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A-6 from Saipan

Congress of Micronesia - House Journal
August 8, 1974

Representative Okerill: Mr. Speaker, I would like to offer a few remarks:

Mr. Speaker and fellow members of the House: Next year the Congress of Micronesia will celebrate its tenth anniversary. In thinking about this fact, I have been troubled by a daydream which seems all too real to me, and which has caused me to be uneasy. While we cannot always solve problems by talking about them, it sometimes helps. So if you will bear with me for a few minutes, I would like to relate this daydream to you, in the hope that it will relieve my uneasiness.

This daydream consists of two histories of Micronesia. Both histories result from actions taken at a particular point in time, on certain important issues. The time is not certain, and neither are the issues. But I believe the time is in the very near future, and the issues are ones very important to all of us.

In the first history, I see a lack of positive action by the Congress, resulting in a situation where the Congress actually becomes ineffective and paralyzed by the refusal of some districts to continue to participate in it. Consequently, at the Constitutional Convention, the Marianas District withdraws, the Marshalls boycott the convention, and the Palau delegates walk out when the remaining districts refuse to accede to their demands for local control.

As a result of these actions, the Marianas is swallowed up by and incorporated into the Territory of Guam; the United States changes its mind and finally accedes to the request of the Marshalls and negotiates a relationship whereby they are associated with Guam and what once was the Marianas, but retain some local autonomy.

Palau splits from all of the Districts, and becomes an independent republic supported in various parts by its own local economy, serving as an air and sea link in the Pacific, and also by virtue of military land leases which it has accepted, but not by Free Association, which it has rejected.

Ponape, Truk and Yap remain the only districts to stay together, but because the other districts have split away, a loose association is formed with no central government. And although some assistance is forthcoming from the United States, the economy and the government services deteriorate and the people must live on a bare subsistence level.

Within 30 years--a generation--what once was Micronesia is gone. Huge foreign banking and commercial interests have a strangle hold on all the former districts. The United States military rules its preserves which were carved out in the midst of national confusion. United States nationals leave and are replaced by third country nationals who are unpopular but needed, and who, eventually carve small economic empires into the economy, at the expense of Micronesians. And worse yet, well-trained and capable Micronesians desert their home islands to be absorbed in the economic mainstream of America and Japan. Eventually the almighty dollar and the almighty yen suborn the most admirable of principles and Micronesian land is sold to foreigners. Eventually the Palauans, Marshallese, Chamorro, Yapese, Trukese, and Ponapeans join their northern Hawaiian brothers and sisters as an exploited, diminished, and moribund people.

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That is the first history of which I day dream. The second history is quite different.

In this version, because of the refusal of the United States to yield to certain demands of the Marianas, they decide to join the rest of Micronesia; the Marshalls, satisfied with new financial arrangements, put their status commission to work explaining the value of the future status agreement negotiated by the Congress' Joint Committee; and Palau, heartened by acceptance of its version of central versus district authority relationships, becomes one of the major forces in working for Micronesian unity.

Consequently, the constitutional convention is a success, with seven strong and united districts in a spirit of brotherhood and cooperation creating a new government of Micronesia based on democratic principles and Micronesian customs.

Within 30 years, the compact between the people of Micronesia and the United States of America has been terminated, and military leases are not renegotiated. Micronesia, now 250,000 people strong, becomes a model Pacific nation; a neutralized area in the Pacific with a protective treaty with the United States. The marketing of fish and coconut products, the exploitation of manganese nodules and other mineral resources, the rise of controlled tourism, and the emergence of Micronesia as a duty-free, shipping and financial center of the Pacific, results in an economy which allows great progress along lines chosen by Micronesians themselves.

That is the other history.

The real history of Micronesia lies, of course, somewhere between these two extremes. My simple point is that in the heat of the moment and in the clash of personalities and principles, we may forget who it is we really represent in this Congress. And let me say, we do not represent the voters at home. No, we represent our children and their children.

The choices today are ours, but the future is theirs. Which of these histories will they inherit? Let us take heed to these two possibilities and carve for ourselves a destiny and future that will ensure for all of us and for the generations of Micronesians to come happiness and a productive island lifestyle.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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