

Talks, Round One: Land Claim

SAIPAN — Saipan Senator Edward Pangelinan yesterday suggested the Mariana Islands could move into a format of close association with the United States and then, perhaps, "it would...be appropriate for all military retention and public

land to be turned over to the government of the Mariana Islands."

The suggestion came during the first day of talks here with President Nixon's personal ambassador, Franklin H. Williams, concerning the political future of the Marianas.

The matter of land claims — particularly, what ideas the United States military has for land the U.S. now clutches in the Marianas — could be one of the sticky issues as the status talks develop.

The military forces are not now stationed on any of the Northern Marianas, which stretch some 400 miles north of Guam, but hold large plots of land on Saipan and Tinian.

Williams said he would take the request under advisement. Williams told the Marianas

political leaders that he envisions for them a political arrangement within "the American family" where the United States would provide operating funds on a matching basis. In addition, the United States could undertake programs with Federal grants, he suggested.

The first round of talks is scheduled to end today with the second round expected not until March. A definite request for a political status such as a commonwealth is not expected to come from the Marianas leaders until the second round.

The official opening ceremonies took place in the Mount Carmel auditorium, where they got underway before 300 students and Saipan citizens and officials and the Guam U.S. Navy band, which played the

Star Spangled Banner and "America the Beautiful." Williams was the keynote speaker.

"As a free people, with all of our human imperfections, we cannot be less than heartened and grateful that after coming to know us, the people of the Marianas would have reached the conclusion, voluntarily, that you desire to become a permanent part of the American family," Williams said after reviewing the situation which has led to these status talks separate from those for the rest of Micronesia.

Guam Gov. Camacho attended the ceremonies, as did Comnavmarianas Admiral Rear Admiral George S. Morrison, and Marianas Bishop Felixberto Flores, who gave the invocation.