

STANDING COMMITTEE REPORT NO. 17-48

RE: C.R. NO. 17-18/H&SA

SUBJECT: CONFIRMING THE NOMINEE DR. VITA SKILLING AS
SECRETARY OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS

SEPTEMBER 24, 2011

The Honorable Isaac V. Figir
Speaker, Seventeenth Congress
Federated States of Micronesia
Second Regular Session, 2011

Dear Mr. Speaker:

Your Committee on Health and Social Affairs, to which was referred
C.R. No. 17-18 entitled:

"A RESOLUTION TO CONFIRM THE NOMINATION OF DR. VITA SKILLING
TO THE POSITION OF SECRETARY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND
SOCIAL AFFAIRS OF THE FEDERATED STATES OF MICRONESIA.",

begs leave to report as follows:

The intent and purpose of the resolution are expressed in its title.

Dr. Vita Akapito Skilling has been nominated by the President of the
Federated States of Micronesia to the position of Secretary of the
Department of Health and Social Affairs. Title 2, section 207(1), of
the Code of the Federated States of Micronesia sets out that this
nomination is subject to the advice and consent of Congress.

Dr. Skilling's curriculum vitae is included in Presidential
Communication 17-41. For the past four years Dr. Skilling has resided
on Pohnpei while serving as the Secretary of the Department of Health
and Social Affairs.

Dr. Skilling completed medical training at the University of Hawaii
and a residency in Pediatrics at the Fiji School of Medicine. She has
also completed post-graduate distance learning from the University of
Otago in New Zealand.

PUBLIC HEARING

Your committee held a public hearing on the nomination on August 3,
2011.

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The hearing was conducted in two sessions, the first with the nominee herself and the second with staff members of the Department of Health and Social Affairs.

HEARING WITH THE NOMINEE

The nominee appeared, accompanied by her husband, Senator Bob Skilling of the Kosrae State Legislature.

The hearing began with welcoming remarks from your Committee. The floor was then opened to the nominee for a statement. The nominee expressed her wish to remain Secretary of the Department of Health and Social Affairs for another term. The nominee feels she has done a lot toward the organization of the Department and has initiatives planned for the Department if she is again confirmed.

Your Committee asked the nominee about ways to alleviate Compact-Impact internally. The nominee stated that at this time there are screenings done, but only for infectious diseases like tuberculosis. The nominee stated that over the last few years the Department has focused on awareness and prevention programs. The idea is to reduce the risk of diseases, thus reducing the need for treatment.

The nominee admitted that the effects of these preventive steps would not be realized for some time. The nominee was told that there is pressure for visible action on this issue. The nominee told your Committee she is aware of these demands but the resources are not there to greatly increase treatment in the FSM. She explained that even with dialysis machines in each state the operation and maintenance of these machines cannot be afforded. There are also issues with access to clean water and reliable power. The nominee stated that for this reason the FSM is not in any position to provide treatment. She reiterated her focus on prevention measures, citing these obstacles as factors favoring prioritization of prevention over treatment.

The nominee was then asked about the supply of health professionals the FSM has access to. The nominee cited numbers showing that many doctors and nurses would be retiring soon. Your Committee expressed the need to replace these professionals and asked the nominee how nursing and medical school could use incentives. The nominee agreed there was a problem with not enough of our students going into medical

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fields. She stated that success in courses like English and science in primary school increase a student's likelihood to study science or medicine in college.

Your Committee asked for the nominee's assessment of whether the Nation is trending better or trending worse regarding general health. The nominee told the Committee this is a difficult question to answer. She cited many statistics pointing to both a healthier FSM and to a less healthy FSM. She stated that the Nation is becoming more aware of what should be done. The problem remains in implementation, but the foundation policies have been identified are in place.

HEARING WITH DEPARTMENTAL STAFF

Your Committee held a public hearing with Department employees on August 5, 2011. None of the attendees testified negatively regarding the nomination. The attendees were asked if the Nation is getting healthier. The response was that the programs the nominee implemented while Secretary during the previous administration will produce results over time, and that the Department has adopted initiatives that will improve the health of our Nation if given the time to take effect.

Your Committee has received several informal communications from staff at the Department regarding the nomination. The communications bear mixed messages. Your Committee notes these mixed messages and invites members to view the communications before making a decision on the nomination.

CONCLUSION

Based on the above your Committee is satisfied with the qualifications and dedication of the nominee and recommends her confirmation as Secretary of the Department of Health and Social Affairs. Your Committee recommends that, if confirmed, Dr. Skilling work to improve the delivery of health services in the FSM, including training FSM citizens in health care.

Your Committee on Health and Social Affairs is in accord with the intent and purpose of C.R. No. 17-18, attached hereto, and recommends its adoption.

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Respectfully submitted,

/s/ Tony H. Otto
Tony H. Otto, chairman

/s/Yosiwo P. George
Yosiwo George, vice chairman

/s/ Tiwiter Aritos
Tiwiter Aritos, member

/s/ Dohsis Halbert
Dohsis Halbert, member

Florencio S. Harper, member

Berney Martin, member

/s/ Joseph J. Urusemal
Joseph J. Urusemal, member