

Franklin Williams:

Pacific Deadline

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'Not easy to determine what Micronesian people want'

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Status

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WASHINGTON—The U.S. Ambassador to the Micronesian Status Negotiations said Thursday disagreement and confusion among Pacific Trust Territory residents is a puzzling barrier to determining their future relationship with this country.

"It is not easy to determine what the people of Micronesia really want," said Franklin Hayden Williams, President Nixon's emissary to the status talks, before the House Interior Subcommittee on Territorial and Insular Affairs. "There are wide differences of opinion on the future political status question within Micronesia."

Williams appeared to bring members up to date on talks dealing with the 2100 islands and their 115,000 residents. Under a 1947 law, this country administers the area as a United Nations trustee.

Some citizens want to maintain trusteeship status, Williams noted, while others prefer "close association" with the U.S. as a commonwealth, permanent association with the U.S., short-term affiliation, or even complete independence. At the moment, Williams said, no one has come up with an accurate way of measuring public opinion in the territory.

"This situation makes the talks more difficult both for the Micronesian delegation as well as ours," Williams said.

"I'm going to have to confess that from what I've been told, a very large segment of opinion in Micronesia doesn't know very much about the issue."

Proposals for straw votes and census surveys have not advanced very far, Williams said.

Members of the subcommittee suggested later that perhaps they might have to travel to the area themselves to get a better idea what the people want. "We may make an effort to join up with you for a day or so in the Marianas, even though it's a long and arduous trip out there," Chairman Philip Burton, D-Calif., told Williams, who agreed that such "visits in the past have been very useful."

Rep. Patsy T. Mink, D-Hawaii, praised Williams for his progress in the negotiations. "Instead of being far from completion of your work, indeed you are now extremely close," she said.

Rep. Jonathan Bingham, D-N.Y., a former UN Trusteeship Council member, told Williams he was "impressed, but not as optimistic as Mrs. Mink sounded. I think we're in pretty deep difficulty" with respect to getting UN approval of the negotiation results. Bingham said this was especially true, in his opinion, of efforts by the Marianas to make their own deal with the U.S., apart from the other islands.

Rep. Antonio Won Pat of Guam said the people of the Marianas are "confused" about American policies and are "becoming alienated from our American way of life" because of the "military impact on the natives, and then the civilian government workers, the Peace Corps and all kinds of people representing the United States . . . I can understand why the people are confused."

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