

**Marshall Islands Chamber of Commerce**

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**Meeting Minutes**

Tuesday, April 17, 2007

Marshall Islands Resort

Meeting called to order by President Jack Niedenthal at 12:01 P.M. Approximately 40 members and guests were in attendance. The next regular meeting will be on Tuesday, May 8, 2007.

- **Minutes** – approved electronically prior to the meeting
- **Treasurer's report** – Bank of Guam balance: \$4942.07
- **Guests**
  - Tom Brown, Vice Counsel, US Embassy Manila
  - Mina Andrike, RMI Taxation
  - Laju Sawej, RMI Taxation
  - Father Rich, Assumption
  - Wilson Hess, President CMI
  - Richard Li, MIHS Counselor
  - Helen Reed-Rowe, US Embassy DCM
  - Bruce Bilimon, Assistant Secretary of Finance for Revenue, Tax, and Customs
  - Maria Fowler, Marshallese mat exhibition
- **Chamber President remarks**

I would like to take this opportunity to recognize members of the Diplomatic Corps, the general public in attendance, and of course our Marshall Islands Chamber of Commerce membership.

It is time to move forward with the agenda of the Marshall Islands Chamber of Commerce, and I am not talking about today's meeting agenda. This, as we all know, is an election year. And for the private sector there has never been more at stake. I believe that we should make sure that the interests of our businesses become a major issue in this upcoming political campaign. Today I would like to have a short discussion about what we can do as an organization to place our agenda at the forefront of this election. As you may already know we have changed our bylaws to allow us to become politically active should we choose to do so. It is time for us not only to make sure that our opinions get heard, but get valued as well.

The Chamber remains very dismayed over the revamped Labor Law that was introduced and passed during the fall 2006 Nitijela session. Jerry Kramer and I worked for many hours on behalf of the Chamber as part of a committee formed by the Ministry of R & D to help put together a law that would not only be fair for the private sector, but that would also be very workable for government bureaucrats. The law that was passed reflected almost none of the committee's suggestions; indeed, the new law made procedures so confused and complicated for the private sector that the government issued an extension to the old law through June 30 of this year, while at the same time the Minister of Foreign Affairs promised the Chamber Executive Committee that he would propose amendments to address some of the problems created by the new law. For whatever reason, this didn't happen during this past Nitijela session.

What this means for those of us who must employ foreign labor is that on July 1 our businesses will begin to suffer because we will not be able to follow this unfair, strange and draconian law. One of the major suggestions our committee put forth was that the government should not be exempted from the Labor Law: We wanted the government to feel the private sector's pain hoping this would make them more sympathetic to our needs, and thus provide them with an incentive to create a more practical law. But the new law does exempt the government making it very easy for them to hire foreign labor, while at the same time makes it almost impossible for the private sector to do so in any kind of cost and time efficient way.

The Labor Law is just one of many issues that the private sector needs addressed by our government. Maybe part of the blame is our own. We have to send a clearer message, and we have to send it to the right people in both political parties. We need to get more politicians on our side, and they need to believe there is a benefit to being on our side.

Because of this, I would like to propose the following idea: For all of the remaining monthly Chamber meetings before the election in November, we invite any and all national candidates for the Nitijela to speak for 10 minutes before the Chamber to tell us what their ideas are for helping and supporting the private sector of the Marshall Islands. The candidates would be the first item on the agenda, no waiting, and we would pay for their lunches. After their speeches, Chamber members would be given a short time to ask questions. We would begin advertising these events immediately. We need to begin the dialogue now to get our issues burning in the minds of the voting public, and in the minds of our candidates. Another idea that we can discuss as the election nears is the possibility of hosting a debate for the candidates, and also the notion of the Chamber actively supporting a slate of pro-business candidates.

On a related issue, I find it astounding that since the formation of this Republic in 1979 only 2 women have been elected to the Nitijela. For the life of me I can't figure out why this has become the norm in a country where women, to me, seem so powerful. Look at all the successful organizations and boards here in the RMI and you will see the touch of a woman. CMI, since it began its turnaround 3 years ago, has had two women as Board Chairs. Four of the 11 members of the CMI Board are women. MISSA, from 2000 to 2005, had a majority of women Board members, a

first for the RMI for a governmental agency. And, of course, Saane Aho, MISSA's Administrator, is one of the most capable people I have ever worked with in the RMI. The Majuro Cooperative School, which just got rave reviews from the visiting WASC team last month, has 3 female Board members and a female principal; and Assumption, the only WASC accredited high school in the RMI, also has a female principal. So I ask you, in contrast, How many women are on the Boards or serve in leadership positions of MEC, NTA, AMI or the Ports Authority? Maybe WUTMI and the other women's organizations should begin to target some of these governmental entities that don't like to include women in leadership roles.

And while we are on the subject of Boards, there was just a law passed that creates a new Postal Authority Board of Directors. With the post office in dire need of leadership and advocacy, why not have all women from the private sector appointed to that Board? After all, the private sector has the most to gain from an improved and more efficient post office. Can you imagine what the post office would be like if we had a group of powerful women running the show and advocating its cause to the US and RMI governments?

There are just too many underutilized women in this country, and this is something that needs to change now. Most of us in this room understand the power of a Marshallese woman, and for those of you who don't know how to deal with them, here is a free tip from your Chamber president:

When I make a mistake that results in an argument with my wife, I always—immediately—apologize to my wife.

And when my *wife* makes a mistake that results in an argument, I always—immediately—apologize to my wife. It works; try it.

At any rate, the floor is now open for any discussion by the members regarding the idea of having potential candidates speak before each meeting until the election, or any other ideas.

The next meeting will be May 8<sup>th</sup>.

I would like to thank Tom Maus, US Embassy Military Liaison, for his efforts to bring visiting American naval vessels to Majuro. This has been a significant source of revenue for our local businesses.

- **Discussion from the floor**

Chamber members approved the invitation of candidates for national elected office to speak for ten minutes at any of the remaining Chamber meetings this year prior to the November election. Several members suggested that these presentations be taped and made available to V7AB and V7EMON. Richard Li suggested that the Chamber join MIHS students and host a debate. Neal suggested that the Chamber should endorse business friendly platforms and not specific candidates. However, candidates could be mentioned as supporting business platforms. With only seven remaining Chamber

meetings prior to the election, there could be a bunching up of speakers as we get closer to the election. The Chamber always has the ability to schedule special meetings to accommodate this should it occur.

Richard Li reported a serious problem regarding MIHS senior TOEFL test results that are being incorrectly sent to Europe and not coming to the Marshall Islands. These test results arrived at designated American colleges nearly two months ago. They haven't arrived here yet. On May first, this will be a real problem for students who want to go to college.

Helen Reed-Rowe reported that US Postal Services Leo Tudela will be arriving in Majuro to answer postal questions next week. He is schedule to meet with the Chamber's Executive Committee.

Liz asked what can we do to help Alele Museum This is an important part of both the culture and prospective tourism.

Kenneth reported that we'll know at the end of the month whether or not the Marshall Islands will be selected to host the 2010 Micronesian Games. It's between us and Yap. If we're approved, the previous RMI commitment of four million dollars will need to be spent to develop the necessary facilities.

Diesel and gasoline rates have just gone up 14 cents.

- **Committee Reports**

Government Relations –Jerry Kramer

Whereas details are not yet available, some of the legislation that was passed in the recent Nitijela session follows:

- Repeal of the Kwajalein Atoll Development Authority to free up an estimated five million dollars in funds available for Ebeye purposes
- Secured transactions or the ability to register liens against personal property
- Juvenile procedures
- Ministry of Justice special revenue fund
- Prisoner parole
- Legal profession amendment
- Parking for the disabled
- Revocation of the requirement for tinted windows

- Postal services amendment

There were no changes to the previously enacted labor and immigrations laws in spite of Chamber recommendations. Technically and on June 30<sup>th</sup>, many guest workers will become illegal unless the Minister of Foreign Affairs further delays implementation of these two laws until the August Nitijela session has a chance to amend them.

Jerry and Jack will write a formal letter to the Minister of Foreign Affairs requesting an additional extension of time before these laws go into effect.

#### Business and Trade – Neal Skinner

Outer island development is being considered by the Japanese and the Koreans. JAL flights to the Marshall Islands take only five hours non-stop whereas flights to the Maldives take 12 hours. There are an estimated two million retiring “baby boomers” in Japan that want to travel to places like the Marshall Islands. They want an outer island setting in upscale accommodations such as would cost \$500 a night. There are many flights from Korea to Japan that could easily connect with JAL flights to the Marshall Islands. This is why Koreans are interested. For example, it is rumored that there is consideration being given to developing part of Wotje for Korean tourism. The benefit to the Marshall Islands is in increased employment and development of outer island commerce.

The visiting Taiwanese and American naval vessels represent very good business for us. They like it here. There are no real security concerns.

The Chamber expressed its appreciation to the Taiwan Embassy for their part in bringing the recent naval vessels. MIVA will complete an economic assessment of the two recent naval visits soon.

#### Financial Services – Jim McLean

The Secured Transaction legislation that has recently passed will allow the registration of a security interest in personal property as would be the case when a consumer item is purchased on contract or when personal property is pledged as collateral for a loan. The bill provides for a local agent such as Bank of the Marshall Islands acting as the collection point to process and enter liens against a database that is hosted outside of the country by a service provider that specializes in such matters.

#### Tourism – Bill Weza

*Marshall Islands Visitors Authority  
NTO REPORT  
2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter Report (January – March 2007)*

#### *Marketing and Promotions*

- Action Asia – one-page advertisement for the January/February and the March/April 2007 issues.

- ScubaDiver AustralAsia magazine – ¼ page advertisement in the January/February 2007 issue.
- RMI is featured in a two-part series of “Walking Travel” in the March issue of a popular Japanese sports magazine. A representative from this magazine was part of the media visit during the first JAL flight in February.
- The MIVA website is now available in Chinese and is accessible through the [visitmarshallislands.com](http://visitmarshallislands.com) website.
  - Travel World has been hosting MIVA’s Chinese web site on their website [www.travelworld.cn](http://www.travelworld.cn), the accumulative visitors to MIVA’s web pages has reached 24,011 up to now.
- MIVA continues to receive questions, comments and requests referred from the website.
- Approximately 81 emails responded to including information packets mailed out during the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter.
- MIVA hosted JAL Skyward Magazine – inflight magazine during JAL’s first official charter flight to Majuro on February 11-15, 2007. The magazine is on all of JAL flights.
- MIVA hosted a familiarization tour for two representatives from PADI Dive Japan Magazine during the second JAL charter flight between March 22-26, 2007.

#### *Trade Shows*

- 38<sup>th</sup> Annual Dusseldorf Boat Show – The RMI was represented by MOJO International, Inc. at the Dusseldorf Boat Show, one of Germany’s most prestigious boat shows held from January 20-28. The event had over a thousand exhibitors from both travel and boat trades and was well attended with approximately 320,000 people from all across Europe. The company met with thirty-one (31) travel agents who were interested in establishing contacts in the RMI and contacted over 150 dive/travel agents and media groups all across Europe in all of which have shown a lot of interest in the Marshall Islands.
- Travel World China represented MIVA in the large outbound travel fair WTF 2007 in Shanghai between 22nd-25th March. They handed out many of MIVA’s Chinese brochures to the interested tour operators and general public.
- Layne Ballard, Central Pacific Expeditions, represented MIVA/RMI at the annual Beneath the Sea dive show held in New Jersey and New York during the week of March 19-26, 2007.

#### *Product Changes & Developments*

- MIVA hosted a Taxi Driver’s Training session on January 19 in as part of the preparatory efforts for JAL. The training focused mainly on appearance, presentation and honesty. Over 40 taxi drivers participated. Bill Weza and Hirobo Obeketang conducted the training, with the assistance of the National Police.
- After two years of hard work, persistence and dedication, MIVA and the MIVA Japan Office, along with support from the RMI Government, finally welcomed Japan Airlines on its first official charter flight to the RMI on February 11-15, 2007. There were approximately 200 passengers on board, most of whom were divers. The Majuro lagoon was buzzing for three days as members of the Charter

Boats Association assisted Satoshi Yoshii, Marshall Islands Tours, with dive charters. Many of the Japanese enjoyed their visit and returned to Japan with local souvenirs such as handicrafts and t-shirts. Current estimate of the economic impact of the first flight, not including RMIPA, MIT, RRE and other small businesses, is at \$130,000.

- The “Just do It” Committee, with the assistance of Anil Construction Company, Marshall Islands Stevedore and Terminal Company and Pacific International, Inc., has since collected approximately 100 old and discarded vehicles from both companies and households located in Rita Village all the way to Rairok Village.
- Continental Micronesia introduces a fourth flight to Majuro on March 3, 2007. The additional service is a weekly direct flight between Honolulu, Majuro and Guam. Access has been one of the major hurdles in the development of tourism for the RMI. With this new service, along with JAL charters and Our Airline the RMI see a definite increase in the number of visitors to the islands. The Guam-Kwajalein-Honolulu flight has since been discontinued.
- Travel World China’s promotion team has been continuously recommending and promoting the RMI as a new and unique destination to many outbound tour operators, travel agencies and various travel organizations throughout China.
- Emelyn Simon is promoted to Marketing and Research Manager, replacing Neiar Kabua.
- The RMI welcomes JAL’s second charter flight from March 22 – 26, 2007 with 190 passengers and media on board. Three flights were planned for the months of April and May but were cancelled due to certain issues that have to be resolved between JAL and the RMI Government. JAL sees the RMI as the new Palau for the Japanese visitors and are determined to continue the charter operation well into the summer with possibly 6-8 flights.

#### *Industry Relations*

- The Indies Trader hosted “Off the Hook” a regional fishing/cooking show from Australia during the second week of January.
- MIVA was invited to attend a meeting held by the Marshall Islands Conservation Society regarding an environmental impact assessment (EIA) that they are conducting for a local company who is looking at deep-sea sand mining in Majuro’s Lagoon. The meeting was held between MICS and the landowners for the “aenkan” (islets) of Majuro. Based on studies conducted through the EPA, there are other areas in the lagoon on the main island of Majuro but the deltas located between most of the “aenkan” seemes more feasible and highly recommended. Although there continues to be controversy as to who owns the lagoon, the landowners and community traditionally, are the actual owners. Almost all of the landowners that participated disagreed on this activity not only because it will be unattractive to tourism development but more so on the long term environmental impacts of such a project.
- Mr. Akinori Ito, President of Blest, Inc., led a delegation of representatives from his company along with JMIFA (Japan Marshall Islands Friendship Association) and a TV crew to Majuro to demonstrate the plastics-fuel converter machine to members of the community, schools including the President and the Cabinet. JMIFA is a strong supporter for the RMI and MIVA in our quest to acquire this machine for the RMI. The Government of Japan’s Green Energy Innovative

Committee is currently assisting MIVA in searching for a donor company who can fund this machine for the RMI. This machine will greatly help in the reduction of certain kinds of plastics, especially styrofoam, here in Majuro. It is MIVA's intention to sell the fuel at a minimal cost to local tourism operators and other community based organizations.

- Bill Weza and Dolores deBrum-Kattil, through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the RMI Japan Embassy, had a chance to meet with five individuals who visited Majuro in search of potential sites for small-scale resort development. The individuals, led by Tony Shu of the RMI Embassy in Japan, represented a large scale of the industry as there were planners, designers and investors

#### *Local Events*

- 1st Japan Airlines charter flight, February 22-26, 2007.
- Memorial & Nuclear Victims' Day ceremony activities, March 1, 2007.
- MIVA hosted the Marshalls Billfish Club mini-tournament held on March 17, 2007. The tournament was for Total Points with a first prize of \$1,200 and the winner was Sherwood Tibon.
- 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Coconut Cup Regatta Race was held on March 24, 2007.
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Japan Airlines charter flight, March 22-26, 2007.

#### *Upcoming Events/Activities*

April 7-21 – MARE Magazine from Germany

April – CBS News to Bikini (dates TBA)

April 13-15 – ROC Naval visit to the RMI

April 15-20 – Pacific Expeditions Show in Majuro

April 23-27 – WUTMI Board of Directors meeting

April 26 – Marshallese Traditional Clothing Mats - Exhibition and Silent Auction

- Media from Honolulu to cover the event

April 30 – May 14 – RMI National Games

May 4-5 – Marshall Islands National Cup

#### Transportation –Salome Andrike

It would be helpful were RMI Customs to have an office at the airport that would handle inbound airfreight during business hours. Bruce Bilimon replied that this used to be the case and is currently being considered.

Asia Pacific Airlines (APA) had a mechanical breakdown earlier this week that resulted in one of the planes being on the ground in Majuro for several days. The plane is now in service.

Air Marshall Islands flights appear to be cancelled today.

The Litakbouki has sunk alongside Charlie Domnik's lagoon-side development. There appears to be an oil spill. Where is EPA?

It appears that the new Shipping Corporation is having difficulty with former government employees who ran and maintained government ships. These employees apparently got used to not working and getting paid anyway.

#### Communications – David Strauss

##### *Fiber Optic Cable Update*

Tony Muller informed me that he is unable to comment on the status of the fiber optic cable project. He confirmed that using some of the Compact Funds from those dedicated to education and health would be a way to finance this, but said we would have to ask the RMI Government to divulge their position on this.

##### *Cell phone upgrade*

NTA will not be able to meet its projected May Day date. The equipment will not arrive until mid-May by air freight. The heavier equipment such as feeder cables will arrive thereafter by surface. Once the equipment arrives on island, installation should be quick. NTA is now looking at end of May, beginning of June for the upgrade to be in place.

##### *Email Inbox problems*

Everyone should have noticed an increase in the amount of unsolicited mail (spam) (junk) coming through the servers in the past few days. Michael Sawej wants everyone to know that they have been collecting headers on new SPAM to adjust their filters accordingly. By the end of the week, NTA should be able to filter out most of the new SPAM.

##### *Increased flow*

NTA added additional capacity (1.5M down, 768k up) at the end of March. NTA wants to know if anyone has noticed an increase in flow of traffic.

##### *NTA 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary*

NTA's 20<sup>th</sup> will be on May 1<sup>st</sup>. In honor of its anniversary, NTA will be providing free phone calls to the U.S. the entire month (only kidding!!). NTA will open a new Internet Cafe in Rita at the former KUP-65 (across from MIHS) -- free Internet for first 100 customers in Delap, Rita and Ebeye Internet Café (not kidding!!). Cake, drinks and give aways at HQ Delap and Ebeye, at 8 a.m. May 1st. NTA will also sponsor Tennis, Billfish, and Bowling tournaments.

##### *Gugeegue*

As of April 16, 2007, Gugeegue High School is now online with internet connectivity.

#### Education – (Wilson Hess for ) Carlos Domnick

CMI had its 14<sup>th</sup> annual Foundation Day festivities last week. The CMI Board, President Note, and I addressed those in attendance. Part of what was discussed was a new vision for CMI. CMI will be a model community college in the Pacific in future years. CMI just received an unqualified audit of its operations ending with the 9/30/2006 fiscal year.

WASC recently visited Coop and Assumption schools. It appears that both schools will receive a good report.

#### Health – Dr. Alex Pinano

I reported wrong information about an incidence of Typhoid Fever. I apologize for this. The Pacific Basin Medical Association will conduct a meeting here in Majuro from August 1 – 3, 2007. The Taiwan medical team is here and practicing medicine.

Bill reported that the Tuberculosis problem in the Marshall Islands is now being reported on the Yahoo home page. We've seen a different variety of this disease – intestinal and stomach TB.

#### Environment – (Jim McLean for ) Don Hess

##### *Adopted Cabinet Minutes*

On 3 29 07 The Cabinet approved the establishment of a working committee to collectively coordinate and take immediate steps to contain the Majuro Landfill situation. The committee is comprised of the following;

Chief Sec.  
Sec MPW  
Sec MOF  
Sec MOH  
Dir. EPPSO  
GM EPA  
Rep from MALGOV  
Rep from MAWC

and,

2. Directed the committee to provide a report with recommendations, on a Short Term (to contain) and Long Term (to Secure) Plan of Action with detail cost, required equipment/materials and possible timeline, to the Cabinet at the earliest possible time.

I will be in contact with the Chief Sec upon his return to Majuro this evening to discuss the next steps.

##### *Environmental Committee Report*

The Majuro Atoll Solid Waste Corporation was formed in February 2007. At the first meeting officers were elected:

Chairman – Smith Ysawa

Vice – Chair – Jisam Kaisha

Secretary – Don Hess

We met at least once a week in February and March. The main objectives of the meeting were to organize the corporation and come up with some sort of game plan. The major hurdle that was needed to overcome was that of finances. In short we had none. We were promised monies from Public Works through ROC, Compact money, EPPSO money and some other sources. MALGOV was and is very reluctant to commit to anything.

Finally within the last two weeks we received \$325,000 from Public Works. We now have a six month working budget that includes;

Setting up an office at the landfill

Purchasing new collection bins – made from plastic

Purchasing a two garbage trucks – front loading and compacting.

We also are using the last of the funds from the ADB TA to do a GIS study for location of the bins and size of the bins. Further we are looking at options to charge businesses and government for trash pick-up. No details yet.

We are in the process of writing up a project for the compact funds which includes the purchase of more bins.

In regards to the landfill – this is also a major problem we have been exploring. MICS has started separating trash into plastic, glass, hazardous materials, and green waste. These have been segregated at the dump. We are in the process of expanding this.

The major problem at the dump is the seawall which is incomplete and not constructed so as to be able to withstand waves and high tides. We are looking at options of a pyramidal structure using interlocking cement blocks. In order to build the seawall correctly, the cost estimate is approximately 1.4 million. To extend the wall to Royal Garden and repair the existing wall in that area is another 1 million. If we can find the funding for this and continue with the separation of trash, we can extend the dump life for another 4 – 5 years. In this time we can look at other options for disposing of the trash. We tried through the cabinet to have the dump declared a disaster so that outside funds such as USAid would be available. Instead of this, the cabinet formed a committee. See attached.

This committee has met once and asked for a long term plan and short time plan and budgets. The committee is meeting again this week to review these plans and budgets. What is to come of this is unknown.

Membership and Public Relations – Liz Rodick

There are 40 paid members currently. At the end of last year there were 61. This drop is mostly from the private sector. I'll circulate a list of those private sector businesses that haven't renewed their membership. We need to be concerned about this. If there is something that the Executive Committee should do, we need to hear that from our members.

### Special Projects – Sam Smith

The Harlem Ambassadors are seeking a sponsor for a possible trip here near the end of the year. I'm in discussions currently with the Ministry of Internal Affairs about this opportunity for the children of the Marshall Islands.

The Guam Lions Club wants to help revive the Majuro Lions Club. This is a social oriented organization unlike the Chamber of Commerce. You all should be receiving applications via e-mail if you'd like to join.

US and RMI postal rates will rise on May 14, 2007. Zip code 96960 is a valid "international" zip code.

- **Special presentation on traditional mats by Bill Weza, Maria Fowler, and Dolores Debrum**

On April 26<sup>th</sup> here in the Melele Room there will be a weaver's exhibition and silent auction. Originally a conference was held in November of 2006 and lasted for two weeks. The purpose was to revive an ability to produce "pre-war" and even "pre-1900" weaving patterns. Mary Lou Foley who is a Director of the Bishop Museum in Hawaii and Maria Fowler investigated living examples of these ancient Marshallese designs in the Bishop Museum. These designs were brought back to Majuro. Outer islands weavers were invited to come and learn about the old designs. The weavers then went back to their respective islands and produced what you see here today on display. Weavers from Arno, Mili, Ailinglaplap, and Namdrik participated. Iroj Michael Kabua has generously loaned us some of the examples that you.

The April 26<sup>th</sup> exhibition and silent auction will feature an open bar, complimentary pupus, and cost \$20 to attend. There will be 5 judges of the traditional mats. They will pick the winning mat. Bidders will not know which mat won until after the auction. Sponsors of this event include: USP, MIVA, Continental, BOMI, JJJ, KKK, Micronitor, Easy Price, Trust Company, NTA, the Fowlers, the Strauss', PII, G&L, RRE, WUTMI, and BOH. Maria Fowler, Carmen Bigler, Dolores Debrum and Irene Taafaki will be available to explain the weaving tradition.

Please be aware of a new book that is available at USP. It was written by Irene Taafaki, Maria Fowler, and Randolph Tamen. The book documents local traditional medicine and costs \$25.

Meeting adjourned at 2:00 PM.

Minutes prepared by:

Jim McLean

Approved \_\_\_\_\_

Approved with Corrections \_\_\_\_\_