

Inaugural Address

Governor John Ehsa

January 9th, 2012

“World Park – 2023 and Beyond.”

My fellow Pohnpeians I am honored to stand before you today. I wish to thank you for the support that has allowed me to continue the important work we began four years ago. Continuing forward with the work and projects we have initiated is very important to the ultimate success of policies and programs aimed at enriching your lives and bringing us a secure future. Today I will explain the steps my new administration will take to address the very real issues and challenges we face across our islands and how we intend to answer the coming end of Compact economic assistance in 2023.

The theme of my first administration was Pohnpei Met. This theme has carried us forward to today and will carry us forward into the future. In support of Pohnpei Met my new administration has adopted “World Park – 2023 and Beyond” as the foundation for planning that will bring Pohnpei Met to full fruition. I am convinced that we must open our minds to new ideas and to think in new ways for the old ways, or business as usual has failed us so many times in the past.

As your Governor I am committed to preparing Pohnpei for the future utilizing and embracing the World Park strategy. Pohnpei State government has taken this position as a mandate from our Legislature. We believe in the merits of this strategy of how we will develop because through close examination it is clear we do not have other viable choices for change and meaningful economic development available to us.

Why the World Park, and why 2023? Because there's going to be a big funeral in 2023, and everybody wants to know what Pohnpei State is going to bring to that funeral. In 2023, Compact economic assistance ends. Although the Compact will not end, the economic assistance portion will die. So the question everyone is asking is this: What is Pohnpei going to bring to the funeral in 2023?

Is Pohnpei ready to take responsibility for its own economic future, or is Pohnpei going to come empty-handed in 2023? My answer is Pohnpei will be ready for economic independence in 2023 when Compact economic assistance dies.

In our State economic planning process we have developed our answer to both the yearly slow decline or step downs in economic assistance offered to us through the Compact and the pending end of Compact economic assistance in 2023. We have embraced the core premise of the World Park, which is to create a stronger private sector through developing a sustainable tourism based economy.

Sustainable tourism is our best option as it links to and can benefit all other sectors of our economy. Sustainable tourism is planned tourism and seeks to balance private sector development with environmental and cultural protection. We only have one chance to get tourism on the right path and to ensure it stays on that path means we have to plan it.

The World Park much like the traditional yamwe value so much has been growing quietly deep in the heart of Pohnpei. Our Traditional Leaders see the value and have identified the World Park as the key-organizing concept for the future of Pohnpei. The Government has begun to dig it up out of the ground, but it's too big for the government to carry by itself. Once the World Park comes out of the ground, all sectors of Pohnpei – Tiak, Government, churches, Li en Pohnpei, youth, and even Pohnpeians who have gone abroad, must all pitch in to help carry the World Park to 2023 and beyond.

The World Park is being planned by us and will be lived by us the people of Pohnpei. It will set the course for how Pohnpei will develop into the future but it all depends on our willingness to make positive changes in our daily lives. We must modernize and do so on our own terms.

We must all be moving in the same direction. Yes, people think it is too difficult to clean up Pohnpei and build a road from the mountains down to the main road, but

this is our task over the next four years and into the future. Working together, we will harvest the World Park out of the rich Pohnpeian soil and carry it down from the jungle, so that when 2023 arrives, Pohnpei will have a worthy contribution to the funeral that will impact all of our fellow Micronesians. We will be as ready as possible to meet the impact of 2023.

Pohnpeians including traditional leaders, government and so many of you our people have identified the World Park as our answer for a better future. With it we are implementing a unique global position as a State unified and committed to sustainability across Pohnpei and all of our islands from Pingelap to Kapingamarangi. We will develop a more beautiful and pristine Pohnpei as a managed tourism destination that holds the potential to spread economic benefit to our outlying communities and islands as well as the businesses of Kolonia. While we accomplish this we will strive above all else to protect and improve our environment for Pohnpeians and for the coming eco-friendly visitor industry. This focus on enhancement of culture and strengthening of environmental protection is crucial for it is our unique culture and beautiful environment that will attract visitors.

The World Park is an economic engine for managed growth. It is an organizing strategy and marketing position that takes our vision of Pohnpei Met into the future. However this is not with the aim of making Pohnpei just like so many over

developed island locations around the world. Instead our strategy firmly sets our identity to ourselves as proud Pohnpeians, to the global community and to the potential visitors who can bring significant economic benefit to all of us.

However this can only happen if we plan and manage how we attract and host these visitors ensuring Pohnpei will always be for Pohnpeians first. We are drafting a plan that can help us attract tourism but also control tourism. Our State strategic development plan will ensure that our culture and environment, the very things that will attract visitors is fully protected as highly valued assets for all of our futures.

We will emphasize how different and special Pohnpei is from the rest of the world. We are a State with a vision for our future and a plan for how we intend to make our vision a reality.

If we stop for a moment and consider options for meaningful development we cannot see a secure future in fisheries, agriculture for export or manufacturing. We clearly see the potential of tourism. Tourism has potential because it can be connected to all other sectors to create a web of constructive relationships that foster economic growth.

We must be wise and spread the economic benefit of tourism around the entire island and even to our outer islands. We will market Pohnpei as a unique and distinctive place in the world, a place with a unique identity, a place with a global

commitment to environmental sustainability and the home of a resilient people who warmly welcome visitors on our terms.

If we are to achieve economic independence then we need to develop a unified vision of the road ahead, and take advantage of the strengths of each segment of society instead of fighting against each other. As in my previous administration, I am committed to work cooperatively with our Traditional Leaders, the Pohnpei Legislature, our local governments, the private sector, education, health care and our environmental organizations to achieve Pohnpei's goals.

A unified vision also means a greater commitment to cooperation with our sister States of Chuuk, Kosrae and Yap and with the FSM National Government.

We acknowledge the power in unity of purpose and shared vision with our sister States and we pledge to work closely with each as they develop their plans for the future. We can be more effective working together than apart in addressing all of our collective challenges and in forging one unified national position of a great Nation making difficult choices for the betterment of our people.

We recognize that the FSM National Government holds tremendous potential for the future of Pohnpei, and we should take advantage of that potential instead of trying to undermine it. Mr. President, Pohnpei seeks your hand in cooperation as we embark on our hard climb ahead. We seek to build a better future but we cannot do

it alone, we seek what the World Park offers and that is both State and National unity, one people behind one strategy going forward to pave the road to a more prosperous future.

In addition to unity, we need to revive and embrace our unique cultures, traditions, and lifestyles. Even in the Twenty-First Century, these can be strengths instead of weaknesses. We must begin to focus on greater production of healthy local foods instead of importing junk food. We must use the “Micronesian way” of governing by consensus as a strength, instead of allowing the need for consensus to drive us apart. We must love and respect our lands and our waters, our language and our culture. Yes, our way of life is unique, but we can turn that into a benefit instead of a liability. Through the careful development of a sustainable tourism based economy designed to benefit all Pohnpeians we can set the stage for a systemically linked economy that is both efficient and forward looking.

Pohnpei State development planning has been focused on four key sectors that need to be addressed, and we will focus on these areas over the next four years. In particular, we need to focus on those programs and projects that will have the greatest cross-sector linkages and therefore provide systemic benefits instead of focusing on small, isolated problems.

The first sector is the Public Sector, and everybody agrees that this is an area that needs effective reforms. With our consistent record of clean financial and compliance audits, Pohnpei has established its credibility and has a strong foundation for future improvements. Key areas to focus on here over the next four years include reinventing government to make it more effective with fiscal reform to address the decrement in compact funding. Through the World Park model we look to see the public sector partnering more closely with other sectors to facilitate success.

In the Human Resources Sector, Pohnpei has again made significant strides during my first administration. Our educational testing scores are the highest in the FSM, and we lead the other states in our health and education sector indicators. Over the next four years our efforts will be geared towards tailoring our human resources assets to match our economic development needs to support the development of Pohnpei as the World Park.

The Productive Sector also saw significant recent changes with the passage of a new Foreign Investment Act. Regulations have been written and the new Foreign Investment Law is now ready for full implementation. We also have a new Office of Fisheries and Aquaculture. In keeping with the vision of the Third Economic Summit, which identified fisheries, agriculture, and tourism as key areas for private sector growth, my Executive Reorganization proposal will contain a new

function of Food Security and Office of Tourism within the Department of Economic Affairs. Thus, each key area of fisheries, agriculture, and tourism will have its own government office whose goal will be to support and assist private sector investments in those areas.

The fourth key sector in our planning is the Infrastructure Sector. Over the past four years, we have achieved great success in renovation and construction of our health and education facilities. Over the next four years, we need to focus on the economic infrastructure that private individuals and businesses rely on, including power and water, roads, and telecommunications. Our road construction workshop during the last administration was a great success and has opened the door to new potential financing options.

Although telecommunications is a national responsibility, Pohnpei needs to do what it can to upgrade access to new telecommunications technologies, particularly wireless broadband access, for all Pohnpeians. The area of power generation is, quite frankly, an emergency situation that demands creative and open minded solutions. If we continue to approach power generation as we have in the past, we will continue to see rolling blackouts and, eventually, collapse. I will be charging a revitalized Economic Planning Commission with focusing on the power generation situation as an urgent problem that needs to be addressed. We are

currently assessing all means and resources to address both short and long term power generation needs, especially alternative energy sources.

In order to jumpstart World Park – 2023 and Beyond, I will submit critical legislation during the next week as part of a “First 100 Days” legislative agenda that is designed to lay an aggressive and essential foundation to enable us to achieve our desired future.

First, I will submit nominations for cabinet officers and other key advice-and-consent positions. I would kindly ask that the Legislature consider and approve of these nominations with the greatest possible speed. Key personnel are necessary for the various departments to operate in a smooth and efficient manner, and also necessary to advise me personally on critical issues facing Pohnpei.

Second, I will submit a detailed government reorganization package. We are currently operating under the Executive Reorganization Act of 2000, with certain minor amendments. Pohnpei and the Pohnpei Government have significantly changed during the past 12 years. The past four years has given me a very good understanding of how the Executive Branch needs to be structured to most effectively implement the World Park concept. Again, I would humbly request the courtesy of a speedy and positive consideration from the Legislature on the proposed Executive Reorganization.

Third, I will resubmit tax reform legislation. The five FSM Governments, working together over many years, have come up with a comprehensive tax reform package that can lay the foundation for fiscal independence when 2023 arrives. Last year, the FSM Congress enacted the first piece of that tax reform package, the Unified Revenue Authority Act, and the states need to pass enabling legislation by April 19, 2012 when the Unified Revenue Authority is scheduled to begin its operations.

Fourth, I will resubmit legislation for the purchase of a Field Trip Ship. Last year, a Task Force reviewed the challenges associated with the replacement of the Micro Glory and proposed the purchase and financing of a Field Trip Ship. The vision of the World Park is a unified vision that includes all the people of Pohnpei, including the people of the outer islands. A new Field Trip Ship is absolutely necessary for the people of the outer islands, and for Pohnpei, and I urge the Legislature to act on this issue in a timely manner. This is a great demonstration of the systemic connects fostered by the World Park concept.

Fifth, I will submit comprehensive legislation for full implementation of the school lunch program. The school lunch program embodies the cross-sector vision of the World Park. It has been proven to help our children do better in school, it is proven that introducing our children to healthy, local food is the best thing we can do to reduce or eliminate the long-term risks posed by non-communicable diseases, and it will help farmers and fishermen. The school lunch program has been a

cornerstone of my platform and it clearly has the mandate of the people of Pohnpei. The time for full implementation is now.

In addition to the legislative agenda outlined above, I will be reviving the Economic Planning Commission created by Title 5, Chapter 3 of the Pohnpei Code. The Economic Planning Commission will be the nerve center of our “World Park – 2023 and Beyond” initiative and will be charged with overall World Park planning and oversight of implementation. During the next 100 days, the Economic Planning Commission will be focused on Pohnpei’s fiscal situation, at the key productive sectors of fisheries, agriculture, and tourism, and at critical public infrastructure.

Our challenges are many but with linked hands we can be a State self-directed toward sustainability across all facets of our lives. We can create a future built on Pohnpeian wisdom, traditional values and transformational leadership.

Let us be the masters of our lives and harvest a brighter future through embracing a new approach that can only succeed with all of us working in unity toward one common goal. I ask you to step forward from each village and municipality to offer something of yourselves to our mutual cause. Sitting back and assuming someone else is going to create our future will not work this time. So I challenge each of you to pitch in and clean your neighborhoods, to organize a World

Parkcommunitygroup to identify and develop new small-scale tourism business start ups in your communities. Above all to get involved and work together as we plan and prepare for a new age of economic independence and proud guardianship of our lands and waters. As stated so clearly in the preamble to our Constitution:

“We extend to all nations what we seek from each: peace, friendship, cooperation and love in our common humanity. With this Constitution we, who have been wards of other nations, become the proud guardian of our own islands, now and forever.”

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