

The Question For Marianas:

Citizens Or Nationals?

By Diane Maddex
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SAIPAN—Whether the people of the Marianas will have a choice between becoming U.S. citizens or U.S. nationals once the district becomes an American commonwealth may be one of the first major issues resolved in the new status talks that got underway here Thursday.

Indications are that they will have this option, one which the Marianas Political Status Commission strongly supported in the last round of negotiations.

At that time the United States delegation said that it had no objection in principle to giving the people of the Marianas a choice of citizenship status, but that further study of U.S. law and past precedent was necessary before it could agree to this.

A spokesman for the American delegation said yesterday that legal working groups from each side have since researched and discussed questions of political structure such as this, to the point where "there are no basic

disagreements — just a matter of language."

In his opening statement Ambassador Franklin Haydn Williams, the U.S. representative to the talks, also referred to giving Marianas residents the "right to become American citizens if they so desire."

After a total of only three hours of working sessions on Thursday and Friday, the two delegations yesterday recessed the talks until Monday morning.

The legal advisers of both groups are using the time for informal meetings on organizational aspects of a new governmental set-up for the Marianas, such as citizenship and nationality, the applicability of federal laws and tax matters.

Before getting to a review of substantive issues, the two delegations also agreed to a tentative agenda proposed by the Marianas for the two weeks of negotiations.

According to the U.S. spokesman, this includes tackling the political structure first, then moving to planning for

transition, economics and finance, land and finally transition.

He suggested that each of these probably would be discussed in some depth during this round, due to end on Dec. 19. The ordering of the agenda, he said, was more of a carry-over from the progression of the last talks in May and June rather than a conscious attempt to set priorities.

Technical studies and informal discussions held since the June talks have brought the negotiations well beyond some problems left unanswered in the final joint communique, he said.

Sen. Edward DLG. Pangelinan, chairman of the Marianas Political Status Commission, added yesterday that the negotiators are also trying to fit in a promised visit to Rota by the end of the talks.

During the last round the delegations traveled to Tinian, where the U.S. hopes to install a major military base.

"The tone struck in the plenary session," said the U.S. spokesman, "has certainly been borne out in the working sessions so far. There have been no real surprises on either side."

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