

MAR 12 2021

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# SENATE RESOLUTION

RECOGNIZING THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE COMPACT OF FREE ASSOCIATION  
COMMUNITY IN THE STATE OF HAWAII.

1 WHEREAS, shortly after World War II, the United States  
2 assumed administration of the Trust Territory of the Pacific  
3 Islands under a United Nations strategic trusteeship, which  
4 provided for United States control over development of the  
5 islands' economies and international relations, as well as  
6 military access to territory within the islands; and  
7

8 WHEREAS, the three nations with Compacts of Free  
9 Association (COFA) with the United States - the Republic of  
10 Palau, the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI), and the  
11 Federated States of Micronesia have small populations,  
12 economies, and land sizes but stretch over two million square  
13 miles of ocean; and  
14

15 WHEREAS, the swaths of ocean in which they are located are  
16 incredibly strategic, lying directly on the way from the United  
17 States to Asia and Australia, and whoever controls those waters  
18 controls American access to the entire Indo-Pacific region; and  
19

20 WHEREAS, after World War II, these nations became trust  
21 territories of the United States. While the United States  
22 granted them independence in the 1980s and 1990s, these nations  
23 first signed COFA agreements with the United States, allowing it  
24 to establish bases, access territorial waters of these nations,  
25 and exclude other nations from them. For example, Kwajalein in  
26 the Republic of the Marshall Islands hosts the Reagan Test Site,  
27 a cornerstone of American missile defense capabilities; and  
28

29 WHEREAS, if the United States abandoned COFA, China would  
30 be in a unique position to gain control over COFA, jeopardizing  
31 the United States' ability to guarantee the security of its  
32 Indo-Pacific allies and trade through the world's busiest  
33 shipping lanes since China's military buildup is a top threat to  
34 the region and world; and  
35



1 WHEREAS, notwithstanding the COFA islands' status as  
2 independent nations, the economies of these islands are heavily  
3 dependent on United States government grants under the COFA  
4 treaty and the United States military presence; and  
5

6 WHEREAS, treaties arising out of the special and unique  
7 relationship that has existed between the three COFA island  
8 nations and the United States allow island citizens to enter the  
9 United States without work permits or visas to study, live and  
10 work and to access benefits available to United States citizens,  
11 such as driver licenses and health care; and  
12

13 WHEREAS, the federal government estimates that there are  
14 currently over fourteen thousand seven hundred COFA migrants  
15 living in Hawaii; and  
16

17 WHEREAS, citizens from the Federated States of Micronesia  
18 volunteer to serve in the United States Armed Forces at per  
19 capita rates higher than most states; and  
20

21 WHEREAS, a report in 2019 found up to one thousand five  
22 hundred Micronesian citizens currently serving in the United  
23 States Armed Forces; and  
24

25 WHEREAS, there is widespread negative public perception of  
26 COFA migrants in Hawaii and this group continues to be  
27 scapegoated as a drain on resources, particularly regarding  
28 healthcare. COFA migrants also face discrimination in access to  
29 housing, education, and employment; and  
30

31 WHEREAS, despite these hardships and challenges, COFA  
32 migrants participate in economic activities by providing labor,  
33 consuming goods and services, and paying fees and taxes to the  
34 government. According to estimates in a report conducted by the  
35 Department of Business, Economic Development, and Tourism, the  
36 COFA population contributed \$336,200,000 to the Hawaii gross  
37 domestic product in 2017, accounting for 0.4 percent of the  
38 state total GDP that year; and  
39

40 WHEREAS, COFA migrants also contribute to the vibrancy of  
41 indigenous cultural practices in the State, helping to keep  
42 native cultural traditions alive in the modern day as best



1 illustrated by the story of Mau Piailug and his contributions to  
2 traditional ocean navigation, which resulted in a cultural  
3 revolution for native Hawaiians to relearn a part of their  
4 culture that was being lost; and  
5

6 WHEREAS, the COFA island families residing in this country  
7 should be fairly treated in recognition of their contributions  
8 and the special and unique relationship between the COFA islands  
9 and the United States; now, therefore,  
10

11 BE IT RESOLVED by the Senate of the Thirty-first  
12 Legislature of the State of Hawaii, Regular Session of 2021,  
13 that the Legislature recognizes the contributions and  
14 accomplishments of our COFA community in the State of Hawaii and  
15 the broader United States; and  
16

17 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Legislature recognizes the  
18 need to bring justice to Hawaii's relationship with our COFA  
19 community, including providing equal access to health care,  
20 ensuring meaningful inclusion and language access in schools and  
21 workplaces, and promoting the inclusion of COFA residents in  
22 government; and  
23

24 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that certified copies of this  
25 Resolution be transmitted to the Governor, Chairperson to the  
26 Hawaii Advisory Committee to the United States Commission on  
27 Civil Rights, and Executive Director of We Are Oceania.  
28  
29  
30

OFFERED BY: 

