaku reminded us that Guam is always one major storm from becoming a defense community that cannot fully function. In the Western Pacific, typhoons are not rare events. They are simply life.

We have already steadied this system, bringing the new generation online and reducing the average household's power bill by roughly a quarter in a single year. But the next step belongs to the national interest: hardening and undergrounding critical power systems, so that operational continuity, emergency response, communications, and healthcare hold firm when the next storm comes. And it will come.

Cybersecurity

The threats of this century do not always arrive by sea. Cyberattacks, supply chain disruptions, and gray-zone operations increasingly target the civilian systems that sustain military power. Our utilities, hospitals, agencies, ports, and communications networks are part of America's resilience architecture in the Pacific. They must be defended as such. Investments in cybersecurity, communications resilience, and critical infrastructure protection are no longer optional safeguards; they are essential components of national defense in the Indo-Pacific.

Compact Impact

Guam proudly welcomes the citizens of the Freely Associated States. COFA advances American strategy across the Pacific. But the costs we bear in healthcare, education, public safety, and social services are real, ongoing, and substantial.

Those costs belong in federal funding formulas and match requirements. Partnership cannot be a word we use only when it is convenient for Washington.

Tourism

Tourism remains Guam's economic mainstay and one of the largest sources of private-sector employment on our island, supporting thousands of jobs and generating revenues that help fund essential government services. While visitor arrivals continue to recover, that recovery has been gradual and remains vulnerable to external economic conditions and changes in regional travel patterns. Yet Guam's recovery also continues to be constrained by federal policies that limit access to key visitor markets.

As Congress and the Administration consider strategies to strengthen America's position in the Indo-Pacific, they should recognize that Guam's economic resilience is inseparable from its strategic value. A strong tourism industry supports the families, businesses, and public services that sustain our community and, in turn, the civilian foundation that underpins America's presence in the Pacific. Supporting regional connectivity and visitor access is therefore an investment in both Guam's prosperity and America's long-term presence in the Indo-Pacific.

Strategic Regional Partnerships

As we work to strengthen Guam's visitor economy, we continue to look toward our closest markets and regional partners. The Philippines is one of Guam's most important visitor markets, a longstanding treaty ally of the United States, and a country with deep commercial, educational, cultural, and family ties to our island. For that reason, I respectfully urge the Departments of Homeland Security and the Interior to approve the inclusion of the Philippines as an eligible country under the Guam-CNMI Visa Waiver Program, consistent with the request recently submitted by Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. Doing so would strengthen lawful regional travel, support tourism and economic growth, improve air connectivity, and deepen ties between Guam and one of our closest partners in the Indo-Pacific.

The Guam-CNMI Visa Waiver Program already operates within a robust framework of traveler screening, pre-travel authorization, and federal oversight, and any expansion should continue to uphold the highest standards of border security and immigration compliance. At a time of economic recovery and heightened strategic competition in the region, this targeted and region-specific

action would advance both Guam's economic resilience and broader U.S. strategic interests in the Western Pacific.

Pacific Stewardship and Consultation

Recent executive action affecting commercial fishing access in the Mariana Trench Marine National Monument and other federally protected Pacific waters underscores a broader principle that extends beyond any single policy decision. Whether the issue is fisheries management, marine conservation, offshore energy development, or mineral extraction, decisions affecting the Pacific Ocean should not be made without meaningful engagement with the territories and island communities that depend upon it. Guam's culture, economy, food security, and way of life remain deeply connected to the ocean. As federal agencies consider policies affecting Pacific marine resources, Guam should have a seat at the table as a partner in shaping decisions that impact our region.

Deep-Sea Mining

That same principle must guide the federal approach to deep-sea mining. Guam understands the national interest in critical minerals and supply-chain resilience. But decisions about the Pacific Ocean cannot be made without the Pacific peoples most directly affected by them.

BOEM's current process concerns mineral leasing across a vast area between the CNMI and Guam, which share interconnected fisheries, a single marine ecosystem, and a cultural bond to the ocean that predates any map. The sea does not recognize political boundaries, and neither will the harm. I ask Congress to require a precautionary pause before any leasing, exploration, or mining proceeds pending independent scientific review, meaningful consultation with Guam and the CNMI, and a clear demonstration of local benefit and environmental protection. We are not the obstacle to a sustainable future. We are its stewards.

Government Finances

Guam is not sitting on the sidelines waiting to be rescued. We eliminated a structural deficit and turned it into a surplus. We rebuilt our Rainy Day Fund with real cash. We reduced our debt for the first time in generations, and we ended two costly federal receiverships.

We also name our shortcomings honestly. The delayed release of our government-wide single audits is a serious concern. Those audits are essential to good governance and to your oversight, and the shortage of qualified independent auditors does not excuse the delay; it only explains it. Accountability is required regardless of the reason, and we are committed to better performance and timeliness. I would rather tell you the hard truth than leave it for someone else to discover.

Across every one of these issues, healthcare, power, COFA, cybersecurity, the ocean, and our own books, the central truth is the same: America's strategic ambitions in the Indo-Pacific increasingly rest on the strength and resilience of Guam.

So I ask the federal government to match the scale of the mission with the scale of the partnership. Convene the Economic Adjustment Committee. Adopt a One Guam approach. Align resources with reality. And invest in the infrastructure that underpins both Guam's resilience and America's readiness, beginning with a modern Guam Medical Complex and a hardened power grid.

I have spent my life caring for this island; first one patient at a time, and then all of it at once. Progress, I have learned, does not defend itself. It lasts only when it is carried forward deliberately, courageously, with a clear understanding of what is at stake. I will leave this work soon. But I leave it to a people who keep choosing one another, and to a partnership I trust this Committee will honor.

The strength of American deterrence in the Pacific rests not only on the forces we deploy, but on the community that sustains them. Invest in that community, and Guam will endure—safe, strong, prosperous, and free.

Closing

As we join the nation in celebrating 250 years of independence, I ask that you remember this: Guam has given the lives of its sons and daughters, the best of its land, and a share of its treasure to keep this nation safe and free.

We have done so without a vote in Congress, a vote for President, or a meaningful voice in our own future. Yet our commitment to America has never been measured by what we receive, but by what we are willing to give. Today, we ask only to be heard because a stronger Guam makes America stronger. *Si Yu'os Ma'åse'.*