

Urge Open Future As Status

By Mike Malone
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SAIPAN—Rota's Marianas future status negotiator Benjamin T. Manglona believes the Mariana Islands should keep its political options open.

"Close association with the United States is desirable now," the former Micronesian congress representative said, but added islanders should not bind future generations.

"The Pacific and global map may be different 20 to 30 years from now. We need to set the foundation for our political future now and get the best protection we can. But at the same time, we need to leave the options open for our future leaders," he said.

Manglona, who served in

the Congress of Micronesia during the first five years of its existence, resigned his seat in 1970 and became the public works officer on Rota. He chaired the influential House Resources and Development Committee, represented the congress at the United Nations Trusteeship Council in 1969 and was a member of the Joint Committee on Future Status.

In 1970 he was the lone supporter of the United States offer of commonwealth status to all of Micronesia on the committee—a proposal that was overwhelmingly rejected because it lacked provisions for full internal control over land, laws and further changes in future status.

Manglona supported the

commonwealth offer despite the problems. He knew his constituents wanted close ties with the United States, but he wanted safeguards such as plebiscites to periodically determine new political directions the people would like to follow.

Concerning the present negotiations, now in their second week, Manglona said the concept of permanency is constantly repeated by the U.S. delegation, but he personally feels the Marianas should "get away from that idea" and advocate ties that should not necessarily be binding forever.

"Close association is desirable, but the door should be left open," he said.

Manglona also believes

that U.S. citizenship should be optional and hopes it will not influence land matters and the applicability of federal laws in the islands to any great extent.

"Land is our treasure, our most precious commodity. As leaders we have to protect the land interests of our people as much as possible," he said, adding it would be beneficial if an arrangement similar to American Samoa could be worked out so that only native-born citizens could own land.

The military? "A sensational and sensitive issue," said Manglona. "The people of the Marianas generally welcome the military. I believe the people of Tinian also are willing to accommodate them, provided a good and

reasonable offer is made. But nobody there favors giving up their entire island."

Meanwhile, representatives of the United States met with members of the Marianas status commission for private sessions at the sub-panel level yesterday, a spokesman for the U.S. said.

He said discussions concerning the "technical aspects of the nature of the political relationship" took place and that "progress is continuing."

A source said the Marianas delegations has asked that talks now move on to other key topics, including future financing and land controls—but that the U.S. side has insisted on fully completing the "political areas" first. The talks will continue today.

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