

More than seventy years have passed since the Japanese occupation of Guam during World War II, a 32-month period where the Chamorro people suffered greatly as the United States and Japan turned their island home into a battlefield. In the intervening years, as other communities in the Pacific and the US have been compensated and recognized for their suffering, the Chamorro people of Guam have not.

In December 2016, the island first received word that war reparations had finally passed the US Congress, however elation of this fact was quickly soured when the details of how reparations would be provided were revealed. While the proposed law would compensate the families of those who died in Guam during World War II and those living survivors who experienced various atrocities, Section 30 monies were identified as the funding source.

Section 30 monies are made up of the taxes from US Federal employees and retirees living on Guam. Per the Organic Act they are earmarked specifically to be given to the Government of Guam. In essence under the proposed law for war reparations, compensation for what Chamorro war survivors suffered would come from monies already earmarked for Guam to receive. To use this money, rather than a separate funding source turns what is a long-awaited resolution to a tragic era of Guam's history, into a potential insult, it means that Guam will be paying its own reparations.

This central problem overshadows a number of other disconcerting aspects of war reparations as it currently exists, which is not limited to vagueness in terms of funding levels, those who survived World War II but died in the seven decades since not being eligible for any compensation and the fact that 5% of all war reparations is being paid to an office in the US State Department which has done no outreach to the Chamorro community. All together these issues threaten to make what was meant to be a solemn process through which our community could achieve closure, to something that cruelly reminds us of our second-class status and the continued colonization of our island. In this way, despite the passage of war reparations, this issue, the decolonization of Guam and others, remain emblematic of the need to change Guam's political status to one where our concerns and our past suffering is taken seriously.

The Commission on Decolonization calls on Congresswoman Bordallo to immediately secure a new funding source for these reparations. We also call on her to hold a series of town hall meetings in Guam, so that she can face the community and provide further understanding as to why war reparations was passed in such a problematic way and what she is currently doing to ensure that justice for the Chamorro people remains on the horizon.