



National Lieutenant Governors Association

1 **Resolution on the Need for the US Federal Government to Support Economic Development in the**
2 **Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands**

3 **WHEREAS**, the COVENANT is an agreement entered into between two separate, but equal sovereign
4 entities, namely the United States government and the government of the Northern Mariana Islands (NMI),
5 and

6 **WHEREAS**, the COVENANT was negotiated over the course of twenty-seven (27) months; unanimously
7 approved by the NMI people in June of 1975; approved by the U.S. House of Representatives in July of 1975;
8 by the U.S. Senate in February of 1976 (Public Law 94-241 (90 Stat. 263)); and signed in 1976 by President
9 Gerald Ford, and

10 **WHEREAS**, the COVENANT embodies the desire and promise of the U.S. to the NMI people and
11 government to achieve a progressively higher standard of living as part of the American economic
12 community, including developing the economic resources and facilitating sound policies needed to be self-
13 reliant and sustainable, and

14 **WHEREAS**, various US federal policies intended to balance environmental protection with economic
15 development caused significant economic harm to the small economy of scale of the Northern Mariana
16 Islands, which relies on mineral resources and imported goods, and

17 **WHEREAS**, specific federal laws which disproportionately impact the Mariana Islands include the US
18 Endangered Species Act (ESA), Endangered Coral Species Act, and FUDS (Formerly Used Defense Sites)
19 and are stifling economic progress running contrary to helping achieve a higher standard of living per the
20 COVENANT, and

21 **WHEREAS**, more than 20% of current ESA-listed species are found in the six (6) U.S. Affiliated Islands,
22 namely the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, U.S. Virgin Islands, Hawaii, Territory of American Samoa, Territory
23 of Guam, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI), and

24 **WHEREAS**, the Islands are hotspots of endemism (hosting a species found only on one island and nowhere
25 else in the world) so these endemic species may be very common where they occur, but their total population
26 size and range is very small when compared to species that occur in the continental U.S., and

27 **WHEREAS**, the six U.S. Affiliated Islands have the highest number of listed species per unit of land area of
28 all 55 states and islands, and

29 **WHEREAS**, the CNMI has the highest with a listed species for every six (6) square miles), and the CNMI also
30 has the highest number of listed species per capita, with a listed species for every 1,856 residents, and

31 **WHEREAS**, the frequency of ESA-listed species entails a tremendous conservation and regulatory challenge
32 felt most acutely in the islands, and

33 **WHEREAS**, the current ESA policy framework and the application of the policy impacts private citizens and
34 local small businesses who often feel unheard in the process thereby fostering difficult relations with U.S.
35 federal authorities and ultimately eroding efforts to manage endangered species, and

36 **WHEREAS**, both individuals and developers may or may not be able to purchase a mitigation credit if an ESA
37 listed species is found and mitigation is required, and lack of development creates economic stagnation, and

38 **WHEREAS**, the cost of a credit is particularly cost-prohibitive for an individual resulting in social costs for
39 families seeking to build homes to improve quality of life, and

40 **WHEREAS**, the federal ESA Section 6 funding dedicated to endangered species recovery is inadequate; for
41 example, nearly all the CNMI allocation has been directed toward Mariana crow recovery for over a decade, yet
42 the Mariana crow remains on the brink of extinction, while the needs of other species are neglected for lack of
43 funding, and the regulatory burden of ESA eats up both public and private resources to ensure compliance,
44 and

45 **WHEREAS**, many of the FUDS in the CNMI are within public lands, some contaminated with unexploded
46 ordinance or other hazardous substances, and when developers show interest any FUDS program cleanup
47 may take years due to lack of funding or clean up becomes an extra cost to the developer thereby causing the
48 CNMI to lose opportunities for development on public lands,

49 **THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED**, the National Lieutenant Governors Association (NLGA) recognizes
50 the listed U.S. federal environmental policies do not appear to take adequate consideration of the unique,
51 extenuating geographic, social, and cultural landscape of the NMI, and

52 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, the NLGA supports the U.S. federal government honoring the promises
53 of the COVENANT to assist the NMI achieve a progressively higher standard of living of fellow American
54 citizens as part of the American economic community; and

55 **BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED**, the NLGA supports efforts by NMI government leadership to confer
56 with U.S. federal leaders to revisit application of the referenced environmental policies to exercise reasonable,
57 sound, and prudent judgment taking into consideration the small economy of scale while achieving renewed
58 economic development balanced with environmental stewardship.

Sponsors: Lt. Gov. Victor B. Hocog, NMI; Lt. Gov. Nancy Wyman, CT; Additional Co-Sponsors: