

# TT "Rattly Bangs," Birth Rate Are Status Talk Topics

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WASHINGTON — The Micronesian status talks are focusing on the question of how the island will get their financial support under the proposed "free association" agreement they are negotiating with their trustees, the U.S. government.

At the same time, officials of the Micronesian Congress and the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands' government are also in town to lobby the House and Senate Appropriations Committee for about \$13 million for the current annual budget.

The negotiation—which have attracted little or no attention in a city that is preoccupied with the energy crisis, the Mid-East and congressional meetings at the White House—are in the busy stage where each side is meeting privately to draft proposals on the key issue of Micronesia's financial relations with the U.S. once the expected compact takes effect.

More visible have been the activities of Stanley Carpenter, the director of the Office of Territories in the Interior Department, Edward E. Johnston, the high commissioner of the Trust Territory, and Rep. Raymond Setik, chairman of the Micronesian Congress' Budget Committee.

They testified in favor of

supplemental funds in the House this week and are scheduled to appear before chairman Alan Bible, D-Nev., of the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on the interior, on Tuesday.

It is just a coincidence that all of this Micronesian activity is going on here this month, according to the visitors, but it provides an interesting backdrop to the talks which are proceeding with virtually no comment from the principals, minimal interest in Congress and coverage by two people from the news media.

Earlier this year, the Micronesian Congress urged the U.S. Congress to enact legislation that would provide open-ended appropriations for the Trust Territory without having to go through the Interior Department and the committees of Congress each year. There isn't a department or program of government that wouldn't like to have such an arrangement with the U.S. Treasury, and the proposal has little chance of adoption.

But under the present system, the U.S. Congress has been giving Micronesia about \$6 million a year as part of the interior appropriation. It means members of Congress, who are used to dealing in multi-billion dollar figures, have to take time, as they did this week, and talk about buying school buses in Saipan.

Chairman Julia Butler Hansen,

D-Washington, the hard-bitten but benevolent matriarch of Interior Appropriations Subcommittee took Commissioner Johnston to task for not replacing the "rattly bangs," as she called them, in a more orderly fashion. Rep. Setik said the buses had 50,000 miles each on them. Mrs. Hansen was also upset because Johnston didn't seem to think replacing the buses was a high priority item on the capital improvements budget.

Later, Mrs. Hansen's subcommittee voted \$8.4 million for the Trust Territory, this was more than the \$8.2 million which the Interior Department requested because it included \$160,000 for new-school buses on Saipan, thanks to Mrs. Hansen.

But the local Micronesian officials wanted nearly \$5 million more for such capital improvement projects as the cost-overrun on the bridge that is needed in the Palau district to permit cars to travel from Koror where most to the people live to the nearby island of Babelthup where the airport is.

The distance is less than a mile, but the sea is deep and choppy making the ferry boat an unpredictable means of travel between islands. Johnston said the low bid on the project was over \$5 million and Micronesians will have to decide by Dec. 9 whether to accept it or re-bid the project. Congress has already given the territory

about \$3 million for it.

Micronesia asked for about \$60 million from congress this year, got \$47 million and wants the difference. Interior went to bat for only \$8.2 million of the difference.

Mrs. Hansen warned the Micronesians that if they became totally independent, they might have to come to Congress for money from the foreign aid program. "God help you, then," she said. Another possibility was to receive money as the states do in revenue sharing grants, and Mrs. Hansen said Micronesia lacked the tax base to make that work.

Rep. Clarence Long, D-Md., said he was concerned that as U.S. appropriations to Micronesia grew—expected to reach \$100 million soon—"We are building an impossible situation there" in terms of ever being reimbursed. Mrs. Hansen snapped back that, "I don't think the United States has to feel apologetic for what it's spending in Micronesia." Noting that the U.S. has a national security interest in the Pacific, and also is trying to develop a tourist economy there.

Long was amazed when he was told that the population was growing at a 4 per cent rate in Micronesia. "One of the largest in the world," he marveled.

"That," said Mrs. Hansen, "is because they don't have anything else to do there."