

On Saipan ✓

COM President, Speaker To Testify Before CAB

By Diane Maddex
Daily News Staff Writer

SAIPAN — In an about-face, the senate president and the house speaker of the Congress of Micronesia now say they feel compelled to testify before the Civil Aeronautics Board to rebut insinuations that the congress does not represent the people of Micronesia on the matter of which airline should receive the Saipan-Japan air route.

President Tosiwo Nakayama and Speaker Bethwel Henry told the CAB when the current hearings into the route opened March 11 that they would not appear in order to try to preserve what is left of Micronesian unity.

The congress has officially backed award of the route to Continental/Air Micronesia on the basis that Air Mike's proposal would economically benefit all of Micronesia.

Legislative bodies in the Marianas District, in which Saipan is located, are on record in favor of Pan American World Airways. Testimony at the hearings to date indicates that Pan Am supporters are urging that the views of the Marianas be given preference over any others in Micronesia because this district would be most directly affected by the new route.

In an April 11 letter to CAB Administrative Law Judge Greer Murphy, Nakayama and Henry said they had been closely following the hearings during the past five weeks through reports made by Sen. Andon Amaratch of Truk.

"From these reports," they wrote, "it has become obvious that it is important for us, as the presiding officers of Micronesia's highest elected body, to deal with the partisan allegations which have been made to the effect that the Congress of Micronesia does not represent the people of all Micronesia, that its expressions are not the expressions of their will, and that such expressions ought not to be given the greatest weight in this case."

Nakayama and Henry asked to speak in behalf of the congress during the second phase of the board's hearings, which began this week to ascertain Micronesian views on which airline should be awarded the route.

They added that they do not intend to criticize any carrier or group but want only to set the record straight as to the independence and firmness of the congress' position.

Both the "Marianas Parties," which support Pan Am, and the congress have begun calling witnesses for phase two of the route proceedings.

The four-week phase one took evidence on charges of carrier misconduct in obtaining local support.

Pan Am also is calling supporters from districts other than the Marianas, but Continental is not. The third carrier seeking the route, Northwest Orient, has stayed in the background throughout the hearings.

Amaratch is one of some 20 witnesses from both sides who took the stand this week before the hearings were recessed Thursday.

The senator testified that he did not particularly care which airline receives the CAB route award, but he went on to say that Air Mike has invested heavily in Micronesia and that it "has performed rather excellently under adverse conditions."

Amaratch also told the CAB that having an airline that is Micronesian in name and at least partly in ownership "means a lot in terms of our identity in this world."

He pointed out that Micronesia's transportation situation has reached critical proportions with the bankruptcy of its shipping company, Transpacific Lines, and ensuing lawsuits that may tie up shipping for years. "Something has to be done," said Amaratch, "to assure Micronesians that they can continue to trade." The senator added that he is afraid the territory will thus have to depend on its internal air link for years to come.

Pan Am supporters called by the "Marianas Parties" include Marianas Congressman Herman Q. Guerrero, district legislators Vicente N. Santos, Manuel D. Muna and Daniel T. Muna and Saipan councilmen Vicente T. Camacho, Albert S. Camacho and Jose Q. Lizama.

Pan Am's greater experience in international traffic, increased employment possibilities and the injection of competition into the airline business in Micronesia were reasons cited by them for favoring Pan Am.

Manuel Muna added that he thought Pan Am's stewardesses were more attractive.

The men said they believed their constituents also preferred Pan Am to Continental, although they had not conducted an official survey or talked to many people about the route.

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CAB Hearings

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Cross-examination of the Pan Am supporters brought out that there had been a fist fight on the floor of the Saipan Municipal Council the night a pro-Am Am resolution was adopted in 1970. Councilman Albert Camacho also related a saga of 25 cases of paint he shipped from Okinawa when he was flying Air Mike on his daughter's company pass. He refused to pay the air freight, he said, and the paint was eventually auctioned.

Pan Am witnesses called by the airline included High Chief Reklai of Northern Palau, Sen. Roman Tmetuchl, Rep. Timothy S. Olkeriil, Palau District Legislature Speaker Iteibang Luit and several legislators and businessmen.

Testifying in support of Air Mike were a Ponape delegation including Sen. Ambilos Iehsi, Legislature Speaker Ilor Harris and businessmen Kikuo Apis and Freahling Sigrah, all called by the congress.

The congress has announced its intention of bringing some 60 witnesses. The "Marianas Parties" will put on the remainder of its approximately 40 witnesses when those traveling to Saipan from the other districts have appeared.

It is expected that this portion of the CAB hearing may last another two weeks.

Although the route case reached the full Civil Aeronautics Board in oral arguments last Nov. 8, the board ordered Jan. 29 that the proceedings be opened. The allegations of carrier misconduct, said the CAB could not be ignored and had to be aired in a hearing before the board could pass on any carrier's fitness to get the route. It also found that the actual present views of the civic parties were "much in doubt."