

Seventeenth Northern Marianas Commonwealth Legislature

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

April 26, 2011

Sec. Spc.

Session, 2011

H. B. 17-181

A BILL FOR AN ACT

To present to the voters of Northern Marianas descent in the next general election the question: "Should the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands and Guam, reunify in the pursuit of a new political status?"

**BE IT ENACTED BY THE SEVENTEENTH NORTHERN MARIANAS
COMMONWEALTH LEGISLATURE:**

1 **Section 1. Findings and Purpose.** In 1521 Ferdinand Magellan landed
2 upon our shores, ushering in the era of empire. By 1898, almost three centuries
3 later, the Spanish-American War would politically divide our people in the
4 southernmost island of Guam from her sister islands to the north, (Saipan, Rota,
5 Tinian, etc.) as Guam was ceded to the United States and the Northern Mariana
6 Islands (NMI) sold off to Germany. In 1919, Japan having declared war on
7 Germany during WWI, took the imperial helm of the Northern Mariana Islands. In
8 1941, the Japanese administration launched an attack on Guam on December 8th
9 of that year. The Japanese occupied Guam for almost three years.

10 Tragic World War II events are believed to be the root of why the Mariana
11 reunification efforts between the Northern Marianas and Guam were turned down
12 by the people of Guam in the November 1969 plebiscite. Political leaders of

1 Guam and the NMI craved a closer relationship with the United States and
2 realized the reunifying would strengthen their chances at reaching this goal.
3 However, deep historical resentment, a fall-out of WWII, became the stumbling
4 block that would catapult both the NMI and Guam on different political paths
5 towards the same objective.

6 Throughout the 1960's the issue of Mariana Reintegration dominated the
7 political status talks of the region. Most people of Saipan, Tinian and Rota (NMI)
8 favored integrating their political system with the people of Guam over being one
9 entity in the Trust Territories of the Pacific Islands. Having closer cultural ties and
10 sharing language and heritage motivated them to seek closer political and
11 economic affinity with their brethren in Guam. The NMI's community made it
12 resoundingly clear that they wanted to unify with Guam in a series of plebiscites.
13 However, reunification sentiments on Guam were mixed and variable due to
14 concerns of economic setbacks and unresolved resentments from WWII.

15 In a special election in 1969 Guam voters decided not to reintegrate with
16 the NMI. Roughly 6,000 of some 20,000 registered voters on the island showed
17 up to the polls for this issue; a little less than half of the votes cast were
18 unfavorable. After the 1969 special election, the NMI began to aggressively seek
19 political status changes independently from Guam and the larger Micronesian
20 region. Over the following six years Guam leaders watched as the NMI leaders
21 quickly and effectively negotiated a Covenant Agreement of Commonwealth
22 Status with the United States. Similar political status developments of the 1970's

1 and years later on Guam were all unsuccessful.

2 Both the CNMI and Guam are experiencing economic challenges. The
3 current economic environment of the CNMI is bleak. With the signing of Public
4 Law 110-229 or the Consolidated Natural Resources Act by President Bush on
5 May 8, 2008, the Federal government took control over CNMI immigration and
6 wage laws. This has caused closures of Textile Manufacturing factories, which
7 served as the CNMI's major trade and industry. For Guam, an increased military
8 development is considered to be a double edged sword which may adversely deter
9 Guam as a tourist destination for the Japan market.

10 On the other hand, Guam today stands at a crossroad of major economic
11 change. The imminent transfer of U.S. Marines, dependants and other related
12 personnel from Okinawa to Guam, estimated to increase the local population by at
13 least 20,000 will have a major impact on the current state of Guam's economy and
14 political environment. The CNMI may expect a spillover effect from the build-
15 up. Included in the plans for the military relocation are training exercises from
16 which the northern islands will be heavily utilized.

17 Guam, Rota, Tinian and Saipan are the four major islands of the Mariana
18 archipelago in the Western Pacific. These small islands are close in distance; they
19 share a distinctive cultural heritage and relatively similar natural resources. Yet
20 these islands have been separated into two different political entities for almost
21 110 years, each with a special territorial relationship with the United States of
22 America (US). The Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands or the CNMI

1 consists of Rota, Tinian, Saipan, and eleven other smaller and uninhabited isles.
2 Guam the largest and southern most islands has its own unique political status; it
3 is an Unincorporated Territory to the US.

4 It is the intent that the submission proposed herein shall be non-binding
5 and open to be voted upon by persons of Northern Marianas descent who have
6 registered and are listed in the Northern Marianas Descent Registry (NMDR),
7 established by P.L. 17-40, during the General Election of 2012. The results shall
8 provide guidance to the overall goal of the future of our islands.

9 **Section 2. Mandate.** In the next regular general election in November
10 2012, the Commonwealth Board of Election shall place before only persons of
11 Northern Marianas descent who have registered and are listed in the Northern
12 Marianas Descent Registry (NMDR), established by P.L. 17-40, for vote on the
13 ballot, together with Findings and Purpose section herein, the following question:

14 “Should the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands and Guam,
15 reunify in the pursuit of a new political status?”

16 **Section 3. Adoption and Transmittal.** The Speaker of the House and
17 the President of the Senate shall certify, and the Clerks of the House and the
18 Senate shall attest to the passage of this House Bill. The House Clerk shall then
19 cause the Bill to be transmitted to the Governor and the Board of Elections
20 whereupon the Board shall place the question presented , with the Findings and
21 Purpose section herein, before the people of the Commonwealth for vote in the
22 next regular general election.

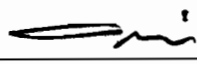
1 **Section 4. Severability.** If any provisions of this Act or the application
2 of any such provision to any person or circumstance should be held invalid by a
3 court of competent jurisdiction, the remainder of this Act or the application of its
4 provisions to persons or circumstances other than those to which it is held invalid
5 shall not be affected thereby.

6 **Section 5. Savings Clause.** This Act and any repealer contained herein
7 shall not be construed as affecting any existing right acquired under contract or
8 acquired under statutes repealed or under any rule, regulation or order adopted
9 under the statutes. Repealers contained in this Act shall not affect any proceeding
10 instituted under or pursuant to prior law. The enactment of the Act shall not have
11 the effect of terminating, or in any way modifying, any liability, civil or criminal,
12 which shall already be in existence on the date this Act becomes effective.

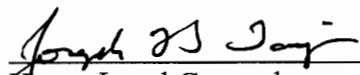
13 **Section 6. Effective Date.** This Act shall take effect upon its approval by
14 the Governor or becoming law without such approval.

Intro 4/26/11
Prefiled: _____

Date: 4/26/11

Introduced By: 
Rep. Joseph M. Palacios

Reviewed for Legal Sufficiency by:


House Legal Counsel

