

U.S. favors united Micronesia

by Mike Malone
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SAIPAN—Ambassador Franklin Haydn Williams, President Nixon's personal representative to the Micronesian status negotiations, said yesterday in Majuro that the United States favors a common future political status for the Marshalls and Caroline Islands.

Obviously responding to recent separatist rumblings in the Marshalls and Palau districts, Williams said in a formal statement:

"The U.S. will continue to hope that out of forthcoming negotiations and, more importantly out of the deliberations within Micronesia regarding the nature of your future

"The issue is new only with respect to timing, not substance," he continued. "The U.S. government's position on public land is clear. We stated at Hana that all Micronesian land belongs to the Micronesians, that its control should rest in the hands of Micronesians, that it is our intention that all public land will be returned to Micronesians, and that ultimate responsibility for the disposition of public land should rest with Micronesians

The ambassador said the United States had assumed that the wishes of the Micronesian people regarding control of their lands would be reflected in a Micronesia constitution and in subsequent decisions by authorities at the various levels of the government.

"Now the Joint Committee and the Congress of Micronesia want the U.S. to undertake the task of returning public land to Palau," he stated.

"The U.S. intends to consider this suggestion carefully. Naturally, we must weigh it in relationship to all of Micronesia's districts. The real question is to whom or what entity in the districts the land should be returned.

"Because of the multiplicity of the different land traditions among the various districts, the return of public lands is a complex question requiring extensive consultation and reflection."

Williams said the views of the TT administration, the Congress of Micronesia, the Status Committee, and private citizen leaders would be solicited in reaching a decision on the timing of the return of the public lands.

Touching on the sensitive issue of Micronesia's fragile unity, Williams said the problem is considered the most important question today by many Micronesians, but added it is basically one which Micronesians must solve themselves.

"However, the U.S. has pursued the future status negotiations with the Joint Committee on Future Status in the hope and expectation that a common status will be forthcoming for the Marshalls and Carolines."

Although Ambassador Williams made no reference to the Mariana Islands district, separate negotiations leading to permanent ties with the United States were initiated last December.

government—will come a united Micronesia.

"We continue to believe that despite considerable cultural diversity and differing local problems and interests, a unified Micronesia would best meet the economic, social, and other needs of the people concerned."

After two days of meetings with the six district administrators of the Trust Territory in Majuro, Williams' statement said his delegation had been prepared to resume full negotiations this month, but a new element which he said required "careful study" was introduced into the negotiations.

"I was informed that it had now become the position of the Joint Committee on Future Status and the Congress of Micronesia that the current political status negotiations cannot go forward unless and until all public land in Palau is returned to the traditional chiefs in the district in trust for the people.

Last month a second district, the Marshall Islands, passed legislation creating their own status committee to initiate separate negotiations, although no official requests for such talks have yet been made.

Williams said the United States has an obligation to the people of the Trust Territory to give them an opportunity to choose freely their own future and that the U.S. intends to fulfill that obligation.

"While we have said that the Micronesians will have the full right of self determination, that sovereignty resides in the people of Micronesia, it is also our responsibility to see that they are not stampeded into a decision of future status by local minorities urging one solution or another. On the other hand, we have no desire to delay an early resolution of the future status question.

"We favor an orderly transition to full self-government and termination of the trusteeship agreement on a time-table approved by the people concerned—the Micronesians themselves," Williams declared.

"The U.S. therefore stands ready to continue to work cooperatively with the Joint Committee on Future Status, with the leaders and people of Micronesia, toward a status agreement reflecting the true will of the people."

Williams left Majuro for Truk Wednesday and is expected to arrive on Saipan this weekend. His delegation will meet with the Mariana Islands Status Commission for a second round of negotiations next week.