



Members of the Statehood for Guam Task Force attending the conference, "Fanhita: Our Continuing Quests for Decolonization" held on Guam in 2019. Courtesy of Michael Lujan Bevacqua.

STATEHOOD IS THE BEST OPTION FOR GUAM

ESSAY | DEBATE

By the Statehood for Guam Task Force

Statehood is the best option for Guam, for a variety of reasons that we are already very familiar with. We know the U.S. system very well. We have been under the U.S. flag for more than 120 years. As Guamanians we have assimilated the American way as part of our lifestyle. Our loyalty to the U.S. is unquestionable: it has been proven by our high levels of service in the U.S. military, our numerous casualties in American conflicts across the globe, and has been well-documented even in the darkest hours of enemy occupation during WWII.

In a nutshell, statehood will fully "integrate" Guam with the United States as a state of the union. Other status options, independence and free association, will "dis-integrate" Guam from its present relationship with the United States and will turn Guam loose to chart its own destiny. If we were to achieve either of those statuses, we would no longer be "Guam U.S.A."

In addition to losing the status of being a part of America and where its day begins, such a change would force the discontinuance of all federal assistance, aid and grants for social, economic, and educational programs as well as highway and infrastructure funding. Persons who were granted their U.S. citizenship by virtue of the 1950 Organic Act of Guam run the risk of not enjoying their full benefits while living in a non-U.S. Guam.

Under the U.S. Immigration and Nationality Act, 8 U.S.C. §1481 (2021), a native-born or naturalized U.S. citizen could lose his or her citizenship by taking an oath or making an affirmation or other formal declaration of allegiance to a foreign state or a political subdivision thereof. Descendants born on Guam also could run into problems with their citizenship because Guam would no longer be a U.S. territory.

Statehood is the only option that can guarantee not only your U.S. citizenship but also that of your descendants and the generations to come.

As a state, Guam would acquire state sovereignty and have full control of all state matters. The people would have full protection and permanent citizenship under the U.S. Constitution, vote for the president and vice president, and have two senators and one representative in Congress.

Guam would also write its own state constitution and set up a state government with three equal branches — executive, legislative and judicial. This government will be subject to how our people want our government to look and function.

Some argue that a downside to becoming a state is that there will be increased income taxes for island residents. Currently the taxes we pay each year stay in Guam for the operations of the Government of Guam, and don't go into the federal coffers, to be divvied up across the states and territories like all 50 states are required to do. By becoming a state, there would be an increasing tax burden.

But, as a result of full inclusion, Guam would be able to obtain more money from the federal government. We'll be able to participate in the revenue sharing, which means for example, we'll be treated equally and equitably when it comes to federal funds, revenue sharing programs, grants and entitlements available to all states. This will increase Guam's level of federal assistance.

Supplemental Security Income would also be available for Guam. This program will certainly provide needed funds to our SSI recipients.

Having two senators and a representative in Congress should enable Guam to obtain more federal dollars in appropriations, grants, aids and entitlements than it is currently receiving as a territory.

Some say that statehood for Guam is a pipe dream because we are too small, have too few people and are too far away to ever be brought into the American union. But the constitution has no minimum requirements for becoming a state in terms of population and size. There are also no conditions for states being geographically close to the U.S., something already challenged by Alaska and Hawai'i.

And we should remember the U.S. Constitution as we forge ahead. Its first line remarks on the "more perfect union" of America. That even if that founding document launched the history of the greatest country in the world, it featured mechanisms to improve it and make it more perfect. One way it does that is to expand the union as America expands and changes. Our journey with America first began as a territory, and has not always been perfect. But it has always been improving. Statehood should be our goal.