

Week in Review

11/14/73

SUMMARY OF NEWS OF THE TRUST TERRITORY OF THE PACIFIC ISLANDS
Prepared by Micronesian News Service

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Oct. 29-Nov. 2, 1973

U.S. PLEDGES FUNDS FOR CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION

The United States government officially offered, through U.S. Ambassador F. Haydn Williams, to underwrite a portion of the cost of holding a Micronesian Constitutional Convention in a letter last week from Williams to the leadership of the Congress of Micronesia. The Ambassador was responding to a letter to him from House Speaker Bethwel Henry and Senate President Tosiwo Nakayama, in which they indicated that the Congress is likely to pass legislation establishing the convention at its next session in January, and asked formally for U.S. help in financing the meeting.

Noting that the U.S. has for the past two years invited the Joint Committee on Future Status and the Congress of Micronesia to take at an early date this essential step in the transition toward self-government, the Ambassador repeated earlier U.S. pledges to assist in defraying the costs of a constitutional convention. The Ambassador said that in response to this first formal request, for U.S. assistance in financing such a convention, he has asked the Secretary of the Interior to include money for such a purpose in a supplemental funding request to the U.S. Congress.

Ambassador Williams pointed out in his letter that the U.S. has been disappointed in the failure of the Congress of Micronesia to enact legislation establishing a constitutional convention at earlier sessions where such a bill has been considered. This disappointment was reflected in his opening statement at the most recent round of status negotiations, in Hawaii last year, when the Ambassador said:

"We repeat this invitation, this call for your leaders and your people to begin the process of framing your own future governmental institutions, your own lawmaking procedures, your own concepts of division of authority, your own judiciary, your own design for central government and district government relationships, your own laws on land and eminent domain, and your own regulations with respect to the collection and distribution of revenues and sharing between the central government and the district governments. We have recognized that these are questions only Micronesians can resolve. They are internal family matters. All that we can do is to offer, as we have in the past, to be helpful when requested to do so by you." Ambassador Williams noted that he and Senator Salii would discuss the offer of financial assistance for a constitutional convention in Micronesia in more detail as part of the upcoming seventh round of status negotiations, beginning November 13 in Washington, D.C.

PALAU LEADERS TO ATTEND TALKS

Senator Lazarus Salii announced last week that a delegation of four leaders from Palau district would, at his invitation, be attending the next round of status negotiations beginning in Washington next week. He said the delegation, which will travel at the expense of the District Legislature, would include Legislature Speaker Itelbang Lulii, one other member of the Legislature, and the two High Chiefs of Palau, Chief Reklai and Chief Ibedul. The Senator, who is Chairman of the Joint Committee on Future Status, said the presence of the Palau leaders would be helpful to the Committee as it considers the U.S. position on the return of public land in Micronesia. The Committee has tied itself closely to the Palau land issue, endorsing the position of the District Legislature that public land in Palau be returned to the traditional chiefs to be held in trust for the people before any further negotiations on status can take place. "I felt it was essential that since we are basing our conditions on the land situation in Palau that the leaders remain in Washington for the duration of the talks for consultations," Senator Salii explained. The U.S. land position was expected to be made public late last week, following delivery of copies of it to Senator Salii and High Commissioner Edward E. Johnston. By week's end, despite a story on the position that appeared in a Guam newspaper, the policy statement itself had not been released and it was reported Senator Salii would confer in Washington with Ambassador Williams prior to release of the document. The Senator left for Washington on the weekend.

MLSC GRANT VETOED--HICOM GIVES REASONS WHY

Acting within the authority granted him by the U.S. Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, Trust Territory High Commissioner Edward E. Johnston last week revealed that he had vetoed the \$600,000 re-funding grant for the Micronesian Legal Services program. In a letter to the Director of the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO), Alvin J. Arnett, the HiCom explained his action by saying that the program is over-funded in relation to the service it provides, is not properly funded in line with the funding policies of other U.S. agencies operating in Micronesia, and the program has "failed to achieve its primary goals."

When the word of the action was relayed to the Director of the program, Attorney Theodore R. Mitchell, he said his office would immediately take steps to have the veto overturned--something that Arnett has the power to do. Mitchell also noted that the program is currently operating with borrowed funds, which will run out November 15.

The High Commissioner stated last week that the administration is committed to making competent legal advice available to every Micronesian, pledging that if his veto is upheld there will be no reduction in the Legal Services available to the people. He proposed that the current staff of the Public Defender's Office be increased, and that the office be expanded to handle civil as well as criminal matters for "any and all Micronesians financially unable to employ private counsel."

The HiCom said that after three years of existence and the expenditure of nearly a million and a half dollars the Legal Services program in Micronesia has not lived up to its intended purposes. "Better legal services can be provided for far less money," he said. "The primary purpose of this institution was to extend the assistance of Attorneys to Micronesians unable to employ counsel," he added, noting in his letter that in some cases the program has represented Micronesians earning sixteen thousand dollars a year or more, who are clearly able to afford private counsel. The HiCom also charged that MLSC pays salaries out of line with what is paid to Micronesian employees in other government agencies, that the program's Attorneys frequently "try their cases in the media," and that in a period of reduced budgets for every other government program in Micronesia it is not appropriate for MLSC to continue operating at a budget which is excessive for the level of services provided.

By week's end there had been no word from OEO Director Arnett on what action he might take in response to the High Commissioner's veto of the Legal Services program grant.

BRIEFLY, HERE ARE SOME OTHER ITEMS THAT MADE NEWS IN THE TRUST TERRITORY LAST WEEK:

Marianas District Administrator Francisco C. Ada approved the appointment of Pedro A. Tenorio to take the place of Jose C. Tenorio as a member of the 15-man Marianas Political Status Commission.

A Palau Congressman, Polycarp Basilius, has criticized the Joint Committee on Political Status for seemingly tying the next round of future status negotiations to the hearings before the Civil Aeronautics Board on the Saipan-Japan airline route case. The talks begin November 13 in Washington, a time that was selected, according to Committee Chairman Senator Lazarus Salii, because fully half of the members of the Joint Committee will be in Washington then anyway, testifying before the CAB on November 8. Senator Salii had no comment on the critical statements of his Palau colleague.

A four-man television film production team from the University of Georgia is currently touring the Trust Territory, making a 90-minute documentary for presentation next year on the educational television network in the U.S. The team was on a field trip ship last week in the Marshalls, accompanying the people of Kili on an inspection trip to their new homes in Bikini.

The government issued some 187 homestead deeds last week, as ordered to do by the TT High Court. However a dispute arose over wording in the deeds, and at week's end the situation saw both the Trust Territory government and the Attorneys of the Micronesian Legal Services Corporation recommending that the homesteader's not accept the deeds, although for different reasons. MLSC went to court again in an effort to make the government rectify what it contended were serious defects in the wording on the quitclaim deeds.

Another team of environmental experts from the U.S. Airforce went to Tinian last week to continue the work of advance surveys and tests for an

Environmental Impact Statement on military base plans for the island. An agreement was reached in the May/June Marianas status talks that such survey work could proceed even though no final agreement on military use of Tinian has been reached.

A two-day seminar on tourism marketing was held last week on Saipan. Delegates from most of Micronesia took part.

A training seminar for district employment service officers was conducted both on Saipan and in Guam during October.

Deputy High Commissioner Peter T. Coleman returned last week from a trip to Manila, Bangkok, Hong Kong and Taiwan on behalf of the Bank of Micronesia. Coleman is Chairman of the Banks Board of Directors.

And finally, statistics released last week show that at the end of fiscal year 1973, there were 102 foreign companies licensed to do business in the Trust Territory, with half of the them located in the Mariana Islands District. Of the total of approximately 49 million dollars invested by foreign companies in Micronesia's economy, some 72 per cent of it has been invested by just one company--Continental Airlines.