

STATE OF THE JUDICIARY ADDRESS

Delivered by The Honorable Chief Justice F. Philip Carbullido

June 12, 2020

Greetings and Acknowledgements

Good morning, Governor Lou Leon Guerrero; Lt. Governor Joshua Tenorio; Speaker Tina Muña-Barnes and members of the 35th Guam Legislature; my fellow Judicial Officers; all Judiciary of Guam employees – those present in this hall and those attending virtually; distinguished guests; people of Guam. It is always an honor to come before you to speak about the state of the Judiciary. Speaker Muña-Barnes, thank you for welcoming us and giving me this opportunity.

Recognition of the 2020 Hustisia Award Recipient

Every year, May 1 marks national Law Day. For our Judiciary, the occasion is typically commemorated by the delivery of the Chief Justice's State of the Judiciary Address, followed by a full two weeks of activities and outreach designed to educate the public and island students on the importance of the rule of law. One of the most auspicious commemorations during our yearly celebrations is to bestow the prestigious Hustisia Award – an honor given to an individual or organization who exemplifies a life committed to the cause of justice. Although we had minimal activities this year, we did confer the Hustisia Award.

So, before I begin my address, I would like to recognize this year's posthumous recipient: the late Chief Justice Peter C. Siguenza, Jr. Chief Justice Siguenza died on March 30, leaving behind his wife, Kathy Fokas Siguenza, his daughter and our Judicial Educator, Dawn Siguenza Blas, other family members, and many friends among the profession. He gave a lifetime of service to the people of Guam and the legal system, with a brand of justice that was as unique as it was thoughtful, deliberate, and reasoned. For me, Chief Justice Pete, as many of us fondly knew him, was not just a colleague; he was a dear and respected friend. I would like to ask Kathy and Dawn to please rise, and for all of you to please join me in recognizing the late Chief Justice Pete Siguenza and the indelible mark he left on our legal system.

Introductory Thoughts

On January 21 of this year, I assumed the position of Chief Justice once again, honored and excited to serve my fourth term in this role. In the days and weeks that followed, I was determined to hit the ground running, and my management team was given fair warning they had better be ready to do the same. And they were. There were many exciting projects in the works that would help our judicial branch work better, smarter, and more efficiently for our people in the face of ever-growing demands for justice services. I was eager to resume community outreach efforts and invest more in our public-private partnerships and collaborations.

We planned monthly morale-boosting and employee appreciation events, knowing that a satisfied and happy workforce is a productive workforce. Since the day I was installed as Chief Justice in January, I had begun thinking about the remarks I had planned to deliver to this body, excited to apprise you and our island of the state of your Judiciary. It was a dynamic time within our branch, and I was confident and proud of the direction we were headed.

Less than two months later, however, life as we all had known it changed. And we, as an entire island, were abruptly faced with a very sobering question: *What now?* Like almost everywhere else in the world, Guam was besieged by a new virus, about which little was known – the 2019 novel coronavirus and the disease it causes, known simply as COVID-19. I vividly recall Sunday afternoon, March 15. Though Guam had yet to have its first confirmed case of COVID-19, the Governor had just declared a State of Emergency the day before, preparing for the inevitable. I called in Justice Robert Torres, Justice Katherine Maraman, Presiding Judge Alberto Lamorena, and a few of my managers to meet at the Supreme Court to collectively devise a plan to address what our branch would do if or when Guam started seeing local cases of COVID-19. During the third hour of our meeting, we received word that Guam had just gotten its first positive cases.

There was a palpable heaviness in the room as the news settled in – as I'm sure was the same for each of you when you heard the news. But I must tell you that, at least among my team of advisers gathered with me, there was an equally palpable feeling of resolve – resolve to craft and execute a plan to meet this unprecedented crisis, which almost certainly would lead to closure of many

government, and possibly private, operations. And the very next day, with the Governor's executive order closing non-essential government operations and mandating social distancing measures, this is precisely what came to be.

So here I am, delivering my State of the Judiciary Address under these most unusual of times – in the legislative session hall with only 48 people present, all of whom are wearing masks, and none of whom are seated closer than six feet from each other. This is not the speech I had envisioned giving. I envisioned telling you about how proud and excited I am of the progress and expansion of justice services and capital improvement projects underway within our branch.

And though these are no longer the things I will be focusing on in this address, I am even more proud of what I will be reporting to you today, which is how your third branch of government and the dedicated employees who comprise this branch have risen to the occasion under these pandemic conditions, committed to keeping the wheels of justice moving forward.

Steady, Stable, and Safe

Senators, Governor, Lt. Governor, people of Guam, I am proud to report that the state of the Judiciary is steady, stable, and safe. The Judiciary's performance in this pandemic is attributable to several factors, the most significant of which is the strong foundation upon which the Judiciary of Guam has been built. This foundation has allowed us to innovate – really, at a moment's notice – so we could keep our employees safe, and also continue to serve our people consistent with our mandate. With this solid foundation in mind, I would like to give you all a brief glimpse into the Judiciary's performance and our future outlook.

The mandate of the Judiciary of Guam is clear: to administer justice by interpreting and upholding the laws; to resolve disputes promptly; to provide accessible, efficient, and effective court services. Yet when the entire planet was operating under a haze of panic, uncertainty, and loss, the need for calm, measured responses from our government leaders was critical. As the leader of this branch, I knew we had to forge ahead so justice services would never stop, even while everything else was on a temporary and indefinite hold.

This is where I must credit and thank my colleagues on the bench and my managers, because together we responded as best we could to quickly and comprehensively develop plans to shift our entire way of doing business, knowing full well that the justice system could not, and would not, close – not even for a pandemic.

Our New Normal Begins

It was time to think outside the box and move toward a path of innovation and creativity to make sure our mandates never fell victim to this virus. If you will indulge me for a few moments, I would like to tell you about the operations of our branch beginning at 12:00 noon on March 16 – the day and hour when our courthouse doors closed to the public. Along with the rest of the world, Guam had embarked on the so-called “new normal” of life in a pandemic. A concept previously relegated to the storyline of a Hollywood movie, this was surreally the life in which we had all suddenly found ourselves. Schools were closed, and within a few days, so was almost everything else. All non-essential government employees were ordered to remain at home – for how long, no one knew.

While we acted prudently to send most employees home, these very employees continued their work to keep the Judiciary afloat. They took their work home and ensured litigants’ rights were protected, those who needed urgent action would still be served, and that necessary orders and guidance from the courts were drafted, issued, and disseminated to the public.

I have heard rampant criticism over these past couple of months about government employees continuing to be paid their wages while staying home. I obviously can only speak about the branch I lead, but believe me when I say that, for Judiciary employees, the past two and a half months have by no means been a vacation. I am tempted to challenge those critics to spend a 40-hour workweek with the Judiciary. My educated guess is that, at the end of their workweek with us, their view of government of Guam workers would change.

Across the divisions of the Judiciary, court employees were tasked with writing standard operating procedures, updating policies, and completing research projects and training modules relative to operations in pandemic conditions. They were participating in national webinars – sometimes at

2:00 in the morning because of time zone differences – all in an effort to collaborate with other court systems nationwide on best practices in operating during these unprecedented times. Weekly, every division head gave an accounting to our Administrator of the Courts of how every employee within their divisions spent their workweek – including detailed work descriptions, time spent on tasks, and outputs.

And lest we forget, for many of these employees, they did all this while simultaneously trying to teach themselves Common Core math so they could homeschool their children – which, I have been told, has been no picnic! The task has not been easy by any means, and our employees have my utmost respect and appreciation for rising to the challenge.

Let me start by thanking two of our Judiciary divisions in particular – because without them, operations in these pandemic conditions would have been impossible: Our MIS division, and our Facilities division. The herculean efforts of our technology specialists under the leadership of MIS Administrator Joe Mannion have allowed us to conduct the work of the courts almost entirely on a virtual platform, understanding that mandatory social distancing and “stay at home” orders would otherwise bring the wheels of justice to a screeching halt.

Next, I must recognize our facilities and maintenance staff, who have utilized this opportunity of having our courthouse relatively empty and have worked relentlessly to sanitize the buildings, literally from top to bottom. We had our HVAC system and carpets cleaned; furniture, countertops, and all common areas were scrubbed down; hand sanitizer dispensers and COVID-19 precautionary signs were installed throughout the buildings; and excess furniture was removed from public areas to deter gathering.

Under the leadership of our Procurement and Facilities Administrator Carl Dominguez, these dedicated employees have not only cleaned, cleaned, and then cleaned some more, but they have also overseen the installation of protective barriers in all open areas that service clients and patrons, and are continuing to help reconfigure and redesign work spaces to keep our employees safe and adequately distanced when we eventually return to somewhat normal operations.

Doors Were Closed, But Justice Continued

I have just shared with you *how* we have been able to function as a Judiciary for the past few months; now let me tell you some of *what* we have been doing. I will start with our Courts and Ministerial and Probation Services divisions – the divisions which directly support our trial court judges and the critical work they do. Even through this challenging time, judges, clerks, and chamber staff took seriously the lives and liberties of our people, understanding that many still required the assistance of the court. Through the combined efforts of our employees, the cooperation of attorneys, and the understanding of patrons, we continued to provide many critical services – without sacrificing the safety of all those involved.

Most hearings were held via teleconference or videoconference. And where in-person hearings were required, the Judiciary implemented procedures to protect the health and safety of patrons and employees present in the courtroom.

Our trial judges and magistrate judges continued to conduct hearings ranging from magistrate hearings, to juvenile delinquency, to orders of protection, to COVID-19 quarantine and isolation petitions. Nearly 4,000 filings have been accepted since we closed our doors to in-person business, and over 1,000 virtual hearings have been conducted in the Superior and Supreme Courts.

Though we closed our physical facilities to the public to help prevent the spread of the virus, we continued to remain open, providing essential services virtually or online – and eventually some limited in-person services – to the public. We did our best to ensure we remained transparent, responsive, accessible, and accountable. We collectively kept the public and media informed of what was going on inside the courthouse. We disseminated information as best we could with the resources we had, without direct person to person contact.

We have also continued to hold regular monthly meetings of the Judicial Council via videoconference. Within two weeks of the Governor's declaration of a State of Emergency, our Judicial Council implemented rules to provide for videoconference meetings, which was necessary to continue critical court proceedings and operations without interruption, while still respecting the Open Government Law and the public's right to participate.

Justices and staff of the Supreme Court have continued to meet regularly, via Zoom and other virtual means, to discuss pending cases and periodic updates to administrative orders to guide employees and the public on court operations in the ever-changing landscape of COVID-19 conditions. There is an old saying that “you can’t teach a seasoned dog new tricks.” For the sake of preventing an EEO claim, notice I used the term “seasoned.” Well I am living proof that it can be done. I now consider myself a superior user of Zoom and other videoconferencing technology, much to my children’s surprise.

Through almost 100 percent electronic and virtual means, the Supreme Court has continued to accept new appeals, conduct panel conferences, issue opinions and orders, grade bar exams, and even swear in someone to the bar by videoconference. And on May 1, we held Guam’s first of several virtual appellate arguments via Zoom, which was livestreamed on the Judiciary’s YouTube channel. Parties got their day in court, members of the public had live access to these proceedings, and the health and safety of all involved were never compromised. So while it may not be business as usual, we most certainly are still in business.

Critical Support Divisions

Since this pandemic hit our shores, every day has been filled with uncertainty, and as the days passed, new challenges unfolded. Information changed by the hour and all lives were affected, but we still needed to deliver on our mission. More than ever, we knew that securing and maintaining alternate sources of funds, such as grants, would become increasingly important, with our island and regional economies taking big hits. To help augment our finances and maximize non-government funding sources, the staff of our Court Programs Office worked diligently – and entirely from home – to meet critical grant deadlines, obtaining and managing federal grants to fund Judiciary programs, which would help the Judiciary respond to emerging needs in our community.

Among the deadlines Court Programs was able to meet was the FY 2020 Sex Offender Registry grant and the FY 2021 DWI Alcohol Education Program application – two critically important programs the court administers. I would like to take a moment to thank Cerina Mariano, who ran

this division so effectively for the past five years. Cerina has moved on to the next chapter in her career. Although her move is a loss to the Judiciary, her leadership has left this division on very solid footing.

But there has been a whole other aspect of the island-wide shut-down that may not immediately come to mind when you think of court operations, and that's the dozens of wards under the care of the Public Guardian – wards who still need regular contact, who still have medical appointments, who still need their finances attended to, and who still need their medications delivered. The staff of the Office of the Public Guardian and the Marshals provided these services to group home residents, caregivers, and wards who could not come to the Office of the Public Guardian. Our OPG staff drove wards to the clinic, stood in lines at the bank, and shopped for wards' food and supplies, making sure that their needs continued to be met. These employees are heroes in my book, as I'm sure they are to the wards they serve.

We're In this Together

Since the onset of this pandemic, we have often heard the phrase “We're in this together” used to describe how the world is coping with the coronavirus challenge – isolated from one another, yet interconnected in ways we had never been before. We're in this together – how true that is. It is true for private citizens, and it is true for government. We all have resources, skills, and talent to share, and when we come together, we can do so much more.

In this vein, I want to recognize and thank some of our Judiciary employees who have stepped up to assist the executive branch in addressing the COVID-19 emergency. Twelve of our marshals and eight of our probation officers willingly served at the frontlines of this crisis, putting themselves in harm's way voluntarily, with no promise or expectation of special compensation. Day in and day out, they helped augment executive branch law enforcement by providing security at quarantine sites, assisting public health workers with surveillance and home checks, and performing any other tasks they were called upon to do. I would like to thank our Chief Marshal, Mr. Troy Pangelinan, and our Chief Probation Officer, Ms. Rossanna Villagomez-Aguon, for responding to this request for assistance and finding a way to deliver without compromising the work within the Judiciary.

In a different but equally important way, our registered court interpreters offered their very valuable skills to assist the executive branch in drafting and recording COVID-related public service announcements and health advisories in various languages in an effort to reach as many of Guam's residents as possible. I would like to thank and recognize Mr. David Welle, who coordinated this effort and ensured that our court interpreters were there to answer the call for help. Our branch not only focused on our mandates, but we came forward to help support the services of the executive branch. Cooperation is key if we are to survive this as a government and as an island. The Judiciary has been and remains willing to lend our services to this cause, because truly, we are all in this together.

Collaboration and Beautification

In keeping with the "We're In This Together" spirit, I read a couple of articles recently that struck a chord. One article was about the Guam Chamber of Commerce relaunching its Make Guam Beautiful campaign, challenging island residents, businesses, and organizations to clean up in anticipation of our island reopening to visitors beginning July 1. The other article was an interview with Guam Visitors Bureau Interim President and CEO, Former Governor Carl Gutierrez, who reminded us to use this downtime, while we have no visitors to speak of, to reinvest in sprucing up and refurbishing our tourist sites. I agree wholeheartedly that a big part of our economic recovery depends on each one of us embracing the "We're In This Together" attitude. We all play a part in keeping Guam beautiful, which in turn keeps Guam attractive and welcoming to our visitors.

When I resumed office in January, one of our targeted capital improvement projects was the beautification of both the Judiciary's exterior and our island. Within our own campus, we are waiting for the rainy season so we can start the design and planting of our landscape beds. Beyond our grounds, volunteers from our Facilities Division clean, mow, trim, and remove the debris from the grounds of Latte Stone Park on a bimonthly basis. Our Marshals Division likewise volunteers to clean and maintain the grounds of Triangle Park.

Our island outreach started back in February when volunteers from all Judiciary divisions, along with their family members, turned out to clean up the village of Piti on a Saturday morning. I was there that day and was in awe of the number of trash bags our employees filled and the number of tires pulled out of the jungle for disposal. This was the first of what I foresee will be many clean-up projects our branch will take part in. I gladly commit the Judiciary to take up the Chamber's and GVB's challenge. Let's all do our part to get Guam ready as we prepare to welcome our tourists back.

Transitioning Back

We are now at a point in our island where restrictions have begun to be lifted and more operations have resumed, albeit under new safety conditions. And I must thank you, Governor Leon Guerrero, for always keeping the Judiciary informed of all developments, which has allowed us to plan appropriately for our operations at every stage of this pandemic.

For the Judiciary, almost three months have passed since we physically closed the courthouse to the public. During these pandemic times, I convened a Transition Planning Team of division managers, tasked with reviewing their respective division's Continuity of Operations Plan, or COOP, to ensure consistency in crisis-response planning.

This group also worked arduously to survey employees regarding their questions and concerns in transitioning back to work, to assess physical workspaces and floorplans for every division to ensure social distancing, and to engage in policy development such as for teleworking. They continue to provide health and safety educational information to our employees, recommend public health and sanitizing measures, and advise the Administrator of the Courts on the phasing in of operations.

In the last two months, I, along with Presiding Judge Lamorena, convened the "Remote Hearings Committee" and the "Implementation Committee on Virtual and In-Person Hearings" to assess the expansion of remote court hearings and provide recommendations for conducting these hearings. Striking the delicate balance of ensuring access to justice, protecting the constitutional rights of

individuals, and assuring the safety and health of our employees and the public is not easy, and it is something we continue to undertake together.

One of the court's biggest stakeholders is the Department of Corrections, and we have continued to collaborate with DOC on the expansion of remote hearings in criminal cases, including addressing the technology capabilities of the Judiciary and DOC, using the Zoom platform. DOC identified additional workspaces within its facilities appropriate to conduct remote hearings. The plan is for DOC to have two rooms in Mangilao and two rooms in Hagåtña to connect with the courtrooms via Zoom so trial judges can conduct virtual hearings without the need to transport the detainees to the Judicial Center. This cooperative effort between the Judiciary and DOC – along with the Office of Technology – will allow for more criminal cases to be brought before the courts sooner, and help eliminate or reduce DOC's transportation and security costs and the risk of exposure to the COVID-19 contagion for DOC and Judiciary personnel.

After considering the input of these Committees and the advisories of the Governor and public health officials, we determined that we could open the Northern Court Satellite on May 11 for limited business transactions. That facility averaged over 100 court patrons a day since reopening – a testament to the many services our people rely on our courts to provide.

To stagger our soft openings and slowly introduce our employees back to on-site operations, our Probation Services Division resumed operations on May 18, and on May 27, our Client Services and Family Counseling Division eased back into the Judicial Center, with both divisions focusing on critical client care. Then on June 1, in line with the Governor's reopening of the government of Guam, the remaining Judiciary employees reported back to work at the Judicial Center. This phasing-in of openings and in-person services will be examined and re-examined often, understanding that this is still a relatively unknown virus and that data regarding COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations can change at any time, as the Governor has reminded us time and time again. And we are prepared to adjust.

As we move forward, we must respect public health considerations and do all we can to ensure the safety of our employees and the public we serve. But for now, as Guam seems to have done well

to flatten the curve of new infections, I want to update the bar, self-represented litigants, the public, and our sister branches on the Judiciary's tentative plans for the months ahead.

Today, both the Superior and Supreme Courts are hearing and deciding cases virtually, relying on written submissions and telephonic or videoconference hearings. Before June 5, the trial courts were focused mostly on emergency or urgent matters. Now, under updated guidance from the Supreme Court, our trial court judges are also hearing an increasing number of nonemergency matters where it is feasible to do so without an in-person hearing. The number and range of nonemergency matters adjudicated virtually in the trial courts will continue to grow.

Until now, court deadlines have mostly been tolled. We will soon lift the tolling of certain court deadlines, so most matters may be released from "litigation limbo" and move forward in courts increasingly able to act virtually. Even as our courts reopen for most types of court business, we plan to conduct the majority of court business virtually to limit the number of lawyers, litigants, and court personnel who come to the courthouse, so those who must come in can do so safely with the necessary social distancing. The days when our courthouse welcomed hundreds of persons a day are over, at least for a while. This is simply the reality we must accept.

The Future of Justice Services

Resilience, resourcefulness, and resolve have always been the "Three Rs" of how our branch operates, and I am confident that the dedicated individuals who call themselves "I Familian Kotte" will do whatever it takes to fulfill our mission. And we shall seize the opportunities arising from these unprecedented times.

Long before the pandemic, we recognized that the civil courts of the future would need to resolve an increasing number and range of matters without burdening attorneys, litigants, and witnesses with the need to come to the courthouse.

Before the pandemic, we expected that it would take years to make these changes; with the pandemic, however, we have made substantial progress in weeks. This leads me to add a fourth "R" to how our branch operates, and that is for Reinvention, because even when this pandemic is

behind us, we do not believe we will or should go back to doing things as we did in pre-pandemic times. We are creating a more modern and efficient court system that will survive after the pandemic has passed, and we are doing so more quickly than many thought we could.

We recognize there are many judicial matters that still must be conducted in person. And so we continue to brainstorm ways to address formidable challenges, such as conducting jury trials with social distancing in a pandemic and post-pandemic Guam. These challenges will require us to reimagine how juries are empaneled, where they will sit during trial, and where they will deliberate so jurors can both *be* safe and *feel* safe.

Another challenge is determining how to operate time-intensive treatment courts under virtual or low-contact conditions. Thankfully, Guam Behavioral Health and Wellness Center stepped up to help us make Zoom treatment sessions and hearings possible. Similar collaborations with our community stakeholders are precisely the kind of teamwork that is not only heartening, but necessary if we as an island community are to survive and thrive in the aftermath of this virus.

A Rocky Road, But A Solid Foundation

We recognize that the road we have travelled together in the last few months has often been rocky and at times riddled with unexpected potholes. But we also recognize that, if one had asked at the beginning of this year whether we would be able, in just two months, to transform our court system from one that almost invariably required in-person appearance to one that is mostly virtual, few would have imagined that it was possible or that we would be as far along as we are.

I go back to the sentiment I expressed at the start of this address, which is that it is primarily because of the strong and solid foundation upon which we have built our Judiciary that we have been able to persevere, evolve, and remain responsive to our mission. The success we have achieved is because of the remarkable dedication, imagination, resilience, and hard work of our judges, clerks, MIS staff, probation officers, facilities staff, and other court employees, aided by the equally remarkable cooperation of the bar and public. In the coming months, we will need all of that, and more, because, as challenging as it has been to close our courthouses, it will be even more challenging to reopen them.

A Fair Budget

This brings me to my next point, which is that – pandemic or no pandemic – this is budget season. The Judiciary’s Fiscal Year 2021 Annual Budget has been submitted to the Office of Senator Joe San Agustin. Under normal conditions, it is a challenge vying for a sliver of the budgetary pie. Under our present reality, however, to call it a challenge is a gross understatement. Speaker Muña-Barnes, your branch has the unenviable task of deliberating on and passing a budget bill. Governor Leon Guerrero, you are charged with the unimaginable responsibility of keeping our island economically sound, all while trying to keep us safe. We know the difficult jobs each of our sister branches has ahead of it.

But please allow me this time to convey the challenges that lie ahead for our branch. There is a myriad of issues flowing from this pandemic that will soon fall on the doorsteps of the court. Since March, there has been a halt on legal actions such as evictions, collections, and unlawful detainer actions. With life returning somewhat back to normal, all these actions will soon resume – and likely all at around the same time. We anticipate this pandemic will create a host of first-impression contract disputes, civil actions, and small claims filings. Disputes that have been stalled or put on hold for now will eventually bubble up, and it is our branch that will be called upon to resolve them. This could include disputes among ordinary citizens, and disputes among the highest echelons of government.

On March 22, the Supreme Court suspended jury activities in the interest of public health. The suspension of grand jury proceedings, arraignments, and jury trials has created a substantial backlog. Upon the lifting of more restrictions by the Governor, the Judiciary must be prepared for the onslaught of criminal cases that will need to be heard, including asserted criminal trials.

This backlog will consume much of our trial judges’ time, and will place a great demand on our jury unit. We also understand that, unless we have adequate distancing, safety, and health measures in place, community members will be hesitant to respond to the call for jury service due to, among other things, anxiety or fear related to COVID-19 exposure. All these factors point to

our need for increased resources to address the significant demand on our courts and to ease the legitimate concerns of jurors.

So while we understand and appreciate that our government coffers are meager and our island economy will continue to suffer for the foreseeable future, please consider the heavy burden that our courts will bear in processing, hearing, and adjudicating the many filings, cases, and trials that will almost certainly arise once these stays have been lifted. If we are not given the tools, resources, and adequate personnel, then who will address these disputes? We are by no means asking for special treatment or a pass to cut to the front of the budget line; we simply ask that you make your budget decisions aware of the reality on the horizon for our branch.

Concluding Thoughts

This year, 2020, marks my 20th year on the bench, and it has been a great privilege to have spent two decades serving this branch and the people of Guam. At the start of my judicial career, I never imagined I would be shepherding this branch through a time such as this. But as with everything else in life, we find ourselves where we are, and we do the best we can.

I have always maintained that the court system is a foundational component of the infrastructure of any community, like power and water, because without it, law and order, and the rights of every person in the community, stand to suffer. People count on this branch to deliver the justice they seek. With the steadfast commitment and collaborative efforts of all our court employees, we did the best we could to maintain the quality justice system that our people expect from their third branch of government.

And while 20/20 hindsight is always easy, 20/20 foresight is not. I would venture to say that none of us could have foreseen the life-changing challenges this year would bring. Who would have imagined that a little-known virus would throw our lives into disarray and force us to rethink how we do everything – from simple personal errands like grocery shopping, to the consequential duties of providing essential government services for our people. Every aspect of our daily lives has been affected.

But I am confident that, together, we will recover, evolve, and progress as a government and as an island community. We have a long and proud history of survival – through war, typhoons, earthquakes, missile threats, and yes, we will survive even through this global pandemic. The people of Guam know what it takes to recover together. Governor Lou Leon Guerrero and Speaker Tina Muña-Barnes, you will always have a cooperative and willing partner in the Judiciary. Our island and our people expect and deserve nothing less.

Si Yu'os Ma'åse for your time, and may God continue to bless us all.