



OFFICE OF MICRONESIAN STATUS NEGOTIATIONS

Washington, D.C. 20240

16 October 1973

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

Subject: Political Education in Micronesia

Participants:

Ambassador Franklin Haydn Williams  
Mr. James M. Wilson, Jr.  
Mr. Harmon E. Kirby  
Ms. Mary Vance Trent  
Mr. Stanley S. Carpenter  
High Commissioner Edward E. Johnston

Senator Lazarus Salii  
Congressman Ekpaap Silk  
Mr. Strik Yoma

Place and Time:

CINCPAC Guest House, Makalapa, Honolulu, October 10, 1973

After welcoming Senator Salii and Congressman Silk, Ambassador Williams turned to the business of the meeting -- political education. He commented that he was certain that everyone in the room considered political education in the Trust Territory to be a subject of great importance. The Ambassador said he wished to assure Senator Salii and Congressman Silk that all of those present from the TTPI Government and from Washington considered the matter in that light. He indicated that he, Mr. Carpenter and the High Commissioner had met earlier that day at which time the High Commissioner had outlined a new plan for political education in Micronesia which he had decided to launch at an early date. Noting that it is the responsibility of the executive branch of the Trust Territory Government to develop and carry out efforts to prepare the people of Micronesia for self-government, the Ambassador then asked the High Commissioner to present the general outlines of his new program.

The High Commissioner said his administration recognized its responsibility in this field and the necessity of doing much more than has been done in the past. Since the new expanded program which he was proposing will be broader than what has traditionally been labelled "political education" in the TTPI, the High Commissioner said he intends to call it a "Program of Education for Self-Government in Micronesia". He presented this as a comprehensive plan ranging from basic civics, including new courses to be developed in the schools, to programs involving adult education and expanded channels of public information. The program will be strictly objective, impartial and factual in nature. He indicated that while the program will be his responsibility, he will seek the support and cooperation of the Congress of Micronesia. He observed that, inter alia, the program will help prepare the Micronesian people for a constitutional convention.

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The High Commissioner, in remarks concurred in by Mr. Carpenter, said that significantly increased funding will be necessary for this new program, and indicated that additional funds will be sought for the remainder of the fiscal year in the pending supplemental appropriation request for the TT budget which the Department of the Interior is now presenting to OMB and the U.S. Congress. The High Commissioner said his administration will give the development of this program first priority and that he expects to explain it in depth to the Congress of Micronesia in his State of the Territory message at the opening of the COM's next session.

Senator Salii said he had no trouble with this concept of a broadly conceived program initiated and directed by the executive branch of the TTPI Government.

Observing that in developing and executing such a program, the executive branch of the TT Government would presumably need to involve both the Public Affairs and the Education Departments, the Ambassador asked the extent of present instruction in general civics in the schools. Mr. Yoma said the subject is taught principally in the high schools. Senator Salii thought it is begun in the seventh and eighth grades. There was general comment to the effect that the type and extent of such teaching varies greatly throughout the TT and that, in any case, execution of a meaningful program of education for self-government might require considerable teacher training.

It was agreed by all the participants in the meeting that the development of a program along the lines envisaged, running from basic civics through preparation for self-government and including preparation for the actual choice of political status, would probably require the advice of outside consultants. It was also felt desirable to conduct periodic evaluations of the program and prepare regular progress reports.

Senator Salii suggested that a role might be played in this educational program by the prospective political education commission provided for in a bill passed by the special session of the Congress of Micronesia at Ponape in 1972 but so far not implemented. He indicated that the Congress plans to activate the commission at its coming session. The High Commissioner inquired regarding the present status of the legislation establishing the commission and asked if the commission was in fact still alive. He then noted that Congress might, if it wished, feel encouraged to play an advisory role in the program he was outlining.

There was some general discussion of the wide variations in political awareness and interest in the TT and of the consequent need for flexibility in programming to arouse interest and make the program meaningful. Mr. Yoma illustrated this point with a story from one of the outlying islands in the Marshalls where, after a speaker had made a prolonged attempt to explain to the people some of the issues relating to future political status, the audience only wanted to know whether the visiting group from the district center had brought them some sugar.

Congressman Silk supported this point regarding the lack of political awareness in the remote areas and the consequent need for information programs designed to arouse the interest of the people.

In further discussion of the scope of the prospective program, Mr. Wilson asked Senator Salii's views on the relevance of the new program to plans of the Congress of Micronesia for setting up a constitutional convention, noting that the people of Micronesia would need to be prepared to select delegates, to follow the convention's proceedings, and to vote on the result. Senator Salii said the educational program could be most useful in this regard and indicated that the forthcoming congressional session would again consider his bill for holding a constitutional convention at an early date.

The Ambassador recalled his long-standing statements that the U.S. will assist in funding a constitutional convention and said that despite his declarations and other official indications of U.S. willingness to assist, no official request had been received for such funding until a letter was recently sent to him by Senate President Nakayama and House Speaker Bethwel Henry. The Ambassador noted that as he had indicated to Nakayama and Henry informally in Washington, the U.S. Government is willing to help and is presently considering the means and extent to which it can best assist in funding the convention.

The Ambassador noted that he, OMSN and the Status Liaison Officer in Saipan would not take part in the actual preparation and implementation of the educational program being presented by the High Commissioner. He wished to suggest, nevertheless, that it would be important to include within this comprehensive program preliminary preparation for the actual act of self-determination by the Micronesian people. He went on to say, however, that he continued to expect that following agreement between the U.S. delegation and the JCFS on the terms of a status agreement (e.g., a draft compact), the two sides would jointly present and support this position before the people of Micronesia in an educational/informational program separate from and in addition to the one being discussed here. He indicated this had earlier been discussed by Senator Salii and himself. Senator Salii said he had agreed to this approach.

Mr. Carpenter commented that the prospective plan for a comprehensive program of education for self-government would meet a long-felt need. He said that the TTPI Government's Department of Public Affairs would be the principal executor, working with the Department of Education.

Mr. Yoma indicated that he considers the new, expanded educational effort to be necessary and timely. He thought that through careful conception and faithful implementation it could be expected to accomplish its purpose of raising the level of political consciousness throughout Micronesia. He emphasized the necessity of assuring adequate funding for the program.

Senator Salii commented that he welcomed this initiative by the TTPI Government's executive branch and said that it would be up to him and Congressman Silk to see that the Congress was properly informed of the proposed undertaking. He expressed appreciation for this joint meeting with all the concerned elements - the High Commissioner and Mr. Yoma, Mr. Carpenter, and the Ambassador.

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