

Week in Review

SUMMARY OF NEWS OF THE TRUST TERRITORY OF THE PACIFIC ISLANDS

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FUEL COMMITTEE

Meetings of the recently created Trust Territory Fuel Conservation Committee were held on Saipan last week. According to Vice Chairman James Wheeler, Director of Public Works, who presided over the meetings in the absence of Chairman Peter T. Coleman, the Committee "is trying to develop a set of ground rules and procedures to submit to the High Commissioner."

In its first decision the Committee approved an emergency fuel request from the ACME Construction Company of Majuro for its newly-acquired LCU, which has remained on Guam for the past several days unable to obtain fuel. The ship is carrying equipment which is to be used in completing the Bikini Atoll rehabilitation project. According to Wheeler, an arrangement has been worked out whereby Mobil will supply the boat with enough fuel to get to Ponape, and in Ponape the LCU will be given sufficient fuel for the remainder of its voyage to the Marshalls. The Ponape fuel will be charged against the allocation of fuel for the Marshall Islands District. Wheeler noted that "the LCU-59 of ACME can very likely offset one or more trips by TT field trip ships."

ACME is the company responsible for the construction of 40 houses and their out-buildings on Bikini prior to the return of the people from Kili. According to Marshall Islands District Administrator Oscar DeBrum, plans to return the people will be delayed until at least April due to problems with shipping materials to Bikini and the fuel shortage, among other things.

Wheeler stated that other requests for fuel over and above the formula allocations made by Mobil will not be acted upon until further information concerning the requests is received.

In addition to Wheeler and Deputy High Commissioner Peter T. Coleman, committee members include Finance Director Ronald Peterson, Transportation and Communications Director Joseph Beadles, and Special Assistant for District Affairs J. Boyd MacKenzie. The names of the two members from the Congress who will serve on the Committee have not been formally announced.

JOINT COMMUNIQUE ISSUED

After a week of status negotiations, Senator Edward Dlg. Pangelinan, Chairman of the Marianas Political Status Commission and Ambassador Franklin Haydn Williams, President Nixon's Personal Representative to the Micronesian Status negotiations, released a joint statement last week on Saipan.

The communique indicated that steady and substantial progress had been made thus far in the negotiations and that detailed discussions will be held this week on specific issues concerning constitutional and legal arrangements, economics and finance, land and transition.

According to the communique, "the two sides have arrived at agreements in principle on questions relating to the right of local self-government, a generalized approach to the application of U.S. laws in the Marianas, as well as customs, excise and income taxation." Also, the group reached general agreement concerning the wording of a clause providing that the people of the Marianas will become U.S. citizens or U.S. nationals, as they may desire.

Present discussions are centered on the funding and initiation of a series of transitional studies and steps to be taken for a smooth transition and "orderly assumption of responsibility for local affairs pursuant to a constitution to be framed and adopted locally".

The Chairmen of the two delegations stated that information concerning specific agreements reached on topics discussed in the negotiations will be set forth in a Joint Communique to be released at the close of this session of talks. They emphasized that the pace and momentum of the talks to date have met their expectations and that the talks are proceeding efficiently and harmoniously.

SENATE APPROVES BUDGET REQUEST

The United States Senate has given its approval to the \$8.2 million Trust Territory supplemental budget request for fiscal year 1974. Additional appropriations were approved by the Senate to supplement money already allocated for construction of the Airai-Babelthup Bridge in Palau and for the purchase of new school buses for Saipan. According to William D. Oyler, Trust Territory Program and Budget Officer, this action means that the entire supplemental request has been approved with the exception of the Palau Bridge money. The House has approved the supplemental request and additional funds for new school buses for Saipan, but did not approve funds for the bridge construction. The bill will now go to a conference committee to resolve this difference.

Included in the supplemental request are funds for the Ponape Hospital, school construction in the Marshalls and continued Bikini rehabilitation, a Micronesian Constitutional Convention, a public land survey program and a program of education for self-government.

MARSHALLS DEATH CLAIM UPHELD

Rendering its first appeal decision last week, the Micronesian Claims Commission ruled that the death claim it awarded in the case of Minniah Melong and others in the Marshall Islands was a fair and, in the light of applicable international law, justifiable one, and reaffirmed the award in that case of \$4,400. The claimants had sought many times that amount on appeal, and had challenged the commission's criteria for establishing an award schedule based on the age of an individual killed during World War Two.

The Commission pointed out the "ex gratia" nature of the claims program, and said the principles of tort law cited by attorneys for the claimants are "clearly inapplicable" to death claims under the Micronesian Claims Act. Interest on claims is also not appropriate under the act, the commission ruled.

The decision rendered last week is final, and not reviewable under the law, the commission said in a formal statement announcing its findings.

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

Chief Rengulbai Mesechol of Aimeliik Municipality, Palau District, passed away early in December. His successor will be chosen by the four highest-ranking women who are members of the Uchelkeyukl Clan of Aimeliik.

Last week Chief Justice Harold Burnett announced the appointment of Sebastian Frank as Associate Judge for the Truk District Court, and the appointment of Judah C. Johnny of Ponape to the position of Director, Administrative Office of the Trust Territory Courts.

According to an announcement from Deputy Director of Health Services Dr. Arobati Hicking, 14 Micronesians were awarded certificates after completing 12-months of intensive health care study under the MEDEX MICRONESIA Program at the Truk Hospital. High Commissioner Johnston attended special graduation ceremonies there last week.

The Annual Trust Territory District Attorneys Conference is to be held this week on Guam. The agenda will include discussions on administrative, staff and budget matters, uniform relocation assistance and the real property acquisition policies act of 1970, land certification procedures under the revised Manual of Administration, and procurement and contract procedures.

According to TT Agriculture Chief Bermin F. Weillbacher, seven Micronesian agriculture students have completed three years of college in Papua, New Guinea. All of the students will return to their home districts, where they will be employed by the Agriculture Division.

Marianas District Administrator Francisco C. Ada announced the appointment of Robert Huston as the Senior Land Commissioner for the Marianas District.

According to Eletrical Maitenance Branch Manager Ray Wiseman of the TT Communications Division, new voice communications equipment has been installed in the Palau District Center of Koror and the construction of a new communications building is expected to be completed in six months. The Division also expects to undertake a study early next year of the feasibility of installing voice and teletype communications between Kusaie Island and the Ponape District Center.

Eleven Trust Territory Government employees and two from the private sector have completed the Dale Carnegie Top and Middle Management Seminar yeld in Yap District early this month.

Topics discussed at the recently concluded meeting of the Congress of Micronesia Leadership included legislation to enable public lands to be returned to the districts and for the reapportionment of the House as a result of the recent

TT census, the current energy crisis, and matters affecting the upcoming session of the Congress. Director of Public Affairs Strik Yoma discussed the composition, goals and objectives of a Task Force on education for self-government. The next Congress session will begin January 14 on Saipan.

Christmas greetings from Micronesia will be heard around the world this year, through the facilities of the U.S. Military's American Forces Radio and Television Service and the radio network of the South Pacific Commission. The Broadcast Division on Saipan has provided taped messages and programs of Micronesian music at the request of these two organizations.