

Bordallo seeks presidential voting rights for US territories, more Guam control over its foreign labor

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(Photo: Rick Cruz/PDN)

Del. Madeleine Bordallo is seeking constitutional amendments that would give Guam and other U.S. territories presidential voting rights, and is also pushing for more Guam control over its temporary foreign labor need.

Bordallo, who is seeking reelection, introduced H.J.R. 137, which seeks an amendment to the U.S. Constitution that would allow some 4 million American citizens living in the territories to vote for president and vice president.

American citizens on Guam, the CNMI, Puerto Rico, American Samoa and the U.S. Virgin Islands are not allowed to vote for the American president.

Bordallo's amendment, if adopted by the House of Representatives and Senate by two-thirds vote in each chamber, would require 38 states to formally ratify and adopt the amendment.

Upon adoption, Congress would determine apportionment of the electoral votes to the territories, with Puerto Rico estimated to carry four electoral votes and one each to the four remaining territories with smaller populations.

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The apportionment of electoral votes is typically conducted every 10 years during the decennial census.

'Solution to constitutional error'

Bordallo calls her proposed constitutional amendment a common sense solution to a fundamental error in the constitution.

"I am proud to introduce this Constitutional Amendment so that every American is finally able to cast a vote for president and vice president of the United States, just as the Founding Fathers intended. Casting a ballot for president is an inalienable right for all Americans and the Amendment I introduced today is yet another step towards upholding our Constitution's solemn promise to form a more perfect union," Bordallo said in a statement.

Under her proposed amendment, U.S. territories with a population of more than 30,000 would be allowed to cast electoral votes for president and vice president. Guam has a population of about 160,000.

Unlike the 23rd Amendment that gave electoral votes to the District of Columbia, however, Bordallo's proposed amendment seeks to give each territory elector votes solely based on population and not capped by the number of electors of the least populous state.

The delegate said her amendment will not affect the right of the people of Guam or other territories determine their political status or exercise their right to self-determination.

Guam's H-2B program

Bordallo also introduced H.R. 6480, which seeks to give the governor of Guam the authority to determine the need for temporary workers in Guam's civilian labor market.

The bill was introduced over concerns about the federal government's near 100 percent denial of temporary foreign workers for Guam under the H-2B program, which has stalled construction projects on the island since 2016.

Bordallo said her Guam Temporary Workforce Act would ensure that the island's civilian labor needs are met by giving the governor of Guam more control over the temporary labor determination process.

Guam used to have as many as 1,500 H-2B workers but in 2015, the federal government started denying requests for new H-2B visas.

The denials eventually led to Guam having no H-2B workers as of early May 2018.

Guam officials lobbied for the approval of H-2B petitions for the island, and the 2018 Defense budget allows Guam to employ as many as 4,000 a year for projects directly connected to or associated with the Marine realignment on Guam.

Dozens of new H-2B workers have arrived on Guam since June this year.

However, Guam is still fighting for the approval of H-2B visas for civilian projects.

Reporter Haidee Eugenio covers Guam's Catholic church issues, education, government, business and more. Follow her on Twitter @haidee_eugenio (https://twitter.com/haidee_eugenio). Follow Pacific Daily News on Facebook/GuamPDN (<http://www.facebook.com/guampdn/>) and Instagram @guampd (<http://instagram.com/GuamPDN>)n.

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