

JAMES M. WILSON STATEMENT ON TINIAN HOMESTEADING-MARIANAS  
DISTRICT LEGISLATURE

August 8, 1973

A number of statements have been made recently implying that there has been a "cut-off" of economic development programs in Tinian, particularly the homestead program. These seem to reflect considerable misunderstanding. There has been no "cut-off". But a public explanation appears to be long overdue on what is actually happening and why.

There has been no thought in the first place of stunting Tinian's economic growth. For the people of Tinian economic growth should continue in uninterrupted fashion and should flourish. But as you know we are talking with your status commission about possibly making changes in the use of land on Tinian. If anything like this should happen we must be very careful not to go blindly down the same paths followed earlier until those discussions got underway.

In particular we want to avoid at this critical time anything that resembles a permanent alienation of public land on Tinian. The Marianas Status Commission indeed suggested in May that any future programs involving possible alienation of public land be curtailed until the Marianas themselves can decide what uses they wish to make of such land. Other economic development activities, however, have not been and should not be curtailed.

Secondly, the negotiations presently underway involve as one of several features the possible use of land by the United States Government. What specific areas might be selected is still to be agreed. They may involve, however, areas that have already been homesteaded or areas in the public domain previously considered available for homesteading.

It is our feeling that it would be clearly unfair to someone who had waited for years for a homestead to have one approved and move on the land only to have it taken away a short time later for public purposes. It is better from his point of view to wait a relatively short period of time while negotiators are deciding what land may be made available for military use and what land will remain clear for homesteading.

Thirdly, it should be emphasized that nothing like a permanent cut off is involved. This is only a temporary delay in the program which should not last at most for more than a few months. Applications can still be received and processed. Those which have been approved but have not been fully perfected prior to the start of negotiations will continue to process through the granting of deeds and will not be affected by the moratorium.

Finally, it must be noted that it would be difficult in the last analysis to explain to the American Congress and the American public why a program was continued routinely which could only add to the cost to the American taxpayer when compensation had to be given for newly approved homesteads in areas which by final agreement came to be set aside for military use. Also, the opportunities for speculation are too obvious to mention. I am sure you as elected representatives of the people can fully appreciate this point of view.

For all of these reasons a limited and temporary suspension in the issuance of new Tinian homesteading permits appears in order. The pity is that a full explanation was not given the public earlier so that these unfortunate misunderstandings could have been avoided.