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UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20240

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Dear Mr. Secretary:

The political status of the Trust Territory is, to all of the interested Departments, a matter of the utmost urgency. I feel, and I do not doubt that you agree, that we must forthwith take positive, constructive steps to resolve the issue.

Representatives of our two Departments have discussed for many months possible means by which the trusteeship status of the islands of Micronesia may be terminated at an early date. A variety of alternatives has been explored but each has appeared objectionable from some standpoint. Now, however, the Micronesians have come up with a proposal which I feel can serve as a vehicle for quickly reaching our goal. They have recommended that the President appoint a commission to devise "meaningful proposals of the political and constitutional alternatives open to the people of Micronesia."

In my judgment, the most effective means for implementing this course of action is incorporated in the attached preliminary draft legislative proposal to establish a commission to make recommendations concerning the political status of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands. Within a few days we shall be sending this proposal to the Bureau of the Budget for its consideration and for the formal solicitation of the views of your Department and the other interested agencies of the Executive Branch.

At the outset, it should be made clear that I do not consider the commission to be a "study commission," with all that term connotes. I regard the commission to be an action commission with a timely statutory deadline to provide recommendations framed by representatives of the Executive, the Congress and the Micronesians themselves. All of the efforts of this Department will be directed toward assisting the commission in meeting its deadline. This Department will urge that the commission recommend an immediate plebiscite to determine Micronesia's future.

If the necessary concurrence can be obtained, it is my objective to have this proposal before Congress by April 1, to obtain Congressional enactment during this session, to have the commission organized and conducting business by the Fall of this year, and to have the commission's recommendations in our hands early in calendar

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HARVEY DELAGHETTI, CHIEF
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year 1968. In a little over one year our two Departments would, hopefully, be setting up the machinery for the holding of a plebiscite in Micronesia. We would be able to do so with the firm knowledge that Micronesians had been heard and had participated in framing recommendations concerning the plebiscite and that Congress had been as fully and as formally as possible involved in proceedings leading to the plebiscite. I know of no other means for going so far in so short a time that would provide the same reasonable assurance that our actions are well grounded.

My people have attempted to solicit reactions from your Department informally, with the hope that in so doing the legislative review might be expedited. As we have made explicit throughout, this was foreseen as laying the groundwork in an effort to expedite the usual formal clearance.

Turning to the substantive issue before us, I should like to summarize very briefly the major considerations which have prompted me to transmit the enclosed legislation. First, I am impressed by the urgency with which the Department of Defense views the need to cause the Trust Territory to become permanently a part of the United States. This is also the political goal of the Department of the Interior in the Trust Territory. In light of information which has come to my attention, I judge that positive action has never been more urgent than it is today if we are to realize our goals in the Trust Territory. It grows more urgent as the days pass. Secondly, I am impressed by the need which your representatives have expressed to terminate the trusteeship status of Micronesia. You have our wholehearted support in this effort. Thirdly, because of my direct responsibility for the civil administration of the Trust Territory, I am particularly impressed with the recent clear indications that the Micronesians, who until recent months have been rather passive on this subject, are most anxious to have the question resolved. This matter is further discussed in the enclosure.

Proper resolution of this subject requires due deference to the views of the Micronesians, the United States Congress, and the Security Council of the United Nations. We defer to you wholly with respect to the last. As to the first, we intend that the Micronesians be consulted fully and openly as to their own views. This is fundamental irrespective of United Nations involvement. This consultation should take a form which will be visible to the Micronesians and thus credible. But most important of all, the means of consultation should be readily accessible to Micronesians who wish to present their opinions. I know of no method by which this can so fully be achieved as by the use of formal proceedings throughout the Trust Territory, making provision for suitable notice and an opportunity for all to be heard.

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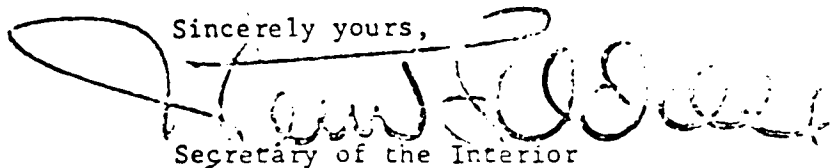
As to the Congress, I know of no means by which we can obtain a formal Congressional involvement in dealing with the status issue as effectively as by asking the Congress, as such, to turn to a legislative proposal. We can, of course, consult informally with key Congressional leaders, but because we must be as certain as possible that the Congress will be willing to accommodate the people of the Trust Territory in a manner agreeable to both the Micronesians and the Congress, we should not rely upon informality. By providing for formal Congressional membership on the Commission, we are assuring some form of Congressional involvement in all steps leading to the Commission's recommendations. By enacting the proposed Commission legislation, Congress, itself, will be requiring that the Commission submit specific recommendations to Congress, which we feel is the most certain means available of guaranteeing that the Congress will act upon the Commission's recommendations. I do not believe that the ends which we seek can be achieved short of sizeable, formal Congressional representation on a Commission charged with responsibilities such as those outlined in the attached legislative proposal.

The Department is not irrevocably wedded to any particular detail of the enclosed proposed bill as long as the substance discussed above is not impaired. Although we have attempted to set forth provisions which are appropriate, we have no doubt that other agencies will have different views, and we look forward to learning of them.

We are wedded only to one premise, and that is that the Executive Branch must proceed quickly and wisely to cause the Trust Territory to become permanently a part of the United States. I would appreciate your views as to how we might bring the issue of Micronesian self-determination to a head more quickly and effectively.

I will be out of the country for some time in early February. In my absence, Under Secretary Luce and Assistant Secretary Anderson would be pleased to meet with Under Secretary Katzenbach and Assistant Secretary Sisco in an effort to reach agreement between our Departments on this matter.

Sincerely yours,


Secretary of the Interior

Hon. Dean Rusk
Secretary of State
Washington, D. C.

Enclosure

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