

Statement
Mr. Jim Arenovski
Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee
H.R. 339, Northern Mariana Islands Economic Expansion Act
April 27, 2017

Chairwoman Murkowski,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of H.R. 339, the Northern Mariana Islands Economic Expansion Act.

My name is Jim Arenovski, a long time resident and business owner on the island of Saipan in the Marianas.

Over the years, I have hired and trained many local workers for my own businesses.

But more recently I have also been training and certifying local workers, so they can find jobs in businesses throughout our economy. It is from my experiences both as an employer and a trainer that I speak this morning.

I operate Island Training Solutions, the Regional Licensee for the American Hotel and Lodging Educational Institute. We offer a Hospitality curriculum that provides a globally-recognized hospitality certification.

385 Marianas residents have been certified over the last 3 years and there are 73 currently enrolled. The pass rate is 95% and, not surprisingly, most of our graduates get hired quickly.

My business works under the umbrella of the Latte Training Academy, a 501c3 non-profit, which also provides certification training in Allied Health, IT, Bookkeeping — a dozen specialty skills altogether.

In addition, the Public School System's High School Cooperative Education Program, Northern Marianas College's Career Development Institute & Adult Basic Education, and the Northern Marianas Trade Institute all offer workforce skills training to help fill positions in various industries.

Employers are hiring these local, US workers. But it is not always so easy.

I remember one of the women who took our class, who thought she had no skills or abilities and felt she would never get hired. She had run her own household for the last 15 years and did not understand that her skills — organization, logistics and budgeting — applied in the workplace, too. But one day she came over to me with a huge smile on her face and said "you were right... I can do this and I am good at it."

There are many other men and women out there now who are struggling with similar attitudes about themselves or with physical challenges. We have a girl in one of our programs, who is pregnant and was eventually told to stay at home by her doctor. But she contacted her instructor and said she was not quitting. She asked how she could continue. We arranged for assignments and tests to be given at her home and we will test her for certification, after she delivers. She understood that she would need to work to support her child and that this class was her best chance of getting the job she wanted (a front desk clerk). She was not going to let it slip away. I cannot wait to see her success.

I would like to share another quick story that might help depict a clearer picture on the limited pool of applicants. A senior hotel manager recently encountered a person who was asking for money outside a local store. The manager declined but offered the person the opportunity to apply and work at the hotel. He gave his name and direct contact number, but never really expected to see this person come to the hotel. The very next day, this individual came in to fill out an application and was eventually hired. As you might imagine this person has family and educational challenges, but rides their bike, rain or shine, to the hotel every day and is still gainfully employed.

This story is just one of many that show just how businesses are changing their thinking when it comes to the hiring and development of local talent.

I could tell you lots more stories, but my time is limited.

The point I want to make is that with a limited pool of unemployed people, each person we train and help to get a job is going to be a story. We have to encourage. We have to build confidence and help people up again when they fall. And it all takes time.

But I think we are making good progress. And H.R. 339, by putting more training funds into the system will help that progress. Maybe speed it along.

By not passing HR339 the US Congress will have missed an opportunity to help the Marianas help itself. Our congressman and Governor have opened opportunities for both businesses and local US workers. They both know the importance of getting the labor situation in the NMI... RIGHT! Please give them the tools to continue this effort and work to pass HR 339.

Thank you.