

July 23, 2025

Rear Admiral Joshua Lasky
Commander
Joint Task Force Micronesia
Nimitz Hill Annex, Guam

Dear Admiral Lasky,

I write to bring to your attention what I believe may be a misalignment in the Department of Defense's stated priorities in the region, particularly as it relates to advancing the economic opportunities that should accompany ongoing military investments in the Marianas.

First, I want to thank you and the team at Joint Task Force Micronesia for your clear recognition that economic stability is an essential pillar of national security in the Indo-Pacific. I know that your experience in the region has provided you with a deep understanding that development in the resource-constrained islands of the Pacific requires proactive and flexible policy at both the federal and local levels. Despite the challenges, our shared defense goals rely on the social and political stability that comes from expanding opportunity and strengthening communities.

In that spirit, I appreciated the remarks made recently by the Pacific Air Forces to the CNMI community affirming their commitment to working closely with the local private sector to align security objectives with economic development. However, I am concerned by what appears to be a breakdown in coordination across the Department with respect to the actual implementation of this vision.

During her presentation to the Saipan Chamber of Commerce on April 23, 2025, PACAF Deputy Commander Lieutenant General Laura Lenderman expressed strong support for the establishment of a full-time APEX Accelerator in the CNMI.¹ This program would help local businesses build capacity and readiness to compete for federal contracting opportunities. Her remarks reflected a clear understanding that defense investments should support meaningful local economic participation.

¹ https://www.mvariety.com/news/local/us-air-force-engages-nmi-in-economic-forum/article_5fd87039-7ec9-40b5-b52a-168066183202.html

Yet earlier this year, I was troubled to learn that the Department of the Army denied Northern Marianas College's application to host an APEX Accelerator, citing "funding constraints."² In follow-up correspondence with my office, the Department clarified that the application was not deficient, did not exceed federal funding limits, and was not rejected due to any threshold criteria. Rather, I was told the expansion was deemed too costly and not in the best interest of the program.

This response raises concerns. It suggests that, despite public statements about supporting the local economy, the CNMI remains excluded from programs specifically designed to ensure that defense investments benefit the communities most directly impacted. The APEX Accelerator is the Department's primary tool for empowering local businesses to access federal procurement opportunities. Denying its presence in the CNMI is counterproductive and undermines the very outcomes the Department claims to support.

This is especially disappointing given the expectations of the CNMI government and the broader community that Department of Defense activities would help offset the sharp and sustained declines in tourism and air service that have devastated the local economy. As the Commonwealth continues to endure these economic shocks, the denial of a program intended to foster opportunity calls into question the seriousness of the Department's commitment to integrated, whole-of-government engagement in the region.

Recent procurement decisions compound these concerns. Reports that water is being imported from off-island to support training activities on Tinian, and that a \$238,000 catering contract was awarded to a non-local vendor during exercises in the CNMI,³ suggest missed opportunities for local engagement. While the CNMI does not have a large manufacturing base or research and development infrastructure, basic goods and services, such as those referenced, are readily available on-island.

The people of the CNMI deserve to be full partners in advancing our nation's Indo-Pacific strategy, an effort that must include equitable access to the economic opportunities federal programs like the APEX Accelerator are specifically designed to support.

I share this information with the hope that it will inform internal coordination and help ensure the Department's policies and spending practices reflect its stated commitments. I am also preparing legislation that would require the federal procurement process to consider economic impact and needs of the businesses in the Northern Mariana Islands. I would welcome the opportunity to share the draft with you and work together to ensure that, when the Department spends time and resources in the Marianas, it spends more than ammunition.

² Department of the Army. (January 23, 2025) APEX Accelerator Application for Fiscal Year 2025. Letter to

Northern Marianas College from Monica Wideman, Grants & Contracting Officer, CCAP-MDA.

³ Mark Rabago. (July 22, 2025). *Texas company won \$238K contract to feed US troops in CNMI*. Marianas Press. Available at <https://sites.google.com/marianaspres.com/marianaspres/news/texas-company-won-238k-contract-to-feed-us-troops-in-cnmi?authuser=0>

Thank you for your attention to this issue. I look forward to continuing to work with you and your team in support of a stronger, more resilient Marianas.

Sincerely,



Kimberly King-Hinds
Member of Congress