

MIHALY
ASSOCIATES

208 Panoramic Way, Berkeley, California 94704
Telephone: (415) 849-0904

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Mr. Howard D. Willens
Wilmer, Cutler & Pickering
1666 K Street N. W.
Washington, D. C. 20006

Since our conversation at Kathy's last week, I have been pondering the issue we discussed: how to prepare for a plebiscite in the Marianas. Clearly, the issue is critical. And so I am sending along the following thoughts.

Understanding and Doubt

The outcome of this plebiscite--as of others similar to it--will ultimately depend on two factors. The first is the building of understanding of the proposed political arrangement. The second is elimination of doubts and fears, on the part of individuals and groups within the Marianas society, that the arrangement will somehow jeopardize their future or their children's. These two factors, of course, are inter-related.

The arrangement is based on a number of concepts alien to most of the people of the Marianas: commonwealth, U.S. citizenship, self-government. Some of the terms simply do not exist in Chamorran or Carolinean. As I learned when speaking in high schools and to other groups in Micronesia, it is not enough simply to define. This is a teaching task; and teaching always entails relating the new and unknown to that which is known and already part of the learner's life.

Doubts and fears will arise from misperceptions of how the arrangement will, in practice, work. This problem area thus calls for more teaching--teaching based on intimate knowledge of both the Marianas and the United States, and of the proposal itself.

Who Does It?

The principal actors must be the leadership of the Marianas community: the political leadership, and the leaders of key groups such as magistrates, the church, women's groups, the farmers' coop, etc.

Outsiders have a vital role to play. They offer experience in communications (media and other), political education, American government, organization, and economics.

How?

This brief letter does not permit an adequate treatment of how to approach the problem. A carefully drawn up plan of action is called for. Suffice it to say here that any workable plan will incorporate these elements:

A. Analysis of the teaching problem, i.e., of which concepts need to be explained and, equally important, identification of those parts of the proposed political arrangement that could engender misunderstanding, doubts, and fears for the future.

B. Identification of the resources needed and available to do the job--physical resources and human resources.

C. A coordinated approach to, and involvement of, key leaders and groups in the Marianas.

D. A coordinated use of television, printed materials, and public meetings.

Outside Help

As I noted above, the principal actors must be the Marianas leadership. However, outsiders are likely, I believe, to play a key role in the process. Not only can they offer skills, they can offer neutrality. This will be important to the people of the Marianas. For the same reason, I do not think the government should take on the job. Ideally, outside experts will be retained by the District Legislature or the Status Commission.

It strikes me that the Marianas leadership can turn to two alternative sources for assistance.

The first would be a political public relations firm. Some of these are quite good. They know how to handle elections. On the other hand, such firms will not know the Marianas. Secondly, such firms are really in the business of selling candidates.

The second would be that small but talented pool of people in political science, communications, and the media who know the Marianas well; and who care.

In the Bay Area, for instance, we have such people as Gwyneth Donchin, Director of National Affairs for the public television station KQED, who organized the community television board of Saipan and who specializes in TV content; Dan Smith (presently in the Marshalls) who recently conducted an in-depth survey of attitudes in the Marianas for Stanford University; Professor Paul Ekman of the University of California, who participated in the Surgeon General's analysis of the impact of violence in television and who heads a major TV research project involving

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Micronesia; plus excellent political scientists and communications specialists.

I expect that an excellent team could be organized.

I hope these very preliminary thoughts are of some use.

Best regards.

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Eugene B. Mihaly

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