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X. Approach to U.S. Congress. It is expected that there will be some U.S. Congressional reluctance to offering Micronesia self-government at this time without the extended trial and growth period of the other territories. This reluctance obtains whether we offer a Political Status Act or a Constitutional Convention Bill.

We continue to believe, however, that the U.S. Congress is mindful of our strategic interest in the area and that it can be brought to appreciate the importance of extending U.S. sovereignty over Micronesia. Since Micronesian support is obviously essential to achieve this goal, we believe the Congress can be persuaded to accept substantive requirements necessary to secure such support so long as essential federal prerogatives are maintained.

The question remains, however, as to when we should make this effort to persuade the Congress, i.e. the key figures in the two Interior and Insular Affairs Committees. There appear to be two basic choices, as follows:

1) Consultation soon after the May discussions in Saipan.

This would continue the policy agreed upon by the Under Secretaries last August on the narrower issue of the elected executive -- to approach the Congress only after getting a better idea of Micronesian thinking on the matter. We still do not have sufficient knowledge of Micronesian attitudes on all the issues relating to status, nor do we believe they fully understand our position. Since the purpose of the May discussions is to discuss mutual positions, it may still be

premature to discuss the matter with Congress. We still do not have definitive answers to all questions likely to be asked; after the May meetings we hope to be so prepared. Moreover, an approach prior to the Saipan meeting raises the risk that Congressional leaders would attempt to exercise a veto on our chosen position.

The danger of postponing consultations is that key Congressional figures are likely to feel themselves presented with a fait accompli should our proposal be alive after the May talks. They could accurately point out that the executive branch was aware of potential Congressional objections to the types of proposals contemplated. Any resulting resentment -- which in the view of the Interior Department would be substantial -- could close their minds to our presentation of the bills themselves, as well as the reasoning which led to them.

2) Consultations With Congress Prior to the May Discussions.

This would involve a confidential discussion by Assistant Secretary Loesch with the key figures on the respective Interior Committees summarizing the present situation and direction in which we are going. Secretary Loesch, as he did last October, could also invite the two committees to send staff members to Saipan to sit in on the negotiating sessions.

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In the unlikely event that the early reaction in his discussions is favorable and understanding, Secretary Loesch could describe in greater detail the exact course we expect to take at the May discussions. If, as is to be expected, the reaction is less than favorable, Secretary Loesch would attempt to keep the briefing as general as possible. To the extent specific objections were raised on key issues, he would attempt to persuade the committee leaders to our viewpoint.

Should their objections not be dropped, Secretary Loesch would point out that the executive branch's conclusions had not been reached lightly: territorial precedents had been kept fully in mind, but in order to bring the Trust Territory under U. S. sovereignty, Micronesian support was absolutely essential. While in gaining such support we could not sacrifice basic U.S. interests or federal supremacy, Secretary Loesch could point out that we are convinced that our approach will in fact work to secure U.S. interests as well as offer a good possibility of Micronesian support. He would state, therefore, that we felt it necessary to proceed in Saipan along the lines he had outlined. We would, of course, fully inform the committees of the results of the May session and be prepared to discuss the matter further on our return.

This approach avoids presenting Congress with a fait accompli. It could lead to better congressional understanding of our thinking and possibly even to tentative support. Furthermore, if disagreement exists, it must be faced eventually.

The obvious drawback to this approach is that, if we are unable to overcome existing congressional objections, we would be flouting their clearly expressed views if we nevertheless decided to proceed on our chosen course. There could again be congressional resentment at our actions which could endanger any agreement. The Interior Department believes, however, that resentment under these conditions would be less serious and manageable.

The Interagency Group believes this is an issue which should be considered and decided by the Under Secretaries' Committee.