

## **NEWSLETTER/PRESS RELEASE**

### **The Civil Service Commission elects New Leadership and Reports its Progress to the Legislature**

The Civil Service Commission (CSC) held its first meeting of 2014 this past January 23, continuing on to January 24. With members Herman R. Deleon Guerrero, Charles Calvo, Augustina Kukkun, Felicitas P. Abraham and Eric L. Plinske present, the Commission addressed an agenda of both new and old business.

The first item of business was the election of new officers for Calendar Year 2014. By a unanimous vote, Herman Deleon Guerrero was reelected as Chair, and Felicitas Abraham as Vice-Chair.

Additional new business included:

- discussion of the Government's internship program for college graduates lacking work experience and how to revitalize the program, which has fallen out of use.
- an initiative to advise the Legislature of the progress made by the Commission since its first organizational meeting in December 2012 after the appointment of sufficient Commissioners to form a quorum, allowing the effective conduct of business.
- efforts to obtain federal funding and assistance for human resource training and programs for the Commission, staff of the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) and other government employees.
- the need to review such personnel issues as the frozen annual within-grade increase and promotional increase programs and other matters within the Personnel Service System Rules and Regulations.

The Commission also reviewed progress made by OPM in resolving the numerous appeals and grievances long on hold due to the previous long-time lack of an appointed quorum. OPM has been able to reach a majority of the appellants and grievants, and is working with them to determine what actions will be needed to resolve their cases.

The Commission, in its discussion, noted recent Legislative concern with personnel issues brought to their attention and welcomed their interest in limiting political involvement in the personnel and hiring processes and their desire to ensure that government operations were fair and more effective to all. The Commission pointed out, in a letter to the Presiding Officers that the Commission and the Director of Personnel are always available to provide advice and assistance on Human Resource matters. The development of a mutually assistive relationship will also benefit the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) and the Civil Service Commission by making them aware of the

Legislature's or their constituent's concerns and to ensure that the Congressman or Congresswoman has full and accurate information on the matter.

The Commission also assured the Legislature that the employment policies and practices of the Government are continuously being reviewed and adjusted as necessary to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of personnel operations. Public Law No. 17-80, which took effect on August 31, 2012, mandated the Commission (which was "re-born" and conducted its first organizational meeting on December 4, 2012, after being dormant and without a quorum for the past few years) to promulgate rules and regulations governing employment issues for the government workforce, which includes developing and maintaining fair and non-discriminatory hiring practices.

The letter pointed out that the Civil Service Commission and the Office of Personnel Management take their responsibilities seriously. Since its re-activation, the Commission has begun reviewing the government's main employment policies:

1. **The Personnel Service System Rules and Regulations (PSSR&R)** – This document, which regulates employment under the Civil Service System, is currently under review by OPM, after which the drafted document will be finalized by the Civil Service Commissioners for final adoption and promulgation.
2. **The Excepted Service Regulations** – This regulation provides guidance for government contract employment, a category of employment which is not subject to Civil Service rules and regulations. This regulation has been reviewed and updated, and is now being implemented and enforced.

The Office of Personnel Management has now been tasked by the Commission to review and prepare all CNMI employees grievances, to include all pending files which go back as far as 2006. This backlog resulted from the lengthy period of time when the Commission lacked enough Commissioners to function. Available documents and records are being put together at this time to prepare for an investigation into each case to allow for their resolution.

The Civil Service Commission recognizes that the tasks they face are very challenging, but are currently being addressed. As mentioned above, ensuring that the government follows fair and non-discriminatory hiring and employment practices is a major concern of OPM and the Commission.

The Commission concludes its letter by recognizing that the Office of the Governor, the Legislature, and the Civil Service Commission are all working toward the same goal of an effective government, based upon the hiring and retention of highly qualified government employees, through effective employment practices. The Commission is pleased to have the Administration and the Legislature as partners in achieving this goal. The Commission feels strongly that all share the responsibility to make the government and its employment practices more effective and that all involved must work together to

accomplish this mission for the benefit of all employees and the Community that all serve.

The Commission has also committed to enhancing the capabilities of the Commission members and the Office of Personnel Management and its staff through workshops and other trainings.