

File - MPSC

1910

03
/ 8

March 25, 1975

MEMORANDUM FOR MR. HELFER

Re: Hearing before the Subcommittee on Interior and Insular Affairs - March 24, 1975 on the subject of the Ex Gratia payment to Bikini Islands and Supplemental Authorization for the Trust Territory

1) Ex gratia payment to the Bikini Islands.

I will not report on this question unless you are interested.

2) Payment date of \$1.5 million for the Northern Marianas

The major issue of interest to us is when the Marianas will receive the \$1.5 million designated as necessary for planning purposes to assist with the transition. James M. Wilson, Jr. asked that the funds be made available now so as to get as much of a head start on the transition as possible. He pointed out that this sum has nothing to do with approval of the Covenant. Now that S. 326 has been passed by the Senate, the availability of the funds is delayed even further. Though obviously anxious for the earlier availability date, Mr. Wilson acquiesced to the administration position by saying he could live with a decision to delay until after Congressional approval of the Covenant. Page 3 of his statement details Mr. Wilson's position.

13971

Chairman Burton indicated his views with respect to the availability date for the \$1.5 million by recommending that S. 326 be reported favorably to the full Interior Committee. This makes it apparent that the funds will not be available until after Congress approves the Covenant.

Chairman Burton reinforced this initial indication in a conversation following the hearing. His primary concern is not giving the appearance of meddling in the Marianas plebiscite. He wants the people to decide on the course of action without any outside influence, and he is afraid that earlier availability of \$1.5 million from the United States might be exactly that. When questioned as to how the MPSC would pay for activities essential to success of the plebiscite, such as political education of the population, he said "not with the \$1.5 million." Further, Burton doesn't seem to think much is needed in the Northern Marianas in the way of political education. In his words, the subject has been about for eight years, every one knows everyone else; after all there are only 12,000 - 13,000 people. The people know the questions involved well enough to make the appropriate choices, according to Burton.

Burton also expressed the opinion that there would not necessarily be much time between congressional approval of the Covenant and the plebiscite itself.

He announced he would hold hearings on the Compact directly following approval by the people of the

13972

Marianas. He mentioned a week's worth of hearings in June.

3) Supplemental authorization for the Trust Territory

Burton's recommendation that S. 326 be reported favorably to the full committee assures a reasonable chance that the 1975 ceiling will be increased to \$65,650,000.

H.R. 5192 introduced by Burton would establish budget authorization for the Trust Territory according to the cover sheet to the House and Senate bills. (Attach. 1). According to the testimony presented and comments by Subcommittee members, it seems probably these amounts will be approved. We can discuss the additional comments made on this point, if you wish.

4) Miscellaneous ----- Burton made High Commissioner Johnston promise he would stay completely out of local affairs having anything to do with the plebescite.

----- Burton expressed the desire for "a minimum number of obstacles to maximum participation in the voting process."

----- Burton expressed uncertainty about proceeding with discussion of the Covenant in the Subcommittee. He is anxious about anticipating the will of the people of the Northern Marianas.

[Note: Attached are all statements. Those with the number 1 concern Bikini; those with number 2 concern the authorization. The bills are also attached.]

13973

Nancy Schuh