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NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS

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Congress of the United States
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Washington, DC 20515

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April 6, 2011

Ms. Karen Gordon Mills
Administrator
U.S. Small Business Administration
409 Third Street, SW, Suite 7000
Washington, DC 20416

Dear Administrator Mills,

The Small Business Administration, Office of International Trade, has issued a notice of grant opportunity regarding the State Trade and Export Promotion (STEP) program established in the Small Business Jobs Act of 2010, U.S.P.L.111-240. Neither this notice nor the Act specifically names the Northern Mariana Islands as an eligible jurisdiction for participation in the STEP program. I would like to request, however, that the Northern Marianas be included pursuant to Section 703(a) of the Covenant to Establish a Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands in Political Union with the United States of America, approved by U.S.P.L 94-241.

The omission of the Northern Mariana Islands from Section 1207(a)(5) of the Small Business Jobs Act appears to have been a drafting error. There is no policy rationale for excluding the Northern Mariana Islands from a program designed to increase the number of U.S. small businesses that are exporting and the value of exports produced by those small businesses. In fact, as a U.S. jurisdiction geographically more proximate to Asia than North America, the Northern Marianas is precisely situated to be an exporting area of the U.S.

Section 703(a) of the Covenant was expansively written to ensure that the Northern Marianas would not be excluded from federal programs unintentionally. The relevant language of the Section is “[t]he United States will make available to the Northern Mariana Islands the full range of federal programs and services available to the territories of the United States.” This means that any program available to any U.S. territory should also be available to the Northern Mariana Islands irrespective of any particular provision defining eligibility for such federal programs or services. Only an explicit exclusion of the Northern Mariana Islands from a particular program or service or a provision allowing some alternative form of participation could override the Section 703 general grant of availability. That is not the case with the STEP program.

Inclusion of the Northern Marianas would have no fiscal impact. The STEP program is competitive. There is no base funding per jurisdiction that would have to be allocated to the Northern Mariana Islands. Each applicant project stands on its own

Ms. Karen Gordon Mills
April 6, 2011
Page 2

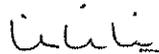
merits. Further underscoring the validity of each project, the State or Territorial government in which the exporting business is located has to contribute to the grant award.

On April 6, 2011, the Small Business Administration issued a modification to the original STEP program announcement, extending the application closing date. I request that the original announcement be modified in the same manner to note the eligibility of the Northern Mariana Islands.

As our nation works its way out of the recession of the last several years and strives to add to the number of jobs in our economy, we must all make certain that every area of the U.S.— and particularly the rural and socially and economically disadvantaged areas, such as the Northern Mariana Islands, targeted by STEP—is included in our efforts.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



GREGORIO KILILI CAMACHO SABLAN
Member of Congress