



Written by [James Heiser](#) on October 5, 2009

## Costly Guam Base Raises Controversy Over Jobs

With a population of approximately 178,000 people residing on an island roughly one-seventh the size of Rhode Island, the smallest state in the union, the U.S. territory of Guam rarely captures much attention in the minds of the average American.

However, as the government prepares to expand a military base in Guam at a cost of \$15 billion, that situation may change.

[According to MSNBC.com:](#)



In the midst of a recession that has cost millions of Americans their jobs, a massive military construction project on the U.S. territory of Guam is provoking a unique debate that boils down to this deceptively simple question: Should the government be more concerned about creating jobs or minding the taxpayers' money?

At the center of the debate is one of the biggest construction projects on the U.S. government's "to do" list: a roughly \$15 billion military base expansion that is expected to require some 20,000 construction workers starting next year. Guamanian Americans will fill some of the jobs, but most are expected to go to foreign workers from the Philippines, China, and South Korea.

But a Hawaii lawmaker is challenging the rules that govern the project, which includes the construction of the military facility and housing for 8,000 U.S. Marines and their families. Rep. Neil Abercrombie, D-Hawaii, inserted a provision in the 2010 defense appropriations bill to require 70 percent of the project jobs go to residents of Guam or the U.S. proper. And, in an attempt to lure more stateside American workers to jobs in the far-flung territory — a seven-hour flight from Honolulu — the amendment would roughly triple hourly pay on the project to match Hawaii's wage levels.

"It's using U.S. taxpayer dollars to build a U.S. military base on a U.S. territory," said Dave Helfert, Abercrombie's press secretary. "Why would we not use those dollars to put as many American workers to work as we can, especially in the construction industry, which has been hit so hard?"

The entire issue is fraught with controversy: The status of the U.S. territories remains unresolved decade after decade; the stationing of U.S. soldiers and sailors in [two-thirds](#) of the nations of the world is perceived as one factor in an unsustainable federal budget; and the false choice of either hiring "foreign laborers" or paying triple wages to bring in laborers to an island where half the population earns under \$10 an hour and a fourth of the people live on food stamps, are only several of the issues tied up in the Guam controversy.



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According to the MSNBC story, Japan is covering \$6 billion of the project's \$15 billion budget as part of a shift of U.S. forces out of Japan; 23,000 military personnel and family members will be relocated to Guam — roughly a 13 percent increase in the island's population. The expansion of facilities in Guam will [triple](#) the number of military personnel there.

Undeniably, the anticipated influx of new residents — first of 20,000 workers, and then later of a comparable number of soldiers and their families — will bring a great deal of money into the economy of Guam, but to what end, and at what cost? Whether Rep. Abercrombie's amendment becomes law or not, the construction jobs would be temporary and, as all government projects do, simply take money out of one set of "pockets" through taxation so that it can be put into other "pockets" through programs and projects. In an age of bailouts and giveaways, we shouldn't be surprised that the largesse is spreading to every corner of the world. The questions often unanswered in such circumstances are: "What best serves the vital interests of the United States?" and, "What can we afford?"

*Photo: AP Images*



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