



Senate ORGANIZATIONAL SESSION

First Day
Monday**January 09, 2017**

[PRESIDENT PRO TEM HITS THE GAVEL AND THE ORGANIZATIONAL SESSION BEGINS]

PRESIDENT PRO-TEM FRANCISCO M. BORJA: The Senate of the Twentieth Northern Marianas Commonwealth Legislature hereby convenes its First Day, Organizational Session.

Good Morning everyone. Pursuant to an appointment by the members of this body, I shall preside as your President Pro-Tem for this Organizational Session. Before proceeding and without any objection from the members, I hereby appoint Senator STEVE K. MESNGON from the FIRST SENATORIAL DISTRICT to serve as our Floor Leader Pro-Tem. Any objection. Thank you members.

At this time, I would like to recognize our LB Staff: Ms. Doris Bermudes our Senate Clerk, Mr. Juan Santos - Sergeant-at-arms, Ms. Antonette Villagomez – Senior Senate Legal Counsel, Mr. Jose A. Bermudes, Senate Legal Counsel, Mr. Joel Camacho and Ms. Jolyn Duenas - Tagabuel, Legislative Assistant; and Ms. Geraldine Cruz, Senate Journal Clerk.

Again, at this time, I call this Organizational Session to order and the next agenda on our Order of Business is the Roll Call. Clerk can you take the roll by each Senatorial District?

[CALL OF THE ROLL]

The Senate Clerk called the roll by Senatorial District and reported to the Chair that nine members are present.

[PUBLIC COMMENT]

PRESIDENT PRO-TEM FRANCISCO M. BORJA: Thank you Clerk. With nine (9) members present, we do have the necessary quorum to conduct our business. First in our order of business is the Public Comment. Anyone or anybody from the gallery wishes to make public comment at this time? Anyone? Okay, Clerk let the record reflect that there is no public comment.

[APPOINTMENT OF CREDENTIALS COMMITTEE]

And going down on our next Order of Business is the appointment of a SPECIAL COMMITTEE, which is the Credentials Committee to review the credentials of senators – elect Paul A. Manglona, Francisco M. Borja and Sixto K. Igisomar. I hereby appoint Senators Francisco Q. Cruz, Steve K. Mesngon and Justo S. Quitugua to the Committee. Senator Cruz shall serve as the Chairman of the Committee. At this time, the Senate will stand recess until the credentials committee is ready to report its findings of the newly elected Senators.

The Senate recessed at 10:15 a.m.

RECESS

The Senate reconvened at 11:45 a.m.

PRESIDENT PRO-TEM FRANCISCO M. BORJA: Before I reconvene this Organizational Session, I would like to ask the Sergeant-At-Arms to please escort the Honorable Governor Torres and the Honorable Lieutenant Governor Victor Hocog together with the Presiding Judge of the Commonwealth Superior Court, the Honorable Judge Naraja, to join me up here. Thank you and at this time, I reconvene this session and, before we entertain the report from the Credential Committee, I believe the members from the House are here to report, so I ask the Sergeant-At-Arms to please escort the members from the House to report to the full Senate body.

[COMMUNICATION FROM THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES]

Representative Francisco Aguon: On behalf of the members of the House of Representatives of the 20th Commonwealth Legislature, we are honored and privileged to inform the Senate that the House of Representatives is duly organized and ready to transact business.

Representative Edwin Aldan: Also to inform this body that Representative Rafael Demapan is the Speaker of the House with Vice-Speaker, Janet Maratita and Floor Leader, Glenn Maratita.

PRESIDENT PRO-TEM FRANCISCO M. BORJA: Thank you Representatives Aguon and Aldan on that report and also please extend our congratulations to the leadership and to the newly

elected House members. At this time, I would like to ask the Chair of the Credentials Committee, Senator Cruz, are you ready to report your findings on the credentials of the Senators-elect?

Senator Cruz: Thank you Mr. Senate President Pro-Tem. Your Credentials Committee is ready to report the Special Committee Report No 20-01. Mr. President Pro-Tem Borja, your Senate Credentials Committee, to which was given the task of reviewing the credentials of the senators-elect of the Twentieth Northern Marianas Commonwealth Senate, begs leave to report as follows:

Your Credentials Committee recommends that the Senate of the Twentieth Northern Marianas Commonwealth Legislature accept the credentials of Senators-elect:

1. Paul A. Manglona
2. Francisco M. Borja
3. Sixto K. Igisomar

Your Credentials Committee finds that Article II, section 2 of the Constitution of the Northern Mariana Islands requires that senators be qualified to vote in the Commonwealth, at least twenty-five years of age, a resident and domiciliary of the Commonwealth for at least five years immediately preceding the date on which the senator takes office, and registered to vote in the senatorial district where he or she is a candidate. [N.M.I. CONST. Art. II, sections 2(c) and (d)]

Mr. President Pro-Tem, your Credentials Committee finds that Senators-elect Paul A. Manglona, Francisco M. Borja and Sixto K. Igisomar are Senators-elect from the First, Second and Third Senatorial District. Your Credentials Committee finds that they are qualified to vote in the Commonwealth, were born prior to January 9, 1991, have been residents and domiciliary of the CNMI since at least January 9, 2012, and are registered to vote in the First, Second and Third Senatorial District. Your Credentials Committee finds that Senators-elect Manglona, Borja and Igisomar meet all the requirements of the CNMI Constitution and Code such that there is no provision with which compliance would prohibit the acceptance of their credentials. Your Credentials Committee further finds that it is unaware of any defect in morals or character that would militate against Senators-elect Manglona, Borja and Igisomar being seated as members of the Twentieth Northern Marianas Commonwealth Senate.

Based on the foregoing, your Credentials Committee recommends that the credentials of Senators-elect Paul A. Manglona, Francisco M. Borja and Sixto K. Igisomar be accepted by the full Senate and that they be seated as members of the Senate and granted all the rights, privileges, immunities and responsibilities appurtenant thereto.

Mr. President, this is the Special Committee Report No. 19 or 20-01, thank you Mr. President Pro-Tem.

PRESIDENT PRO-TEM FRANCISCO M. BORJA: Thank you, Chairman Cruz. Do all members have copies of the Credentials Committee Report? Everyone got copies? Thank you. I ask the Clerk that the report of the Credentials Committee be made part of our records. May I hear a motion for the adoption of the Special Committee Report No. 12-01? Okay, there's a motion for the

adoption of Special Committee Report No. 12-01 and it has been seconded, I am sorry, 20-01and it has been seconded, any discussion? Ready. Clerk, can you take the roll.

CLERK called the roll:

Senator Francisco Q. Cruz	Yes
Senator Jude U. Hofschneider	Hunggan (Yes)
Senator Sixto K. Igisomar	Aweer (Yes)??
Senator Paul A. Manglona	Abstain
Senator Steve K. Mesngon	Yes
Senator Arnold I. Palacios	Yes
Senator Justo S. Quitugua	Yes
Senator Teresita A. Santos	Yes
Senator Francisco M. Borja	Yes

CLERK: Mr. President Pro-Tem, Eight (8) members voting yes and one (1) abstention.

PRESIDENT PRO-TEM FRANCISCO M. BORJA: With Eight (8) members voting yes, Special Committee Report No. 20-01 is hereby adopted. And with the adoption of the Special Committee Report, I think we are now ready to take our Oath of Office.

PRESIDENT PRO-TEM FRANCISCO M. BORJA: I ask the Honorable Judge Naraja to please administer the Oath of Office. I ask all the Members to please stand.

[SWEARING IN OF MEMBERS]

JUDGE ROBERTO NARAJA: Please all stand and raise your right hand and repeat after me.

The Oath of Office was thus administered as follows:

“I do solemnly swear that I will support and defend the Constitution and laws of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, the Covenant to establish a Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands in

Political Union with the United States of America, the applicable provisions of the Constitution, laws and treaties of the United States of America, and that I will faithfully discharge my duties as a Senator for the First, Second and Third Senatorial District, to the best of my abilities, SO HELP ME GOD.”

JUDGE ROBERTO NARAJA: Congratulations.

PRESIDENT PRO-TEM FRANCISCO M. BORJA: Thank you Judge Naraja congratulations to all my colleagues. At this time, I call for a short recess so that members can sign their Oath of Office.

The Senate recessed at 11:15 a.m.

RECESS

The Senate reconvened at 12 noon

PRESIDENT PRO-TEM FRANCISCO M. BORJA: We are back to our session and again thank you Judge Naraja and again congratulations to the members on your Oath of Office, and of course signing your official Oath.

Okay, moving down our next item of our order of business is the adoption of **Senate Resolution No 20-01**, proposing to adopt the Official Rules that would govern the proceedings of the 20th SENATE Northern Marianas Commonwealth Legislature. I recognize the **Floor Leader Pro-Tem Senator Mesngon**.

[ADOPTION OF SENATE RULES OF PROCEDURE]

FLOOR LEADER PRO-TEM Steve K. Mesngon: Thank you, Mr. President Pro-Tem. Before I effectuate any motion, I also would like to recognize also and thank Governor and Lt. Governor and Judge Naraja for swearing in the members and congratulations to all the members. I would like to effectuate a motion to adopt Senate Resolution No. 20-01, the Official Senate Rules for the 20th Northern Marianas Commonwealth Legislature, so move Mr. President Pro-Tem.

PRESIDENT PRO-TEM FRANCISCO M. BORJA: There's a motion on the floor for the adoption of Senate Resolution No. 20-01 and has been seconded. Any discussion.

FLOOR LEADER PRO-TEM Steve K. Mesngon: Ready.

PRESIDENT PRO-TEM FRANCISCO M. BORJA: No discussion? Those in favor of the motion to adopt S.R. No. 20-01 say "aye"

Several members voiced, "aye".

PRESIDENT PRO-TEM FRANCISCO M. BORJA: All those opposed say, "nay". [**No "nays"**] Motion carries.

Senate Resolution No. 20-01 the Senate Rules & Procedures is hereby adopted.

PRESIDENT PRO-TEM FRANCISCO M. BORJA: And the next order of Business is the Election of President.

[ELECTION OF PRESIDENT]

PRESIDENT PRO-TEM FRANCISCO M. BORJA: I recognize **Senator Justo Quitugua**.

Senator Quitugua: Thank you Mr. Senate President Pro-Tem. At this time, I am honored and privileged to nominate **Senator Arnold I. Palacios** from the Third Senatorial District to serve as the **President of the Senate** for the Twentieth CNMI Northern Marianas Commonwealth Legislature.

A member voiced "seconded".

PRESIDENT PRO-TEM FRANCISCO M. BORJA: There is a motion on the floor nominating Senator Arnold I. Palacios from the Third Senatorial District for the President of the Senate of the Twentieth Northern Marianas Legislature and it has been seconded. Any other nomination? I recognize Floor Leader.

FLOOR LEADER PRO-TEM Steve K. Mesngon: Mr. President Pro-Tem, I move to close nomination for the president's seat, thank you.

PRESIDENT PRO-TEM FRANCISCO M. BORJA: There's a motion to close nomination and has been seconded, all in favor of that motion to close nomination say "aye."

All members voiced, "aye".

PRESIDENT PRO-TEM FRANCISCO M. BORJA: All those opposed say, "nay". [No "nays"] Motion carries. The nomination for President is hereby closed.

PRESIDENT PRO-TEM FRANCISCO M. BORJA: There being no other nomination, I call on the Senate Clerk to do the roll call. We are now voting on the nomination of our good Senator Arnold I. Palacios for the Senate President. Clerk can you take the roll?

CLERK called the roll:

Senator Francisco Q. Cruz	Yes
Senator Jude U. Hofschneider	Hunggan (Yes)
Senator Sixto K. Igisomar	Hunggan (Yes)
Senator Paul A. Manglona	Yes
Senator Steve K. Mesngon	Yes
Senator Justo S. Quitugua	Yes
Senator Arnold I. Palacios	Present
Senator Teresita A. Santos	Yes
Senator Francisco M. Borja	Yes

CLERK: Mr. President Pro-Tem, Eight (8) members voting yes and one (1) present.

PRESIDENT PRO-TEM FRANCISCO M. BORJA: Thank you Clerk. With Eight members voting yes and one present, Senator Arnold I. Palacios from the Third Senatorial District is hereby duly elected as President of the Senate for the Twentieth Northern Marianas Commonwealth Legislature. Congratulations. And at this time also, I asked the Sergeant-At-Arms, please escort President Palacios to preside on the rest of the Organizational Session.

[ELECTION OF VICE PRESIDENT]

President Arnold I. Palacios: At this time, I would like to take a few seconds to acknowledge and thank my colleague for the honor to chair the President of the Senate for the 20th Legislature. We will move on to the next agenda item, Election of Vice President and I recognize Senator Igisomar.

Senator Igisomar: Thank you very much, Mr. President, Senator Arnold Palacios congratulations for your nomination as our President. Mr. President, I am honored and privileged to nominate **Senator Steve K. Mesngon** from the First Senatorial District to serve as **Vice President** of the Senate of the Twentieth Northern Marianas Legislature.

President Palacios: There is a nomination on the floor made by Senator Igisomar nominating Senator Steve Mesngon from the First Senatorial District to be Vice President of the Senate. Motion has been seconded; do I hear any other nomination? Senator Hofschneider?

Senator Jude U. Hofschneider: Thank you Mr. President. Mr. President, I move to close the nomination. Thank you.

President Arnold I. Palacios: The motion is to close nomination for the Office of the Vice President of the Senate. Do I hear a second to that motion?

Several members seconded.

President Arnold I. Palacios: The motion has been seconded. Those in favor of the motion say “aye”.

Several members voiced “aye”.

President Arnold I. Palacios: Opposed say “nay”. [No “nays”] Motion carries.

President Arnold I. Palacios: We will now be voting for the Office of the Senate Vice President. Clerk, please call the roll.

CLERK called the roll:

Senator Francisco M. Borja	Yes
Senator Francisco Q. Cruz	Yes
Senator Jude U. Hofschneider	Hunggan (Yes)
Senator Sixto K. Igisomar	Awer(Yes)??
Senator Paul A. Manglona	Yes
Senator Steve K. Mesngon	Present
Senator Justo S. Quitugua	Yes
Senator Teresita A. Santos	Yes
Senator Arnold I. Palacios	Yes

CLERK: Mr. President, Eight (8) members voting yes and one (1) present.

President Arnold Palacios: Thank you Clerk. With eight (8) members voting yes on the nomination of Senator Mesngon to be the Vice President of the Senate. Motion is passed. Senator Mesngon is now the Senate Vice President. Congratulation Senator Mesngon.

President Arnold Palacios: Our next agenda item, is the election of the Floor Leader, Senator Hofschneider recognized.

Senator Hofschneider: Si Yu'us Maase' Mr. President. I am honored and privileged to nominate **Senator Francisco M. Borja** from the Second Senatorial District to serve as **Floor Leader** of the Senate of the Twentieth Northern Marianas Commonwealth Legislature. Thank you.

President Arnold Palacios: Nomination has been made for the Floor Leader of the Senate 20th Legislature Senator Borja. Are there any other nominations? Senator Cruz recognized.

Senator Cruz: Thank you Mr. President. Mr. President, I move to close nomination.

President Arnold Palacios: Motion is to close nomination. Ready for the question. Those in favor of the motion say, "aye".

Several members voiced "aye".

President Arnold Palacios: Opposed say "Nay". [No "nays"] Motion carries.

President Arnold Palacios: We will now be voting on the nomination of Senator Borja to be the Floor Leader of the 20th Legislature of the Senate. Clerk, please call the roll.

CLERK called the roll:

Senator Francisco Q. Cruz	Yes
Senator Jude U. Hofschneider	Hunggan (Yes)
Senator Sixto K. Igisomar	Awer(Yes)??
Senator Paul A. Manglona	Yes
Senator Steve K. Mesngon	Yes
Senator Justo S. Quitugua	Yes
Senator Teresita A. Santos	Yes
Senator Francisco M. Borja	Yes
Senator Arnold I. Palacios	Yes

CLERK: Mr. President, all nine (9) members voting yes.

President Arnold Palacios: With all nine (9) members voting yes on the nomination of Senator Borja, Senator Borja is hereby elected to serve as the Floor Leader of the Senate of the Twentieth Legislature. Congratulations Senator Borja.

President Arnold Palacios: Next agenda item, is the election for the Secretary of the Senate. Senator Igisomar?

Senator Igisomar: Mr. President. I am honored and privileged to nominate **Senator Justo S. Quitugua** for Secretary of the Twentieth Legislature.

President Arnold Palacios: Thank you. There is a motion on the floor nominating Senator Quitugua to serve as our Legislative Secretary of the Senate. Is there any other nomination? Senator Mesngon recognized.

Senator Mesngon: Thank you, Mr. President. I move to close nomination.

President Arnold Palacios: Motion is to close nomination. Motion been seconded. Ready for the question? Those in favor of the motion please say, “aye”.

Several members voiced “aye”.

President Arnold Palacios: Those opposed say “nay”, [No “nay”] motion carries. We will now be voting on the nomination for the Secretary of the Senate, Senator Justo Quitugua. Clerk, please call the roll.

CLERK called the roll:

Senator Francisco M. Borja	Yes
Senator Francisco Q. Cruz	Yes
Senator Jude U. Hofschneider	Hunggan (Yes)
Senator Sixto K. Igisomar	Hunggan (Yes)??
Senator Paul A. Manglona	Yes
Senator Steve K. Mesngon	Yes
Senator Teresita A. Santos	Yes
Senator Justo S. Quitugua	Present
Senator Arnold I. Palacios	Yes

CLERK: Mr. President, Eight (8) members voting yes and one (1) present.

President Arnold Palacios: With eight (8) members voting yes, one (1) present, Senator Justo Quitugua is hereby elected as the Senate Legislative Secretary of the Twentieth Legislature. Congratulations.

President Arnold Palacios: With the organizations and appointment of members to the leadership positions, at this point we are supposed to advise the Governor and the Lt. Governor that the 20th Senate is duly organized and ready to conduct business. We are fortunate that our two executive officers for the Commonwealth are present with us today. It is my great honor to advise you that the Senate of the 20th Northern Marianas Commonwealth Legislature is ready and willing to work with the Administration to do the work for our people, thank you.

President Arnold Palacios: The Chair would like to appoint Senator **Sixto K. Igisomar and Senator Jude U. Hofschneider** to inform and notify the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the members of the House of Representatives that the Senate of the Northern Marianas Legislature is duly organized and ready to conduct business. I would like to take a few minutes while our two members officially advise the House of Representatives. Short recess.

The Senate recessed at 12:15 a.m.

RECESS

The Senate reconvened at 12:25 p.m.

President Arnold Palacios: We are back to our Organizational Session. Senator Igisomar and Senator Hofschneider, please give your report to the full members of the Senate.

Senator Igisomar: Mr. President, may I?

President Arnold Palacios: Recognized.

Senator Igisomar: Thank you Mr. President. Mr. President, Senator Hofschneider and I officially notified the Speaker of the House and the Honorable Rafael S. Demapan that the Senate is duly organized and that we are prepared and ready to conduct business. Thank you, Mr. President.

President Arnold Palacios: Thank you. At this time, I would also like to officially advise the Mayor of the Northern Islands who is present here in the gallery; officially advise him that the Senate is duly organized and ready to conduct official business. Thank you. I extend that also to the members of the Municipal Council for the Third Senatorial District. We are on agenda item N. Floor Leader.

Floor Leader Borja: Thank you, Mr. President. I believe the next Order of Business is the Statements of our Members.

President Arnold Palacios: Thank you. There being no Communications. At this point, the Chair will give each member of the Senate a few minutes for a brief remark. With that, I recognize Senator Paul Manglona from the First Senatorial District, Senator Manglona please.

Senator Paul A. Manglona: Si Yu'us Maase' yan congratulations to you Mr. President and to our newly elected Senate officers. I want to also extend a warm "Hafa Adai" to our distinguish guests and of course our Governor and our Lt. Governor up there, Presiding Judge and our distinguish guests from off-island. I still see our Speaker of the Guam Legislature, Speaker BJ Cruz welcome, friends and families, my dear people of the Commonwealth, buenas yan Si Yu'us Maase' to all of you. Thank you for joining us today. Twenty-nine years ago, today, I was inaugurated for the first time in the 6th Commonwealth Senate. At the age of 58 years now, that means I have been in public service for exactly half of my life time. I just realized this fact as I was meditating during our inaugural mass last Saturday at Mount Carmel Church. That is why my statement today, I am going try to make it brief, simply a "Thank You" speech.

Bishop Ryan's main message during our Red Mass is about listening to our people. Bishop Ryan informed us of how he plans, as the new leader of the Catholic Church in the NMI, to go to the various parishes so that he can better understand his people and be close to his flock. Similarly, he suggested that being an effective legislator involves listening to our constituents, translating their concerns into practical proposals, and building consensus to accomplish them. I believe we all agree with our bishop that we can only do the job of effective representation by truly understanding our people we serve and encouraging their involvement in the betterment of our Commonwealth. That is why I want to thank our people in the Commonwealth and the people of Rota, in particular, for taking the time to share with me ideas and concerns, and for the willingness to discuss what really matters most to them. From Sinapalo to Songsong Village, from Saipan to Guam, Hawaii to the Mainland USA, I have met a lot of our people whose stories and challenges I will never forget. You shared with me concerns about families moving away from Rota because jobs are hard to find, off island college students having a tough time making ends meet, our sick unable to afford adequate health care, lack of funding for medical referral, our youth introduced to drugs and alcohol, the high cost of food commodities and the lack of basic infrastructure, and the hardships of our retirees.

I thank all of you for your feedback and I look forward to working with you to address your aspirations and the current challenges of our islands. I see all our media friends all over the building today. I want to thank them for all for the critical role they play in every aspect of government transparency, citizen participation and government accountability. I will continue to work with you, Si Yu'us Maase' for the work you do to keep our citizens informed.

My Committee Chairman, Mr. Rick Barcinas, and Vice Chairman Alfred Apatang, I see them in the gallery. I am very grateful for their support and the hard work of all other committee members who also generously contributed their time and efforts throughout my campaign journey, Si Yu'us Maase'.

To all my off-island friends and supporters from Guam to Hawaii, California, Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Nevada, Texas, Kansas, all the way to Florida, dangkulo na Si Yu'us Maase' and I thank you so much for your support and confidence. You have worked tirelessly to get my message across and that was what got us to the finish line this past November, Si Yu'us Maase'.

I know I will not be here without my family; I want to thank Uncle Ton, Auntie Ancha, Uncle Pedro Dela Cruz, Si Yu'us Ma'ase hu sen guiayaa hamyu. Para i mananahu siha, maneluhu yan i asaguan niha yan para todos ayu siha na familia ni ma sakrifisia siha nai en nali'e yu ni mampos guinaiyan miyo nu guahu taya apashu nu enao, un dangkulo na Si Yu'us Maase' ti baihu malefa nu enao. I would also like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to my very supportive wife, Lydia and our children for their patience and for being the pillars in my life.

Last, but not least, I thank the Almighty God for the blessings you have bestowed on my family and me over the years. Again, I ask for your continued blessing of help and guidance as I represent the people of the Commonwealth.

Mr. President and members, we have a lot of work to do ahead of us and I am looking forward to doing that work with each and every one of you. My colleagues, we might not always agree on everything, but we need to work together for the prosperous future of our Commonwealth and its people.

Un biahi talo, I want to thank the people of Rota from the bottom of my heart for honoring me with your vote last November. I am deeply moved by the expression of confidence. Every day I hold this office, I would give all that is within me to place our people first. Ti bai na fan tekon hamyo manataohu sen tatkilo este na onru i en na'e yo. Most of all, I will remember that while the honor is mine in representing our people, this Senate seat, as I have always said over the last 29 years, and as our people, loud and clear, said last November, belongs to the people we serve. Indeed, it is the people's seat. Si Yu'us Maase' taotao Marianas, taotao Luta, my colleagues, Dangkulo na Si Yu'us Maase', congratulation para hamyo todo.

President Arnold Palacios: Thank you Senator Manglona. The Chair now recognizes Senator Santos please.

Senator Santos: Thank you Mr. President. Also, in the same way, I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your ascension as Presiding Officer of the Senate. The same salutation is extended to the newly elected officers of the Senate of the 20th Legislature. I would like to recognize the presence of and I thought I saw them earlier, Honorable Governor and Lt. Governor, Presiding Judge Naraja, Justice Inos, Speaker BJ Cruz from Guahan Lehislatura for your presence here this morning. Mayor of Saipan, I thought I saw him earlier, Tinian and the Northern Islands. I also would like to recognize the presence of several former Councils, officials of Tinian, Saipan, and perhaps from Rota, cabinet members, NMC President, families from Rota, Tinian and Saipan, distinguish guests.

As we begin the year with tidings of economic growth, there's that uncertain intuition that require our pacing regional events that would impact directly what's left of investments here.

It brings into focus our fiscal posture, specifically, our ability to meet debts and obligations moving forward. In short, is the NMI financially poised to meet fiscal challenges over the next two years. What is the basis of this assertion? Have we looked into assessments done by reputable economic firms on our financial future and do we understand the implications if and when investments contract.

Herein lies the greatest challenge we face in this Legislature. As difficult as it is, each of us must focus on the concept of "wealth and jobs creation" to allay the "evacuation" of our people from the familiar shores of home to places in search of greener pasture. If you recall, more than three thousand left home nearly ten years ago! It was a forced relocation knowing the scarcity of opportunities right here at home.

As we begin the 20th CNMI Legislature, there are a number of key issues that I would like to continue to strongly advocate for, especially on critical issues concerning our healthcare system. We must ensure that quality care is available to all our people and that quality of care provided is high. We must also support and promote healthy living to prevent and control non-communicable disease that has taken a drastic toll on our people. A relentless focus on the quality of our healthcare system equates to positively transforming the lives of our people.

In both healthcare and educational systems, the NMI must resolutely work to implement the benefits of information technology. In medicine, it facilitates stronger healthcare delivery that includes full use of telemedicine, among others. In education, the concept of cyber classrooms isn't anything new that could advance the tools of learning including cutting costs in the way we deal with our educational infrastructure. These are areas that would benefit tremendously with the use of informational technology.

The NMI deals with issues of magnitude that would require thorough research from real experts in policy formulation. In this, it is vital that we foster establishment of a "research and development center" at Northern Marianas College. It should grant us in concert with heads of private industries,

to jointly address issues on a more thorough basis before their translation into policies. It is an issue we could no longer afford to overlook by any stretch of the imagination.

Our issues are hugely significant. It is therefore, imperative that we work together with sectors of our Northern Marianas community in an inclusive fashion to reap the benefit of collective wisdom in anything we embark in the formulation of beneficial and lasting policies. It can be done. Let us put our best foot forward addressing each issue with full conviction and commitment. And as (Philippians 4:13) says, “We can do all this through Christ who gives us strength”. I shall also continue to execute the mandate given to me by the people of the First Senatorial District and the Commonwealth.

Sen Dangkulo Na Si Yu’us Maase’, Thank you very much, Ghillisow and Malaging Salamat Po.

President Arnold Palacios: Thank you Senator Santos. The Chair now recognizes Senator Mesngon from the First Senatorial District, Senator.

Vice President Mesngon: Thank you, Mr. President. With this, I would like to convey this message to the Press, I know the Variety and Tribune are here and please, if I am done with my speech and you need more information we can talk after because I am speaking in vernacular. We have a lot of our Man Amko here, please bare with me, and with that I will conduct this in Chamorro. Thank you.

Talo ha, buenas dias para todos, congratulation Mr. President yan lokue todo i miembros. Hulehe tiatmanman ha i Gobetno yan i Segundo Gobetno yan lokue i Presiding Judge Naraja, Si Yuus Maase’ ni finaton niha. Hamyu guenao gi kuminidat hamyo lokkue i pago man ma ilelehe yan eyu pago man ma ilelehi tate pago na officiat congratulation. Para i man amkota Si Yuus Maase nai manmato hamyo guenne. Gi hilo este parehu na sentiment yahu nai baihu fan nahe agredisimento talo espesiat menti i Islan Luta, taotao Luta na gaigaige ha i konfiansa yan sigi ha mona para ta chonek hafa mas adelanto para i taotaota enteramente taotao Marianas. Gi hilo enao, hu gagagao lokkue i pinasensian miyu yan lokkue i supottasion miyu na ta kuntuha este mona chumonek buente ha todo tomuggu guaha mulehi buente mona ekonomiaata, gumegefena, puede ha hu kuntuha ya hu bira gue tate gi mafananahan malak yan suabe na nilala para i kuminidatta. Buente hun li’e hafa man ma susedi gi ti atmanman ha na guaha i lehislatura ma nahe apruebasion para hufan tinaka lokkue kada isla i taotaota muchomas i man ritirao gi halom enao bai hu kuntuha lokkue I miembros parahuha ginen i Eksakatibu na ofisina yan papa gi Kongreso na guma bai hu sapota hafa na akto hafa siha mas man impottante na klasi asunton ni man kredikat para hu afekta i taotaota mochomas i estudianteta para eskuela, i man amkota ni ta para primero humatan kada dia yan lokkue man ritirao yan espesiatmente i entero i kuminidat ta. Gaige enao na atikulo na baihu chonek yan para baihu kontinua munahe atension yan talo ha para hayu siha na taotaota ni man gaigge gi san lago ni humehekuguk este hunanahe siha lokkue Si Yu’us Maase’ ni hafa siha ni impotante na idea ni sina man ma nahe yu hafa sina mona para ta chonek pot para hu kalamtin i

kuminiata, para hu kalamtin i industriata, para hu kalamtin i kuminidiat ta ya huguaha fresko hu guaha solelem na hinagong para eyu siha na taotaota i man chatchatsaga yan lokkue eyu siha na taotaota i man malangu yahuguaha kondision hufan inefekta yangin guaha kinalamtin kuminiatta mochomas bula pago gi kuminidatta bula Marianas bula gi islata nai seso man malango mochomas lokkue gi lugat islan Luta yan Tinian. Ta lelehe na kumahuhulo i man malanguta ya yahu nai baihu faisen este siha i membros gi halom i Senate na pot fabot mala ta tafan asostieni ya esta mona i dos na colleague i finenena na distritu Luta na ta sapota este siha bandan medical referral mampos kredikat enao na situation i bandan i minalango yan todo ha buente tumungo na guaha enao na ta susesedi maseha mano na kuatkiet na lugata ya gi hilo enao maila ya tana primeruo enao. Lokkue ta atan i studianteta na sigi man ma eduka ya ta nisisita i eskuela lokkue mas fundo apropiacion yan atension ya yahu baihu congratulate i membrotu ginen Luta yan Tinian yan Saipan ni manma ilihi gi Board of Education ya tana primera ilegna i studianteta finenena pues gilo enao gaige hu guienao ya bai hu falisita enao gi halom enao maila yata fan hagotte ni membros pot kredikat na asunto para i manmalaguta, i litiraota, i studianteta yan i man amkota enteramente yan tododo guienao huyong na kuminidata ni para hu pinatcha maila ya tafan manaitai ni Saina hu kontinua munaihe esta na kuminiata hu konsigi ha mona mulamlam ya hu gatbo mona i Marianas hu gatbo mona i islata ya hu fan pinacha i taotaota huyong.

Talo ha Si Yu'uu Maaase' para i businesses guienao huyong ni man mananahe contribution ni man man apapase gi katkuiet manera na para guaha kuminiata. Talo gi hilo enao baihu fan gagao dangkulu na Si Yu'uus Maase' para i taotao Luta lokkue enteramente Marianas espisiatmente i asaguaho ni gaige gi tatekho, as Judy Si Yu'uus Maase' lokkue ni todo tiempo gaige na tumotogi gi tatekho gi fihonho yangin hafa kridikat manma susesede para hu inafekta i taotaota gaige na ha sapopota yo guienao na enanaho. Talo ha giho este, Mr. President baihu huchom gi taiguiene talo Si Yu'us Maaase' taotao Mariana, Si Yu'uus Maaase' taotao kuminidata espisiatmente para i man magasta ni man ma ilihe pago na ha'ani, maila ya tafan hagote, maila yata chogue primeru hafa i mauleg na idea ta nahe para i taotaota. Talo ha dangkulu na Si Yu'us Maase' ya Si Yu'us Maase' para i taotao mame Luta ya i pinasiensa hu gagagao yan supottasion. Talo ha buenas dias para todos hamyo ya maila ya ta chonek mona ya ta tituhon bumaba talo kabiyun para i minaulek i kuminidat ta.

Si Yu'us Maase', Mr. President.

President Arnold Palacios: Thank you Senator Mesngon for those remarks. I now call upon Senator Cruz to give his brief remarks.

Senator Cruz: Thank you Mr. President. Mr. President, I share the same sentiment in congratulating you and the Senate officers that are elected today, congratulations.

Good afternoon dignitaries, colleagues and members of the general public in attendance and people of the Commonwealth, ladies and gentlemen.

As we embark on the 20th CNMI Legislature, I am committed with strong conviction in working collaboratively with both colleagues in the Senate and the House of Representatives in enabling legislations that would improve the fundamental principles and functions of all branches of government. It is also paramount that within this foundation, it will enable to better the lives of the people in our community, improve public services that we ought to provide, most importantly, better the state of the Commonwealth. Let us be cognizant and mindful as we witness a gradual economic growth with several appropriation legislations in the 19th Legislature for payouts in the millions with our economic developments. Let us also put more emphasis on the government obligations with the Settlement Trust Fund, prolonging its life expectancy by serving all retirees and beneficiaries of the future financial security. Make no mistake, these obligations are mandated to meet annual pension to all recipients in the Settlement Trust Fund until it is fully satisfied. I am also adamant with the Administration thriving proven solutions approach within the Commonwealth. I am confident that if we all create a dialogue of mutual understanding, embracing a forward thinking problem solution approach, we will all achieve our common goals of the Commonwealth. In all, I extend my open arms to the people of the Commonwealth, the people in our community that we serve their open-minded suggestions, advice, recommendation, patience and comments, and values to better improve the lives of the Commonwealth.

I am your servant and I thank my family, my wife, my constituents of the Second Senatorial District of the Island of Tinian, I shall remain. Thank you, Si Yu'us Maase', Ghillisow, Salamat Po. Thank you, Mr. President.

President Arnold Palacios: Thank you Senator Cruz. Senator Hofschneider?

Senator Hofschneider: Good Afternoon everyone. Mr. President, I surely extend my congratulations as well for being elected our leader of the 20th Senate and I look forward to working with you and the rest of the officers. Same recognition goes out to Speaker Demapan and the rest of the officers of the 20th CNMI House of Representatives as we embark into our duties and our responsibilities as we steer CNMI forward. I also like to recognize the dignitaries, distinguish guests in the gallery, some of them have actually returned back to their offices, but nevertheless we appreciate that you are being here today to witness this monumental occasion.

I would like to recognize my fellow leaders from Tinian, Mayor JP San Nicolas, Councilman Philip Long, thank you for joining us this afternoon. I also like to recognize my daughter, Alexis, my brother and my sister-in-law, Louise, thank you for joining me today. And to my beloved people of Tinian, I remain and committed to serving you to the best of my ability and I couldn't thank you enough for the opportunities over the years.

I also want to point out Mr. President and, I will be remiss if I don't recognize and thank the current Floor Leader and the former President, Francisco Borja, and also the Lt. Governor who served in the 19th Legislature as President. I want to thank them for the opportunity to have worked with them.

I would like to begin and recognize the accomplishments over the last 24 months as we witnessed a progressive action by the entire policy-makers as well as the Executive Branch with the objectives of stabilizing the CNMI economy as we all noted over the last few months we have seen that by way of actions by the Legislature appropriating a supplemental budget to address and retire the government some of the obligations.

Mr. President, we have a lot of work ahead of us. But, at the same token, I would like to request that or respectfully request that we should also be mindful that we need to be sustainable in order for us to reach the full potential of the CNMI. While we are experiencing an overall economic upswing, we have our challenges in the Second Senatorial District. I know you have seen them out in the media and during meetings. I want to say this point blank that since the time that I became a member of the Legislature, I was one of the members of the delegation that have actually expressed support of the military in their plans to develop or to partner up with the CNMI in developing their installation on several islands or couple of islands. Just recently, if you guys noticed the Dept. of Defense had chosen or made the direct decision to choose Tinian to be the Divert Air Field. I do know that that's a big step because the Department of Air Force has always advocated that they want it in Saipan, but with continued insistence DOD agreed to have the divert development on the Island of Tinian. But this is only the beginning. We need to make sure that other components associated with the development must be maximized for the best interest of the community of Tinian and the CNMI.

Before I close, I want to thank God for all the blessings and the continued guidance on the challenges that I faced both personally and professionally. I want to thank a special person [despensa yo] that I would rather that she'd be here physically today, but I know in spirit that she is with me. I am talking about my beloved "Zenaida" Castro Javier. Thank you for the memories, thank you for the guidance that made me a better person I am today. You will forever be my always.

Thank you President Palacios and members.

President Arnold Palacios: Thank you Senator Hofschneider. The Chair now recognizes Senator Borja from Tinian, Senator?

Senator Borja: Si Yu'us Maase' Mr. President congratulation ni'e yomu election as Senate President gi para 20th Legislature yan todo i miembros ni man ma'ilihe pago para ofisiales i Senate. Finenena para baihu extende dangkulo na apresision para i taotao Tinian para i oputinidat ni hu setbi siha gi 18 yan 19 Legislature yan lakkue para i yoku colleagues ni oputinidat anai hu setbi hamyo kumo Presidente guine gi un anu na tiempo gi 19 Senate, yan i cooperasion miyu nai mas libiano yu anai Presidente. Thank you nu enao siha na oputinidat, hu de sisiya na ta kontinua humekstende parahi siha koperasion yan i sinente para i nuebo na Presidenteta. Para todo talo taotao Tinian dangkulo na Si Yu'us Ma'ase ni manahe yu talo ni oputinidat para baihu kontinua subetbe siha yan i taotao Marianas kuarto anos na tiempo. Talo dangkulo na Si Yu'us Maase' nu enao na onru.

Mr. President, este na gurupo i 20th Senate guiya ha i 19th ya siguru yo na pareho ha na ko'operasion na adilanto para ta chogue mona man akomprende et man afamauleg et, ya parehu entensionta para ta setbi i taotaota kabales kosaki sina hu mauleg i nilala edukasion, hinemlo gi katkuet manera ni i nilala katkuet taotao Marianas ya siguru yo este talo na team para huma kuintinua enao na sitbesio para huma adelanta ekuminiata CNMI. Gumaige yo guine gi Senate pot rason para, osino, para man ayuda humadelanta ekuminiata i CNMI patiklatmente Tinian ya humanok na esta guaha siha bula na adelanto bandan ekunemia lao Tinian, dangkulo siha, while dangkulo siha na Adelanto, still mamadedesi. Mr. President yan membros ya [despensa sa kalan sinago et] ya eyugue na baihu faisen i membro na pot fabot hu nisisita i ayudun miyo, espesiatmente i Permitting Agency. Masaspet Tinian pago guaha siha developers man enteresao lao bula lokaue obstacles ma susufa mona. Ti eleklek ku na i Permitting Agency na diroga siha i lai or areklo, lao ko sina matrata deferensao este i dos na isla sa i developmento trabiha ti parerehu yan Saipan eyugue na ilekko na kao sina manahe otro na tratamiento gi bandan Permitting kosa ki sina lokaue ha adelanta siha ya hu sainao gumosa ya hu sanao lokaue man ayuda gi Commonwealth. Guinao regulasion anai hu hahatan kulan ha chachandan siha pate gi developmental guine gi dos isla taimanao ha ileleko obligasion niha para hu ma protehe i hinemblo, i kotura yan hafa siha na Environmental Impact. Lao guaha Mr. President yan Membros, chalan anai sina este siha ti ilekku para completely ma exempt esta siha na regulasion lao huma trata diferensiao kumo lugat ni hakeke chagi para hu adulanta gue lao nisisario special ma trata diferensiao esta yangin humalom este siha aplikasion niha. Ni hafa ta chogue yangin hita gi Legislature sigi ha man ma gonni halom ya i mismo i Permitting Agency sigi ha lokaue ha chanda opotinat kululona i dos na dikiki na isla.

Mr. President, seiso man ma akusa man sususo gi kalagat Saipan lao taimanao hit man para man'nuso man para et man gunoso yangin ti man manahe et chansa ni ti para tafan ma poksai mauleg. Pues eyo ha hufafasen i Permitting Agency kao sina hu fan matachong yan i developers Tinian taimanu ha sina man ma ayuda, taimanu i Delegation, taimanu i Legislature yangin nisisario ta amenda akto para hu tinilaika regulasion para hu lalabiano, pot fabot rekomenda enao gi ofisiales ya bai en chogue enao para ta adelanta este i dos na Isla ta na setbi eyo na palabras i "One Commonwealth" ya pot fabot ta tungu ha na yangin guaha malanguta sigi mana ke homlo yangin ta chagi este uno na amot ya ti finamauleg, ta chagi otro pareho ha yan este regulation yangin ta chagi este ya chinachanda ta tulaika otro, tana ke humlat munga na para ta sen puno ha sa siempre i taotao siempre mamadese. Pues enao ha hufafasen i membro talo na tafan ahayuda ni este ya ti nisisario na kada ta atan i regulation ta amenda eyu i statute para ta supersede i regulation lao yangin ti sina siempre man akupenden et. Ti sina manahe special treatment siempre kululona i Tinian. Siempre enao bidanai i Tinian Delegation, i Leaders Tinian will start making proposal para hu ma change i Statute para hu ma amend or sino eyu siha i regulation. Taimanao ha ileklekku ti nisisario este kumo sina ha man ahayuda et kumo sina mana lala este i dos na isla. Siempre ha man ali'e et talo para ta diskute este mas lao ti baihu gof anokku guiene hulu ya ante de baihu dingo bai hu extende apresiasion para i asaguaho, i famaguon mame, familial mame, yan todo i man amigo, i supporters ni talo manahe yo ni konfiansa yan hinagokko para baihu kuintinua subetbi siha talo para kuarto anos na tiempo. Atman ni manetbi yo, trabiha taya nahu nahan tekkun taotao Tinian ya ti baihu sedi lokaue na baihu lachi na para baihu disonra i konfiansa yan i taotao Tinian.

Sen mas Si Yu'us Maase' yan congratulations para todo i members, para todo i bisita, dignitaries ni man gaige guiene Si Yu'us Maase' lokaue yan Buenas Tades yan Good Afternoon. Mayor thank

you ni finatomo, Councilman Philip guaha siha hule siha otro na Councilman lao gaige gi bisino. Si Yu'us Maase' ni finaton miyo ni hun atende este para un witness este i Senate Inaugural yan Organizational Session sen mas Si Yu'us Maase'.

President Arnold Palacios: Thank you Senator Borja. Senator Igisomar.

Senator Igisomar: Thank you Mr. President. Of course, first I want to thank everybody, Judges, Speaker from Guam, Mayors, Councils todo i familia yan i taotao ni man gaige guini. To all of you and everybody giving their time to watch this event on live television, thank you very much for giving us this opportunity.

Mr. President, I will go forward, I'd like to first of all, give thanks to the Holy Spirit our Lord Jesus Christ the Father God Almighty for guidance and giving me the strength to make changes to things I can, the serenity to accept the things I cannot and the wisdom to know the difference and also for all the blessings and grace for all the people of the CNMI. Thank you Lord.

I would like to thank my wife, Catherine Sablan Tenorio, she is behind me. She is a necessary and much needed chamber and pillar of my heart, my mind and my soul. She gives me guidance and she keeps me strong. To my wife, Catherine, thank you very much for everything. I say that because with the last two years, it was not that easy. The commitment I have to make to the public and her to behold with all the political involvements and demands by the people, and hoping that she continue to remain strong and keeps me strong. To my two boys, Kenneth John and Kenneth Dominic, thank you for being there and taking care of everything around the house for mom. And also to my mother, Consolacion Kaipat Igisomar, who is able to join us, I know that she did not fly-in for this, as she is here for the loss of our Auntie, but my mom is here, all works out well, Consolacion. My mother-in-law, Isabel Sablan Tenorio un dangkulo na Si Yu'us Maase' lokkue para hago. All the families from both sides and all the extended families thank you for your guidance and your support. And so just you should know, I really do accept and appreciate for the people, most especially my family members to tell me what I need to hear some times we are so caught up in trying to make a difference. To the people of the Commonwealth, most especially for the Island of Saipan and Northern Island voters, along with my campaign Chairman, Peter Camacho and all the officers and advisers for my campaign, thank you very much. We were all really working hard just to get one vote to get in, but with your support and with the trust and guidance from the people, we were able to secure and guaranteed that we make it in so that I can represent the people one more time.

[in Carolinian language as translated]

“Ladies and Gentlemen, one big THANK YOU to you for all the help and one big THANK YOU to the Lord for his guidance”

Mr. President, I really don't have a written speech aside as my appreciation, I'd like to read out to my Mission Statement from my booklet for those people that do not have a copy of the booklet because I

believe that we have a lot of issues. I think the bottom line is focus, it's really about focus. We are all here to do good, but I don't think that we are here to just do good, we should do better and also without repeating and saying anything on this next item we are all here by the people, for the people.

I know and we all know that for that goes without saying. I know I got elected in for four years, but I don't see it that way. Mr. President, I see we only have one year because next year is election so we need to do a lot of lifting in the first year and do to as much as possible sway away from just ideology because the work that we need to do must be pragmatically surgical, it must be pragmatically surgical no nonsense and nuisances.

My Mission Statement:

I will continue to support common sense driven solutions to realign government policies and regulations, to improve and strengthen our dilapidated public infrastructures, to fulfill our obligations to the retirees, to satisfy government judgments and stipulated orders, and to advanced and improve our healthcare system and children's education.

I am for economic expansion and for the betterment of our CNMI, but we must first strive to become efficient and self-sufficient. Efficiency yields greater productivity; however, it may come at a cost to the CNMI residents, our environmental and natural resources. Therefore, in order to continue to provide for the betterment of the CNMI, and for improved health, wealth, and education of the people of the CNMI, we must adhere to sustainable economic planning and development to protect our past year's and future year's growth.

We must focus on those. To say sustainable development is not just sustainable development based on my past experience, I believe everybody believed sustainable development is all we have a development, let's make it sustainable "period". Sustainable development is not just an impact on such a development, but it must include the voice of our children how is that to affect our children?

What kind of avenue do we allow our children to speak up as minorities in the population? At the same time, to the women, where are the women? How are they impacted while there are social economic impacts is not just whether I have another supplies and materials to build a building, if there's enough then we build it. It goes a lot more than that and in my campaign, Mr. President, I know that people find it funny, but I was brought up with my father giving me the chore that my job is to make sure that there's an outhouse available and my job is to make sure that when it is full, I must look for another ground and my job is to make sure that there's space for next outhouse. With that common sense and after visiting and working with you, Mr. President, our solid waste that must be right now the highest priority we must take care of. If a man cannot take care of his waste, I think you would either implode or explode. So therefore, we have a lot of challenges, I believe we all know that we are all here to do good, but we must take care because without taking care of that, it doesn't matter if you are diabetic and I give you diabetic medicine, or dialysis I give you all the equipment's, but you will explode if that solid waste is not taken care of.

Thank you very much, Mr. President.

President Arnold Palacios: Thank you Senator Igisomar. Senator Quitugua recognized.

Senator Quitugua: Si Yu'us Maase' Mr. President. Greetings to our distinguish guests including officials from our government, the CNMI, and abroad. Members of the public, families and friends who are present here today and those watching us live on Channel 23.

Buenas Dias yan Hafa Adai,

First, I would like to thank my wife, Jackie and my children for their continuous support and understanding in my continuous interest in public service through the Senate, and also community members here in Saipan and the CNMI, including those abroad.

Congratulation to Senator Paul Manglona, Senator Francisco Borja and Senator Sixto Igisomar for your efforts and your return to the 20th Legislature; and congratulation to you Mr. President and the other newly elected officers of the 20th Senate; and to all the member of the 20th Legislature.

In the 20th Legislature, I will continue to truly and faithfully represent the interest of our people in the Commonwealth through collaborative working relationships with the elected members of the Legislature, the Administration, the Judiciary and the wider community, our government and non-governmental agencies, the businesses, school system, and families. With relentless focus, hard work and commitment to all, I believe we can accomplish more and rise above the many challenges with solutions that empower individuals to be resilient and recognize the many competencies of ALL. It is my desire and intent, that I protect the interest of all including retirement, education, quality of life, the economy, resources and infrastructure of the CNMI.

Thank you Mr. President.

President Arnold Palacios: Thank you Senator Quitugua. I guess that leaves me.

Good Morning, obviously we have gone beyond morning and now Good Afternoon.

So Good Afternoon, Hafa Adai, Tirow.

Let me begin by thanking the Governor, Lt. Governor, Father James, Presiding Judge Naraja and I believe there were a member of the Federal Court whose present earlier and our friend from Guam,

the Honorable Benjamin J. Cruz, Speaker of Guam who has patiently been sitting there including us to witness this Inaugural Session, thank you. Member of the respective Municipal Councils, Mayor San Nicolas and I saw Mayor Apatang and Mayor Aldan, distinguish members of the Judiciary and guests, families, friends of the greater Commonwealth, Si Yu'us Maase', Ghillisou and thank you for joining us today for the Organizational Session of the Senate of the 20th Northern Marianas Commonwealth Legislature.

I want to thank my wife, Wella and members of my family, Auntie Bacha for joining us in the Chamber this morning and the rest of my families and relatives. Thank you.

My fellow colleagues, I am honored for your vote of confidence and the privilege to serve as the President of this 20th Northern Marianas Commonwealth Legislature. We have a great deal of work to do in this Legislature.

The Commonwealth has embarked on a bold undertaking to transform the Commonwealth into a major casino operator in the region with Saipan as its centerpiece attraction. We are in the beginning stages of that endeavor. Already, Garapan is being transformed into something we have not seen before. As I watched the cranes moving back and forth at the Grand Mariana project and the steel columns rise, I am awed. But as I look beyond the cranes to the surrounding streets, I am also alarmed and concerned.

There is no doubt that approving casino gaming on Saipan has brought much needed revenue to pay for the CNMI's burgeoning obligations, as well as spurred much needed economic activities in the private sector, large and small. Economic activities we have not seen in over two decades. In a span of two year, the government has been able to extend the lifespan of the pension plan, dedicate a good portion of its budget resources to fully paying retirees plus a bonus, pay down our long overdue accounts to CUC, and very modestly increase the salaries of our rank and file civil service employees, pay our judgment creditors most of whom are land compensation claimants, as well as providing the resources to our government agencies to improve the delivery of much needed public services, especially in the education and healthcare systems for our communities, but with those benefits have come the costs. Gridlock traffic along Garapan is now common place teeming with both tourists and construction workers. Issues concerning compliance with OSHA and Environmental regulations have arisen. The community and businesses have had to adjust to a different tourist market of mostly Chines and Korean visitors, instead of tourists from Japan. Small businesses have closed unable to obtain permits for CW workers as competition for the limited slots has intensified.

Beyond Saipan, there is virtually no trickle-down benefit to Rota and Tinian of this casino development other than the \$2 million direct assistance guaranteed under the casino law. As mentioned earlier, Dynasty has shuttered its operations, the fledgling casino business on Rota has not taken off as envisioned when the Rota voters legalized casino gaming in a popular initiative. These are tough times for the people of Rota and Tinian. If we are not careful, tough times may be ahead again for the people of Saipan and entire Commonwealth.

With that, my fellow Senators, we acknowledged we have work cut for us. I believe that I speak for all of us when I say that we all want what is best for our community and for our children. That was what motivated those who were here in the 18th Legislature to allow casino gaming on Saipan. The challenge now is to ensure that the development of this industry works in the best interest of all, we must learn from experience. Not too long ago, Saipan's garment factories exported the most polo shirts than any other country in the world, with revenues at an all-time high. Today, you will find not a single garment factory and not one polo shirt exported from Saipan. Circumstances beyond our control, the lifting of the quotas under the World Trade Organization regime, caused the exits of these factories to other countries for lesser cost. If you recall those days there was so much resistance to the raising of the minimum wage because of the impact of the factories in Saipan.

Today, the conversation has shifted to increasing the CNMI minimum wage to the federal level and about managing our development in a sustainable manner. Certainly, I am encourage by the shift in the discourse on public policy, that, really for the first time in a long time acknowledges our fragile environment and the importance of protecting it for the future and future generations. That we must enact laws and policies that protect our island environment through an innovative, forward thinking approach that not only meets the demands of the present but does so without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. Simply, it is not ok to sacrifice the future for the present.

Our limited land resources demand smart governance with strategic and achievable goals. To govern smartly, we must require our agencies and ourselves in this body to develop near and long-term plans based on realistic development goals especially when we are dealing with our infrastructure such as solid waste, roadways, electrical and water, tourism, agriculture and airport and so forth. We cannot continue to run our system of government in an ad hoc fashion responding to "emergencies" often of our own making and due to our failures to anticipate the probable outcomes of our decisions.

For the sake of our environment, we must encourage the responsible use of the resources. We use a lot of resources on a daily basis. I suggest that there should be tax and other incentives in place that reward individuals and businesses to develop and adhere to sustainability guidelines to reduce, reuse and or recycle so that what we consume is under control. Simply, colleagues the sky is no longer the limit. We must vigorously enforce our environment protection laws. As a slap on the wrist for violations of law that gravely affect the environment and put the public's health and safety at risk should not be tolerated. Our laws should be amended to impose stiffer sanctions against those who damage the environment. It should be clear to all my passion and commitment to the protection of the environment and I am alarmed and how fast changes are occurring. Our lagoon is changing fast and so is our land environment – we know it because our ocean is telling us that it is. We must heed to what we are observing and do everything we can to prevent undue and irreparable harm to our surroundings.

As a final note, we remind ourselves that as Senators, we are also stewards of our lands and our oceans. The constitutional history on both public and private lands is quite clear the responsibility that we have as Senators over land – the only significant asset of the people of the Commonwealth.

Land has often been referred to as the “cultural anchor” of the Chamorro and Carolinian people which is passed on from one generation to the next. Our parents and grandparents and all who have come before us, bequeath to us a beautiful and wonderful place to live and raise our children. Let us take good care of it so that future generations will also one day thank each one of us here today for a beautiful Mariana Islands.

I am hopeful and I am confident in our individual and collective ability to work cooperatively not only amongst ourselves, the members of the Senate, but also down the hall with the members of the house and across the way with the executive branch and our Judicial branch to make our islands a place we can be proud of.

Finally, I thank each and every one of you, once again, for taking the time to join us here today. Thank you, Si Yu’us Maase’, Ghillisow and May God bless the Commonwealth and God Bless America. Thank you.

[ANNOUNCEMENTS]

President Arnold Palacios: With that we are in agenda item P; Announcements. Are there any announcements? Any of the members, parties, happy hours? The Chair would like to announce that committee assignments for Standing Committees of the Senate will be made in the next few days. Floor Leader Borja.

The Chair will now and certainly the People will now entertain the motion to adjourn this Organizational Session.

Floor Leader Borja: Thank you, Mr. President. I move to adjourn our Inaugural Organizational Session subject to your call.

Senator Santos seconded.


President Arnold Palacios: Motion has been made to adjourn this Inaugural Organizational Session subject to the call. Those in favor of the motion, please say “Aye”.

Several members voiced “Aye”


President Arnold Palacios: Opposed say “Nay”. [No “nays”] Motion carries. Our Inaugural Session is hereby adjourned.

President Arnold Palacios recognizes Mistress of Ceremony for Benediction.

Respectfully Submitted by:



Dolores S. Bermudes
Senate Clerk



Date