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## PRESS RELEASE

### *CPA Engages with U.S. Department of Defense Officials to Advance Economic Growth and Port Infrastructure Development on Saipan, Tinian, and Rota*

The Commonwealth Ports Authority (CPA) recently engaged in productive discussions with key officials from the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) to advocate for the economic growth and development of the ports on Saipan, Tinian, and Rota.

The meeting, held with Brendan Owens, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Energy, Installations, and Environment; Dr. Kay Sullivan, Director of the Readiness and Force Employment Division at the Office of the Secretary of Defense - Cost Assessment and Program Evaluation; and Ron Tickle, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Real Property, focused on potential collaborative efforts to keep the CNMI's ports operating at full capacity and to advance mutually beneficial infrastructure projects.

Highlighting the improved relationship between CPA and DOD, the officials explored avenues to mitigate future airline rate increases, provide tuition assistance reimbursements for firemen receiving training from the Pacific Region Aircraft Rescue and Firefighting Training Center, and to include the CNMI in the United States' Essential Air Service (EAS) program.

At the meeting, CPA officials discussed the link between island prosperity, airline rates, and the CNMI's tourism industry. CPA emphasized the importance of bolstering the islands' economy by maintaining low airline rates to attract both tourists and additional airline operators. The officials also discussed the fact that CPA has not recovered from the COVID-19 pandemic and that financial assistance previously provided by the United States to address revenue shortfalls due to COVID-19 will be exhausted at the end of this calendar year.

To help address this concern, CPA, among other things, raised the possibility of the United States waiving Airport Improvement Program Grant Assurance 27, which prohibits airport sponsors from charging Government aircraft for using facilities developed with Federal financial assistance.

CPA also advocated for tuition reimbursements for Aircraft Rescue and Firefighting firemen. "By offering tuition reimbursements, firemen from airports throughout the region will be able to more easily access training opportunities at the Pacific Region Aircraft Rescue and Firefighting Training Center here in Saipan. This will enhance the entire region's emergency response capabilities," stated CPA Executive Director Christopher S. Tenorio.

Maintaining CPA operations emerged as the most immediate issue to be addressed. The officials discussed the potential impacts that limited CPA operations would have on future DOD trainings

and activities, which heavily rely on the ports' functionality. CPA officials also emphasized that limited CPA operations will not only affect DOD's mission in the region, but it will also have a profound effect on the people of the CNMI in numerous ways, such as leading to a reduction in access to healthcare for residents living on Tinian and Rota.

CPA also continued its advocacy for the inclusion of the CNMI in the Essential Air Services (EAS) program, emphasizing that both the CNMI and Guam should be granted exceptions from certain EAS eligibility requirements. CPA noted that these exceptions have been provided to other non-contiguous areas of the United States, such as Hawaii and Alaska.

CPA remains steadfast in its commitment to develop air and sea navigation to and from the CNMI to its fullest potential. The meeting with federal officials showcased a united effort to address the islands' economic challenges and enhance the partnership between CPA and the DOD.

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