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## *House of Representatives*

### INTRODUCING THE BLUE PACIFIC ACT

#### **HON. ED CASE**

OF HAWAII

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Wednesday, July 30, 2020*

Mr. CASE. Madam Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 7797, the Boosting Long-term U.S. Engagement in the Pacific Act, also known as the BLUE Pacific Act. I am proud to have introduced this bill together with my colleagues Congressmen AMI BERA, TED YOHO, BRAD SHERMAN and DON YOUNG, as well as other members of our Congressional Pacific Islands Caucus.

Scattered across the vast waters of the Pacific from Hawai'i and Rapa Nui to Palau and New Caledonia are countless isles and atolls that constitute what we know as the Pacific Islands and their sub-regions of Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia. The collective land and maritime exclusive economic zones of the Pacific Islands cover more of the Earth's surface than the land areas of China and Russia combined. These islands are home to diverse and dynamic cultures and people on the front lines of climate change and facing significant challenges to long-term sustainable development.

The United States is not some remote power in this integral part of our world. For two centuries we have been, and today we are, a Pacific nation. We have jurisdictions of our own among the family of Pacific Islands, including my home state of Hawai'i. We have longstanding ties with all of the Pacific Islands, be they independent nations, countries in free association, or territories of our friends and allies. Countless Americans died to liberate our Pacific neighbors in storied battles including Tarawa, Peleliu, Guadalcanal and more during the Second World War. In my own district is the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific, the final resting place of so many of these warriors.

Our foreign policy in the Pacific Islands is driven by this deep historical relationship and the shared interests and values built by decades of consistent but quiet engagement. Over the past twenty years, the United States has provided over \$5 billion in assistance for the region. In the past decade, multiple Administrations and Congresses have heightened our engagement in the Pacific Islands as we have focused our attention on the Indo-Pacific region.

Reflecting this renewed attention to the Pacific Islands, last year I joined several of my colleagues in co-founding the first-ever, bipartisan Congressional Pacific Islands Caucus. We are dedicated to promoting greater understanding of this region and advocating for a sound United States foreign policy in the Pacific Islands that advances our shared interests and values.

Our BLUE Pacific Act establishes a comprehensive, long-term framework for United States foreign policy in the Pacific Islands focusing on three essential pillars: security, development and shared values. Our legislation would expand diplomatic and development presence; increase maritime security cooperation and assistance; deepen and diversify trade; support regional economic and social development in areas like public health and education; invest in climate adaptation and climate resilient infrastructure; coordinate with existing regional institutions and like-minded allies and partners; promote shared values like press freedom and gender equality; and strengthen people-to-people relationships and civil society. It would back up our commitment by authorizing \$1 billion in assistance programs for the region for each of the next five fiscal years, more than triple current levels of assistance.

In naming this bill, we not only pay tribute to the concept of the "Blue Pacific" embraced by leaders of the Pacific Islands Forum as a shared identity and platform for collective action, but also intend for our efforts to be informed by and coordinated with the work of existing regional institutions and frameworks. This legislation would also integrate these programs with those of our like-minded allies and partners, including Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Taiwan and more.

I have no doubt that introduction and enactment of the BLUE Pacific Act will be welcomed by our partners and allies in the Pacific Islands. In uncertain times, this legislation sends a clear and powerful statement of what our foreign policy seeks to achieve: a regional order built on mutual assistance and benefit, free of coercion, and fully respectful of the sovereignty of all nations. We seek to empower the countries and people of the region to determine the course of their own destinies. As a Pacific nation, we hope to share in that future alongside our Pacific Islands neighbors.

The BLUE Pacific Act is a first step in that direction. I encourage my colleagues to join me in cosponsoring the BLUE Pacific Act and urge swift consideration of this critical legislation.

Thank you.