

Déjà Vu

Last week the Legislature heard testimony from the Department of Public Works, the Guam Public School System (GPSS) and others about the fate of our John F. Kennedy (JFK) and George Washington High School students for the upcoming school year.

It is clear that GPSS has been planning and considering ideas to end double sessions as soon as possible with some view of reasonableness about funding. The CoreTech property in Tiyan is being considered as is a plan to retrofit Chief Brodie Elementary with ARRA stimulus funds for a temporary facility while the JFK campus is repaired and upgraded with ARRA stimulus funds.

The CoreTech contract signed by George Bamba obligates the government of Guam for \$6.2 million dollars a year for 10 years for a “temporary” school facility. This money is currently not a part of the government operational expense so it represents a new cost that tax payers must fund whether through tax collections or tax credits. Either way, it strips money from other critical areas such as public safety and health.

This spin is in and the administration is pitching this sweetheart deal to use the facility as a temporary location for other schools after JFK vacates. This is a self-serving policy initiative since the Governor only has a year and a half left in office and will have no control over the future plans of repairing and maintaining GPSS facilities.

As we have seen during the \$1 million dollar a week landfill crisis, the Governor has again preyed on the concern of our community over an important issue to ram an unfunded personal agenda down the throats of tax payers. This is an effective way to sneak one in without scrutiny because no elected officials want to stand in opposition to helping our children. I have never backed down from any issue that just isn't right and in this case we are all being taken for a ride.

I sent a letter to Congresswoman Bordallo that discusses a much more fiscally responsible approach to ending double sessions in comparison to signing a ten year lease for \$62 million dollars.

Hafa Adai Congresswoman Bordallo,

As you are aware, for the past several months, there has been much debate on the fate of John F. Kennedy High School (JFK) students. The JFK campus was closed after inspections revealed its present condition present a risk to the delivery of a safe and adequate education to our students. Since then, the JFK students have had to share a campus with George Washington High School in a double session which has not been the best solution, for the students, faculty and administration.

As we discussed in April of this year, the State Fiscal Stabilization Fund program will grant a one-time appropriation under the American

Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA) to Guam upwards of \$100 million dollars that can be used for repair and upgrades to existing schools. As of today, there are no final decisions on conditions for the release of the AARA State Fiscal Stabilization Funds for education use.

The good timing of the ARRA award allows a tremendous opportunity for Guam to remedy the double session stress on JFK and GW students and help with finalizing a plan for a permanent facility for JFK without the financial burden to the tax payers and general fund.

The JFK Exit Task Force had identified a plan to retrofit Chief Brodie Elementary School (CBE), which you know is part of the current JFK campus, to serve as a temporary interim school for JFK students while the existing JFK facilities are repaired. Upon completion of JFK, CBE would then undergo some upgrades and become part of the modernized JFK campus.

There are serious discussions and existing engineering and architectural studies which outline a rebuilding of the existing JFK structures which can be accomplished within one year that would allow for an alternate JFK site for the next school year and return the students to a modernized campus by the fall of 2010.

The cost to retrofit Chief Brodie will be about \$4 million and the modernization of JFK is estimated to cost \$30 million. The \$34 million required for this plan is most certainly going to qualify as projects for which ARRA stimulus money can be used.

The burning question that is left for all of us to ask is whether we should let Uncle Sam pay \$34 million to end double sessions or remove \$62 million from the General Fund over the next ten years. It seems like a no brainer to me.