

It was your work, not the politicians

Written by BY SEN. BEN PANGELINAN
Thursday, 01 May 2014 03:00am

THE talks have definitely begun.

In my mind, last Monday night was what I would call the “official” public start of the forum on the Department of the Navy’s draft supplemental environmental impact statement (SEIS). It so happened that the forum was initiated at our own Guam Legislature. At the outset, it might seem that the roundtable discussion was held too soon after the release of the draft SEIS, so how would it have been possible to read through the entire document and provide comment? But reflecting back on the concerns raised by the various groups present, I believe that putting these initial thoughts out on the table is a very good start. The testimonies that night were indeed compelling, a testament that the people of Guam are willing to take a stand the first time, the second time and seemingly however many times more to ensure that our issues are heard, and that the quality of life of our community is protected and preserved.

Those at the table ranged from nongovernmental community-based organizations, government commissions, families and individuals of lands yet to be returned, as well as many others who were part of the listening audience. Even the Joint Guam Program Office (JGPO) officials were in attendance.

Highlighted here are just a few but significant points raised by a number of participants before Sen. Frank Aguon’s Committee on the Guam U.S. military relocation that sponsored this roundtable discussion, and the panel of senators present that evening. Even if some of the issues may appear to be a repeat of Build Up 1 concerns, they are nonetheless important because, clearly, they have yet to be addressed as we now find ourselves amidst Build Up 2 discussions.

From the various groups and individuals, we heard the following points:

- We should not find ourselves less critical even if the revised DSEIS is an “improvement” from the first. Take note that the only benefit argued is the economic benefit; everything else mentioned is a cost to the people of Guam.
- Socioeconomic issues are classified as significant impacts but potentially mitigatable, but the economic activity needed to trigger and generate additional revenues is less than significant.
- Government agencies should provide a framework for the people of Guam to understand just how this buildup will affect us. The people who work in these agencies are our subject matter experts, and thus should be tasked to inform us of what is at stake.
- The land that is Guam is not owned, but rather occupied, by the federal government.
- No doubt there is adverse environmental impact if there is a live fire training range complex or hand grenade range on our lands.
- As stated over and over in the first Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS), Guam’s social service network cannot accommodate an increase in population, no matter how

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decreased. The social service network continues to ask: Whose burden is it to pay for infrastructural upgrades to Guam's human service organizations?

- An increased military population will increase gendered violence in any community.
- The original families of Ritidian and their descendants remain committed to the return of their lands. H.R. 4402 should be replaced with the "Guam Lands Return Act of 2014" (proffered to the families by the congresswoman). The families ask, "Why must the people repeatedly remind that this buildup is definitely not in our favor?"
- H.R. 4402 bypasses the National Environmental Process Act (NEPA), which is a U.S. environmental law required for any proposed federal agency actions that impact the environment.
- Guam's resources are not free, including but not limited to land and water.
- The areas of the north have rich history. Finegayan, Urunao, Jinapsan, Litekyan must remain accessible to the original landowners and their heirs. The quality of life must not be sacrificed.
- The comment period should be extended to at least 90 days instead of the 60 days granted.

While these are just a few of the points heard at the roundtable discussion, they remain firm and engaged. I encourage each and every one of us to participate in these discussions. The following information is provided to assist with your participation:

Draft SEIS link:

http://guammarines.s3.amazonaws.com/static/draftSEIS/Guam_Draft_SEIS_APR_2014_CD.pdf

Public Hearing Dates:

- Saturday, May 17, Open House: 1 to 3 p.m., Public Hearing 3 to 5 p.m., Okkodo High School.
- Monday, May 19, Open House: 5 to 7 p.m., Public Hearing 7 to 9 p.m., Father Duenas Memorial School Phoenix Center.
- Tuesday, May 20, Open House: 5 to 7 p.m., Public Hearing 7 to 9 p.m., former McCool School, Naval Base Guam.

Submit a comment via online:

<https://extranet.cardnotec.com/guamseis/>

Mail:

Joint Guam Program Office Forward
P.O. Box 153246
Santa Rita, Guam 96915

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Final submission day:

June 17

As always, and as demonstrated at the forum that evening, I remain committed to asking the critical questions to ensure that the safety and integrity of our people and our land are never sacrificed without our consent. However packaged the EIS is, many of our people are not strangers to this process, and our concerns must always be first and foremost when it comes to how all our natural resources will be affected – this includes our people, our wildlife, our marine life, our land, our water and our submerged lands.

Finally, I remind all of you that the improvements of Build Up 2 outlined in the SEIS over Build Up 1, despite the claims of the weekly addresses and press releases of politicians, the improvements were the result of your hard work and the 10,000 public comments you submitted.

I ask that you all do it again and promise to be there once again to help you.

Si Yu'os Ma'åse'