

H.E. David W. Panuelo, President of the Federated States of Micronesia

State of the Nation Address, May 20th, 2020

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY [<https://youtu.be/P0NmXH2zJFY?t=835>]

Mr. Speaker and Honorable Members of Congress,

Kindly allow me to pay my respects in my native language to our traditional leaders.

“IHENG” pohn Mwohlen Wahu en Pohnpei U. Oh ketdien rahnet unsek.

Mwohn ei pahn patohieng nan ei tungoal sakadara, ei tungol sekeren keipwenih pahn kupwuren samatail Koht me wia koht en koht akan oh Nahnmwarki en Nahnmwarki kan.

Ahi tungoal sakaradahn wahu oh keipweni kapatapat pohn Ereksokko en Pohnpei U; wauneki Isonahnken ko, Likend ko, Nanalek ko, oh Nahnkeniei ko, oh kehdi kesempwal-akan koaros nan palien tiahk, mwomwohdiso, oh government; oh wauneki tohn weipokon en FSM unsek.

SALUTATIONS

1. The Honorable Wesley W. Simina, Speaker of the 21st FSM Congress;
2. The Honorable Yosiwo P. George, Vice President of the FSM;
3. Members of the 21st FSM Congress;
4. Chief Justice Yamase & Associate Justices;
5. Traditional Leaders of our Land;
6. Governors of our States;
7. Speaker & Members of our State Legislatures;
8. State Chief Justices & Associate Justices;
9. Church & Religious Leaders of our Nation;
10. Citizens;
11. Ladies & Gentlemen

Mr. Speaker,

I stand before you, our citizens, and our Nation today, in response to the invitation that you and the Members of the 21st FSM Congress have extended to me to deliver my first State of the Nation address.

I wish to extend my deepest respect and appreciation to you and all the Members of the 21st FSM Congress for your continued leadership and dedication to serving the people of the Federated States of Micronesia. Our Nation, this Paradise in our Backyard, has recently celebrated 41 years of Constitutional Government. I am humbled by your gracious and consistent determination to see to it that our Nation's greatest strength, our unity, remains at the forefront of all of our deliberations.

Mr. Speaker,

You will recall that the central theme of my inaugural address was "Taking Actions Today for Our Nation's Prosperity Tomorrow". I wish to take this opportunity to brief Congress and our citizens on the actions the Panuelo-George Administration has taken in the past twelve months to make good on that promise. I also wish to update Congress on the actions our Government is taking to combat the COVID-19 threat which, like Climate Change, represents an enormous challenge and opportunity to our Nation-building efforts. But, like all challenges we have faced these past 41 years, it is one that we will overcome so long as we continue to remain united on all important matters to our Nation and our citizens.

It is in the spirit of collaboration and cooperation on important matters that I would like to address and answer some of the questions on our citizens' minds in these challenging times: What are we going to do to financially support our citizens stranded in Guam, Hawaii, and elsewhere? When are we going to allow our stranded citizens abroad to come home? How are we going to financially support our citizens from the economic impacts of COVID-19?

Mr. Speaker,

As discussed with the Congressional Committee to Wait on the President, I join you, Mr. Speaker, and our four Governors in announcing financial support for our stranded citizens in the amount of three hundred thousand dollars (\$300,000). In the coming days we will be assisting each and every one of our citizens currently stranded in transit abroad in Guam and Hawaii. Our citizens are our obligation, and we are united in our efforts to assist them.

The Governors and I have been having weekly teleconferences, which I trust will continue even after the Pandemic has subsided, to address the needs of our citizens and residents both at home and abroad. While no concrete date is yet set for the return of our stranded citizens, we have broad agreement that citizens MAY, per WHO and CDC guidelines, be required to be tested for COVID-19 two days prior to entry into the FSM, to be followed by State-mandated quarantine and isolation procedures. Citizens returning may then be tested a second time prior to departing their quarantine area into the general population. These protocols will be necessary to ensure that our Nation remains COVID-19 free.

Mr. Speaker,

I really thank you and Congress for approving our 16-million-dollar FSM Economic Stimulus Package. The Stimulus is primarily funded by local revenue, and currently focuses on the Tourism Sector. The Nation's tourism sector turnover revenues in 2019 were approximately 43 million dollars, and the sector employs 1,048 people or about 6.7% of the FSM's total labor force. I want to share with you that about one million dollars has now been disbursed to more than 90 private sector entities suffering losses due to the COVID-19 Pandemic. Monthly support will continue to these tourism sector entities and we look forward to working with Congress to expand this assistance to other affected sectors of the economy.

On behalf of our Nation's leadership, we thank the United States for extending the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance Program to include the FSM. We have requested a grant of 40 million dollars so that all FSM citizens who have lost their jobs, or had their hours reduced, as a result of the COVID-19 Pandemic, are explicitly encouraged to apply for the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance Program. This relief applies to ANY person who has lost their job or had reduced hours due to this Pandemic. If you have reduced hours because of the coronavirus, or you are unemployed because of the coronavirus, you can seek this assistance. The Program will pay a minimum of 166 dollars per week to affected individuals from February this year until December 31st. I want the whole of the Nation to benefit from this assistance, and encourage our affected citizens to apply for it.

Before I continue further on how our Nation and its States continue to collaborate, it is worth highlighting that our friends, allies, and development partners have also stepped forward during

these exceptional times to provide needed and deeply appreciated assistance. On behalf of the Federated States of Micronesia, I thank the United States of America, Japan, the People's Republic of China, Australia, the United Nations, the Asian Development Bank, the World Bank, and all of the rest of our partners for their assistance. Whether it's through direct assistance, such as with the donations of medical supplies, or through support to multilateral channels, we thank you so much for your generosity and kindness as we strive to keep our citizens and residents safe from COVID-19.

Mr. Speaker,

After taking office, the very first letter I signed as President was to invite you and Members of Congress to join in a trip to Washington, D.C. The purpose of that trip was to enhance our Enduring Partnership with the United States of America. Today, one year since that historic visit with U.S. President Trump and the subsequent visit by Secretary Pompeo, we can declare that negotiations on our Compact of Free Association are underway.

We are proceeding on a mutually agreed-upon rapid pace for the negotiations of our Compact of Free Association. Our Nation has chosen its Chief Negotiator, Leo A. Falcam Jr., and the U.S. has chosen their negotiators. Despite the COVID-19 Pandemic, and through teleconferencing made possible in part through our Nation's improving telecommunications infrastructure, we will be able to negotiate for outcomes mutually satisfactory to both the people of the Federated States of Micronesia and the people of the United States. Initial correspondence between our two Governments related to our negotiations have been extremely positive, and our mutual goals are very closely aligned at this time.

Mr. Speaker,

In 2002, the late President Leo A. Falcam said in his State of the Nation address that “We all can be proud to be Micronesian, but none of us can afford to rest on our laurels.” I hope that our actions so far would make President Falcam and all of our Founding Fathers proud of the Federated States of Micronesia, its citizens, and its Government. I have faith that our Chief Negotiator, and the Joint Committee on Compact Review & Planning (JCRP), as well as our U.S. partners, recognize the urgency for completing negotiations soonest.

Mr. Speaker,

I committed that the Panuelo-George administration will be transparent, open, and accountable. We have expanded the dissemination of information from our Public Information division to a new level, and will continue to ensure that the public is informed on the Government’s programs, policies, and activities.

We have established a new Office of Information Technology & Support Services. The Office will support the delivery of e-Government and e-Commerce activities as a means of empowering businesses and citizens and improving services. An example of what this will look like is an online application for renewing your passport.

We have restructured our Department of Justice, to include our new Division of Anti-Human Trafficking. We have submitted the necessary documents for the Nation’s entry into the International Police Organization (INTERPOL), and are awaiting the approval of our application.

We are dedicated to the task of protecting our National Maritime Boundaries, which includes the work being pursued to ensure the FSM's continental shelf claim North of Yap of more than 100,000 square kilometers of seabed is rightfully under our jurisdiction under the Law of the Sea Convention.

Mr. Speaker,

Over this past year, the FSM has taken many steps in order to combat the existential threat of Climate Change. These steps include a Memorandum of Understanding with the Waitt Institute and Blue Prosperity Coalition to protect 30% of our marine resources by 2030, and heightened collaboration with like-minded organizations. Through the Pacific Islands Development Program (PIDP), the only CROP Agency headquartered in the Northern Pacific, and the East-West Center, we held the Micronesian Conference of Leaders with a focus on Climate Change and how the topic feeds into our Nation's Climate Security lens.

Mr. Speaker,

As discussed with the Micronesian Presidents in New York, our Micronesian subregion has chosen a candidate—His Excellency Gerald Zackios, from the Republic of the Marshall Islands—to serve as Secretary-General of the Pacific Island Forum Secretariat. Ambassador Zackios has the open support from all five sovereign Micronesian nations, and our Micronesian subregion is enjoying a heightened sense of cooperation and unity in pushing forward our agenda, be it in the mitigation of Climate Change or the promotion of peace and human rights. It is noted that the next Secretary-General of the PIF Secretariat is to come from our Micronesian subregion, and I have just signed,

along with the four other Micronesian Presidents, a letter of nomination for Ambassador Zackios to become the next Secretary-General of the PIF Secretariat.

It has also been agreed through the Micronesian Presidents' Summit, in a letter jointly signed by all five Presidents, and transmitted to the United Nations' Secretary-General, that the FSM will host the upcoming United Nations Multi-Country Office (MCO). In addition, the Asian Development Bank and World Bank will be establishing full offices on our shores. Our Nation's sense of place in the World's stage is being taken to a new level—one that we can all be proud of.

Here at home, plans continue to be developed to convene the next State & National Leadership Conference whose purpose will be to refine our Nation's goals for the years ahead. The results of this Conference will feed into the forthcoming FSM Donors Roundtable, whose purpose will be to realign overseas development assistance in our Nation to ensure that such assistance contributes to our Sustainable Development Goals.

Mr. Speaker,

Through exemplary leadership demonstrated by yourself, the Committee of Health & Social Affairs, and the Honorable Ferny S. Perman, the FSM has enacted legislation banning most forms of plastic which will take effect in July, 2020. This is a remarkable accomplishment, and I can't express enough my appreciation to the 21st FSM Congress for their efforts on this issue.

Mr. Speaker,

Though COVID-19 has temporarily impacted some of our Nation's efforts to develop our economy, crucial initiatives—such as the Integrated Coconut Processing Facility on Tonoas in Chuuk, or the Pave the Nation project of climate resilient roads, in association with the World Bank and the People's Republic of China—remain ongoing, and our commitments enduring. The FSM Digital Connectivity Project has been launched, and the work of connecting residences and public infrastructure to highspeed internet is underway.

Our Department of Resources & Development, with assistance from the Asian Development Bank, the World Bank, the European Union, and other partners, is actively implementing over 60 million dollars of projects to strengthen our Nation's electrical grid, improve accessibility of electricity to remote communities, and to lessen our reliance on fossil fuels, so as to meet our commitments under the Paris Agreement. Additionally, the Division of Statistics has been increasing its capacity to develop and submit crucial reports to ensure that policy decisions are informed by reliable data. Our food security initiatives are working to ensure that the question of whether there will be enough to eat is a non-issue.

Through the Department of Resources & Development and the National Oceanic Resource Management Authority (NORMA), we are developing a Fisheries Investment Policy to incentivize more onshore fisheries investments. Our Technology for Tuna Transparency (T3) initiative, which began under former President Peter M. Christian, including electronic monitoring and the establishment of “no take zones” within our Exclusive Economic Zone, are working entirely as

planned. We remain on a path towards becoming the first Nation in the world with a 100% transparent tuna fishery.

Mr. Speaker,

The Department of Education has been successfully implementing the recently strengthened version of our FSM School Accreditation procedures. Our Nation's schools are increasingly showing a unified approach to ensuring all children have the opportunity to succeed.

The Department of Education is currently working with the United Nation's Children's Fund (UNICEF) and our four States to ensure that children affected by the COVID-19 Pandemic are still learning how to read, how to write, how to think, and how to grow as responsible citizens of our Nation.

While we understand that school has been interrupted due to the Pandemic, we congratulate all of our students for their commitments to their education. To all of the students who have graduated this year, we congratulate you on your successes and wish you the best in your future endeavors.

Mr. Speaker,

While most countries have active cases of COVID-19, the FSM remains one of precious few countries in the world without a confirmed case. It must be said, and with equal parts admiration and respect, that our healthcare, border control, to include surveillance and police, workers at the

National and State levels have truly shown their commitment as devoted public servants. In the context of COVID-19, all frontline workers, to include health and border control staff, have received infection control training; we've been building quarantine and isolation sites in all four States; we've implemented risk communication processes, and we've acquired the capacity to test for COVID-19. I could not be prouder of our National and State frontline personnel, and I am sure you feel the same way.

Mr. Speaker,

In recalling the 1975 Constitutional Convention in a 1997 interview, the late FSM Chief Justice Andon L. Amaraich said “The Chuukese, the Ponapeans [and Kosraeans], and Yapese were the advocates in advancing our Micronesian unity. They stuck together then, and they stick together today.”

This year, elected delegates of our population convened to review and strengthen our Nation's Constitution. Their meticulous review and debates in the 4th FSM Constitutional Convention will no doubt produce recommendations that will promote and bind our peoples even further. We thank the delegates for their hard work, and look forward to promoting public awareness on the outcomes when the Convention adjourns.

We are, each of us, strong through our diversity, resilient through our unity, and compassionate through our respect for others as well as ourselves. Though 2020 has thus far demonstrated its interest in challenging our resolve, we celebrate 41 years of Constitutional Government as a means

of showing that we will not submit to any fear or any foe, be it Climate Change or Coronavirus, and that we, as Micronesians, will rise to any and all occasions to stand up for what we believe to be right and what we believe to be true.

As human beings, we may from time to time disagree on the details, such as whether a given law ought to have a given component, or whether a particular action resulted in a favorable outcome. But we agree on what matters most: that we are one Micronesian Nation, devoted to extending to all others peace, friendship, cooperation, and love in our common humanity.

Mr. Speaker,

Our sovereign Micronesian Nation has sailed its canoe for 41 years. Our voyage has been guided by the collaboration between the Executive, Legislative, and the Judicial branches of our National and State Governments, which are the paddles for our canoe. We, the Chuukese, Pohnpeians, Kosraeans, and Yapese remain united as Micronesians, like the rope that ties our canoe together.

Our Nation's journey has seen rises and falls, and the Panuelo-George administration began with sunny skies and calm weather. Now that our Nation is in a storm, it is understandable that some of the paddlers—out of concern, or out of fear—will want to row in different directions, as we all must adapt and change to where we were headed.

Our Nation's greatest strength is its unity. By paddling together in one direction, we will keep ourselves afloat in this storm. In time, we will see that these unprecedented challenges will reward us, and through sustainable policy-making, we'll endure the hardship of the COVID-19 Pandemic by emerging as a more resilient and capable Nation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and citizens of our Nation, for the opportunity to speak before you today in my first State of the Nation address.

God bless you, and God bless the people and the Government of the Federated States of Micronesia.



Pictured Above: His Excellency David W. Panuelo, and the Honorable Yosiwo P. George, pose with their Cabinet