

Mr. Speaker, Distinguished Colleagues, and Honored Guests:

[Done 8/25/72]

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Hans Wilentz  
11<sup>th</sup> Day  
Aug 24

The cries for self-determination have echoed through the halls of our Congress for many years. We have studied intensely, prepared meticulously, and negotiated patiently for that day when the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands shall bear a new name--that of the Republic of Micronesia.

12  
97

Many of my distinguished colleagues have argued that our dream of self-government should have become a reality long ago. There are others who have contended that yesterday was too soon, while tomorrow will better enable us to answer the multitude of questions that confront us at this, our Second Special Session in Ponape.

As for myself, I must side with those of you who believe that the necessary plans have been drawn up and that we must now lay the foundation for our Republic by convening a Constitutional Convention. In short, the time is ripe and we are entitled to the privilege of enjoying some of the fruits of our labors.

To this end, Mr. Speaker, I am introducing legislation calling for the creation of a Constitutional Convention for Micronesia. The bill bears a strong resemblance to, and has the same intention of Senate Bill No. 231 introduced by Senator Lazarus Salii.

Several considerations have prompted me to submit this alternative piece of legislation. First of all, I am of the conviction that due to the critical nature of the subject matter, the House members have an obligation to themselves, their constituents, and the

general electorate of all of Micronesia to commence discussion on this issue today rather than tomorrow. Simultaneous debate in both houses of Congress will ensure that this issue receives the solemn consideration it is due.

No less significant is my contention that the proposed legislation before you has certain features which make it more desirable than its Senate counterpart. I would like to make several points.

First, you will note that there is a significant difference between my bill and that of Senator Salii's in the number of delegates, and the method by which those delegates are selected. The slight increase in the number of delegates is important insofar as it grants more men the opportunity to cast their vote in the process whereby the foundation of our house shall be built. But more important, my bill provides for the direct representation of the people of Micronesia by stipulating that one delegate shall, by direct vote of the people, be chosen from each of Micronesia's twenty-one Representative Districts. Contrary to this, Senate Bill No. 231 bestows upon the District Legislatures the power to determine how 22 of the proposed number of 28 delegates shall be selected. This means that it is left to the discretion of the District Legislatures to decide whether the delegates from their respective districts will be chosen by direct vote of the people or by appointment by the District Legislature.

Gentlemen, I cannot overemphasize the importance of direct representation

at the Convention. As you and I sit here this morning, let us not forget that we are here because our people have, by direct method, chosen that we come. The Constitutional Convention should be no different. Just as we are a people's Congress, so should it be a people's Convention. My bill ensures that this shall be so.

The second major difference between the two pieces of legislation focuses on the role of our Joint Status Committee. In his letter to the Senate Ways and Means Committee, Senator Roman Tmetuchel suggested that the Status Committee be required to attend the Convention. So impressed was I by the Senator's recommendation that my bill stipulates that the Status Committee shall go to Palau for the purpose of rendering advice and guidance to the Convention delegates. Let me emphasize, however, that their presence is not a mandate calling for them to draft the Constitution so that it can be ratified by the delegates. Rather, it is an admission by the Convention that their knowledge is unsurpassed in matters regarding status. To waste their expertise is to complicate the already monumental task facing the future delegates.

Finally, I should like to point out that my legislation provides that after the convention is convened, the Convention, its delegates and committees, shall travel through the various districts in order to ascertain the views of our people. If we are going to have a constitution and a government that is truly the work and reflection of the aspirations of all of Micronesia's people, then we can do no less.

One last word, Mr. Speaker. Few times are a people ever given the opportunity to make their mark on history. Few times do a people reach a point in their life where their votes truly have an impact on their future political destiny. My friends, this is one of those rare occasions. Micronesia has embarked upon a dangerous, but exciting voyage to determine her fate. We in the Congress are the navigators. I have no doubt that if we chart our course well, then smooth sailing surely awaits us.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.