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STATEMENT OF JAMES M. WILSON, JR.
U.S. DEPUTY REPRESENTATIVE FOR MICRONESIAN STATUS NEGOTIATIONS

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS - November 12, 1973

I am appearing here today in support of the Trust Territory High Commissioner's request for supplemental funds and to elaborate some of the areas which are of special political interest to the United States in the context of the Micronesian Status Negotiations.

As the members of this Committee are aware, the United States Government has been engaged for some time in a series of negotiations with Micronesian representatives designed to end the U.S. trusteeship under the United Nations and establish a new political relationship with the peoples of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands.

As the High Commissioner has indicated, high priority has been given in the Trust Territory to the implementation of the capital improvements program. There could be little progress in the area of political and economic development without these programs, and it is certainly important from an overall political standpoint that funds to meet these projects be restored. It is similarly important that the requested funds be made available for the new expanded program for education in self government, which is essential to the implementation of any future status agreement.

Over and above these, however, there are two programs which have been included on the supplemental request which we feel are of special significance to the on-going future political status negotiations with the Micronesians. They are the funds to initiate an accelerated land survey program and funds for a Micronesian Constitutional Convention. I would like to outline for the Committee

why we believe these requests are necessary at this time and explain their relevance from the standpoint of our status negotiations and the U.S. interests therein.

LAND SURVEY PROGRAM

Since December of 1972, the U.S. Government has been studying how best to be responsive to a Micronesian request for an early transfer of control over public lands to local district authorities in Micronesia. The United States has said for years that public lands in Micronesia do not belong to and have never been claimed by the United States. Rather they have been held in trust by the U.S. for the people of Micronesia. We had assumed that their eventual disposition would be determined by the Micronesians themselves when their new government was established at the close of the trusteeship. Now the Micronesians have asked that this process be accelerated and that we give priority attention to the transfer of public land from the Trust Territory Government to the districts.

Beginning this summer representatives of the Office of Micronesian Status Negotiations and the Department of the Interior, Office of Territorial Affairs, travelled to each of the districts of Micronesia to gather relevant facts and look into the specific problems involved. The results of this study were presented to the Secretary of the Interior last month. He has recently approved a new U.S. policy under which we have agreed to the early return of public land to the districts if the people of the districts so desire. This is made subject to certain safeguards designed to protect the property interest of individual Micronesians and to meet the continuing needs of the Central Government from now until the trusteeship ends, since the United States must insure that

transfer is accomplished in a manner commensurate with our responsibilities under the Trusteeship Agreement for the protection of Micronesian property rights. This new policy represents also one further manifestation of the continuing program for increasing the responsibility of Micronesians for their own internal self-government.

The public lands of Micronesia have come to be public domain lands for a variety of reasons, including the transfer to the Trust Territory Government of the title of the bulk of the public lands acquired by the Japanese, German and Spanish colonial governments. Almost 60% of the total land area in the TTPI is now considered to be public land. Since many of the pre-World War II land tenure and acquisition records were lost or destroyed, individual ownership boundaries, some of which are now within the originally composed tracts of public lands, are some times very unclear. An extensive program of surveys and adjustments has been necessary. This ^{so-called} cadastrial program, however, has gone extremely slowly, because of the limited funds made available over the years. If it is continued at the present rate it is estimated that almost 30 years would be required to complete it. The new U.S. land policy cannot get off to a successful start without a greatly accelerated public land surveying effort.

After consultation with appropriate experts and land survey officers in the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands

it has been established that a special land survey program and necessary related adjudication work can be completed in roughly three years at a total cost of \$6million. In order to get this started at once a minimum appropriation of \$800,000 this fiscal

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year. To facilitate implementation of this program funds received will go from the Department of the Interior directly to the Trust Territory Government for distribution to those districts in the manner determined to be necessary for the early completion of the project.

CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION

Additional funds in the amount of \$450,000 have also been requested to make possible a Micronesian Constitutional Convention.

The United States has recommended that such a convention take place at an early date, since the establishment of a new Government of Micronesia will be an obvious prerequisite to the termination of the Trusteeship Agreement. It will insure an orderly transition from the present political status to a new government in which the Micronesians will assume full responsibility for their own internal affairs.

As the committee is aware our 1947 agreement with the United Nations establishing the trusteeship, which was approved by both houses of the U.S. Congress, obligates us to move the people of Micronesia as rapidly as possible towards self-government or independence. The present negotiations are aimed at formulating a new relationship of free association

between the people of Micronesia and the United States under which they would be responsible for their own internal affairs and we would be responsible for their foreign affairs and defense. A new constitution which entered into effect even before the termination of the trusteeship would not only represent a further step towards self-government but provide a practical blueprint for the post-trusteeship period.

We have urged the Micronesians to move promptly in this direction and have told them that with the approval of the Congress of the United States we will assist in the funding of the convention. We believe strongly that it is in the interests of the United States to promote the formation of a viable new Government of Micronesia.

The Congress of Micronesia has assured the United States that it will allocate funds for that portion of a convention's costs not covered by the U.S. grant.

For these reasons we urge favorable action by the Congress on both of these supplemental requests.

Thank you very much.