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March 26, 1975

The Honorable Philip Burton  
Chairman, House Subcommittee on  
Territorial and Insular Affairs  
Cannon House Office Bldg.  
Room 428  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representative Burton:

We would like to draw your attention to certain information drawn from recent hearings by your Subcommittee on Territorial and Insular Affairs, as included in a story by Mr. John E. Simonds of the Gannet News Service, published in the Wednesday, March 26, 1975 issue of the Pacific Daily News (copy attached).

We profess ourselves to be profoundly amazed about the information in the third paragraph which states:

"Burton also extracted from Trust Territory High Commissioner Edward E. Johnston a promise that he would not interfere with, or let any of his subordinates try to influence, the June plebiscite in which citizens of the Northern Marianas will vote on whether to enter a commonwealth relationship with the U.S."

While we would like to believe that the Chief Executive of the Trust Territory Government would not intentionally lie to anyone or any group, we have difficulty reconciling what can only be termed Mr. Johnston's "misleading" statement in light of the following information.

1) Mr. George Callison, who is a U.S. citizen and an employee of the TT Government as Special Adviser to the Director of Public Affairs of the Trust Territory

13843

March 26, 1975

Page 2

(and a member of the Task Force on Education for Self-Government) has been assigned the task of producing a radio program "Understanding the Covenant" which is regularly broadcast in the Mariana Islands District.

2) Mr. Callison, on the weekend of March 21, 1975, arranged for employees of the Trust Territory Printing Division, Department of Public Affairs, to expedite the printing of the second issue of the Covenant Newsletter, work (including overtime) for which they were paid by the Trust Territory Government.

3) Certain unnamed employees of the Trust Territory Government in the Mariana Islands District have been assigned the task of translating the Covenant and related informational materials into the local vernacular and producing tapes for airing over the local broadcast station.

4) The program "Our Micronesia" produced by the ESG Task Force for broadcast in the Trust Territory has been dropped without explanation in the Marianas and replaced by "Understanding the Covenant."

We would like to underscore here that our concern is not that a political education program is being launched in favor of the proposed Covenant, but that the work is being carried out by "subordinates" of the High Commissioner with his approval, and that such work certainly does tend to "influence" Marianas voters. If such work is to be done, it properly should be carried out and funded by the Marianas Political Status Commission. This is not being done.

It should also be noted that, despite the fact that the local, privately-owned television station WSZE provided ample time in a question-and-answer interview of Ambassador Williams to explain the Covenant to the people of the Marianas, and recently ran a videotape of the Covenant signing proceedings, it has currently adopted the policy of not providing time to either side to present pros and cons relative to this issue.

13844

The Honorable Philip Burton  
March 26, 1975  
Page 3

While this station is not under government control, for some reason its management policies reflect a bias which may be the result of outside influence.

Furthermore, we would like to recall that Truk Representative Raymond Setik, Chairman of the Congress' Joint Committee on Program and Budget Planning has indicated to you that the High Commissioner, at Ambassador Williams' request, has in the past assisted in planning reprogramming of TT budget allocations in connection with Mariana Islands status matters.

It is, therefore, our belief that Mr. Johnston has contravened his good promise even before it was made before your Committee, and that his statements were grossly misleading. In this connection, we would like to request your assistance in acquiring a copy of the transcript of the subcommittee hearings, so that we might review it to learn what other statements have been made to you concerning this matter.

In closing, we would like to add one comment. While we would hope that the desires of the people of the Mariana Islands District should have considerable weight with regard to approval of the Covenant, we applaud your opinion that the U.S. Congress should not commit itself to providing funds for a transition to a new government, the particulars of which have not yet been approved by that Congress.

We appreciate the many benefits of the past three decades of American administration in the Trust Territory and the sincere friendship displayed by the people of America and members of the U.S. Congress for our people. We are not opposed to a commonwealth arrangement with the United States of America, however, we are opposed to certain particulars and specific aspects of this proposed Covenant. We believe that a thorough review by the U.S. Congress will disclose that it contains certain terms that are unacceptable to both the people of the United States and the people of the Northern Marianas, and that ultimately it will be renegotiated to the satisfaction of both parties.

Very truly yours,

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Rep. Oscar C. Rasa, Marianas

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Rep. Jose P. Mafnas, Marianas

13845

Attachment