

SENATE RESOLUTION NO. 763

WHEREAS, Shortly after World War II, the United States assumed administration of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands under a United Nations strategic trusteeship, which provided for United States control over development of the islands' economies and international relations, as well as military access to territory within the islands; and

WHEREAS, The treatment of the Pacific Islands as a strategic trust territory allowed the United States Atomic Energy Commission to establish the Pacific Proving Grounds in the Marshall Islands, where 67 atmospheric nuclear weapons were tested on a number of inhabited islands, some of which had not been evacuated, between 1946 and 1958; several island residents and their descendants who were in the vicinity of the test proving grounds continue to exhibit medical conditions that may have resulted from exposure to nuclear fallout, which is still measurable on some islands; and

WHEREAS, The area formerly known as the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands consists of three groups of islands, the Republic of Palau, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and the Federated States of Micronesia, which are today referred to as the Compact of Free Association islands; notwithstanding their status as independent, sovereign nations, the COFA islands are heavily dependent on United States government grants and are subjected to United States military presence under the COFA treaty; and

WHEREAS, Because of the unique relationship between the three COFA nations and the United States, the COFA treaties allow island citizens to enter the United States without visas to study, live, and work, and to have access to available services such as health care; since the implementation of the treaties, citizens of the COFA islands have moved to the United States for education and work opportunities because stagnant island economies have made it difficult for residents to find jobs or obtain quality education in their home countries; moreover, COFA island citizens volunteer to serve in the United States armed forces at a higher rate per capita than United States citizens; and

WHEREAS, Approximately 3,500 COFA citizens reside in Texas and directly contribute to the state through volunteering and service in various workplace settings, including industrial, managerial, and educational fields; in addition, numerous COFA islanders serving in the United States military are stationed at Texas military bases, including Fort Hood, Fort Bliss, Fort Sam Houston, Lackland Air Force Base, Sheppard Air Force Base, Randolph Air Force Base, and Goodfellow Air Force Base; and

WHEREAS, In recent years, Congress and some state governments have reduced benefits, including access to medical coverage, for which COFA islanders residing in the United States have historically been eligible; and

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WHEREAS, COFA islanders and their children who reside in the United States should be fairly treated in recognition of the long-standing connection between the United States and the COFA islands and the continued need of the United States to maintain a strong military and economic presence in the island nations; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That the Senate of the State of Texas, 86th Legislature, hereby express support for the rights of Compact of Free Association islanders residing in Texas and extend to them sincere appreciation for their extraordinary commitment to the service and defense of our nation.

Johnson

President of the Senate

I hereby certify that the above Resolution was adopted by the Senate on May 19, 2019.

Secretary of the Senate

Member, Texas Senate