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April 15, 1975

MEMORANDUM FOR MR. WILLENS

Re: Briefing on Marianas Political Status  
before Subcommittee on Territories of  
the House Interior Committee

Ambassador Williams presented his briefing a copy of which you have received or will receive shortly. Congressman Burton concentrated his questioning on eliciting assurances of no interferences with the Marianas plebescite due to take place June 17. His subcommittee has not met to discuss the Covenant so as not to influence the free will of the Marianas people. He stressed this should not be interpreted as opposition to the Covenant, Burton alluded to the possibility of enacting some sort of "enabling legislation" prior to the plebescite in the event the picture as far as acceptance looked bleak. The details are unclear, but the language would take the form of a declaration of a neutral position on the part of the Subcommittee, emphasizing it is not opposed to acceptance of the Covenant. The minority counsel, in a brief conversation afterward, said he regards this course of action as "dangerous".

Voter registration

Burton emphasized his desire to have no pre-registration requirement, so that the maximum number of voters could register in to questioning by Burton as to whether the requirement to register could be waived in the outer islands, Williams said large numbers of people are not involved and that existing voter registration lists will serve as a basis for registering voters, even in the outer islands.

Congressman Clausen suggested the possibility of political intrigue in such a unique situation and that safeguards should be used to guard against this. To this, as well as to other questions concerning the plebescite, Williams, suggested it is up to the Plebescite Commissioner and its newly appointed Commissioner. One built-in safeguard, he stated, is the political education program.

Equal representation for Tinian and Rota is viewed by Ambassador Williams in his statement as possibly having a problem in the courts due to the one man, one vote rule. However, during the session, the majority of committee members were favorably inclined toward equal representation. It was decided that sufficient precedent exists in Micronesia as well as the U.S. Congress.

According to Ambassador Williams, the Plebescite Commissioner will have broad discretionary powers regarding educational effort. In response to Burton questioning on what steps have been taken to avoid financial involvement

by other countries trying to influence the outcome of the election (he heard at a conference he attended in Hawaii that certain business interests would like to see the plebescite fail.), Williams stated the U.S. would need concrete evidence of any such efforts.

In response to questioning on what mechanisms might be built in to the situation to protect against involvement by private enterprise, Williams suggested the Plebescite Commissioner could look into it. Burton then demanded a record of the advertising expenditures (in column inches) during the pre-plebescite period using a randomly selected comparable period of time as a control.

The only antagonistic questioning came from Congressman Vigonto who wondered why \$20 million was required for so few people. He was reassured that the land to be leased would require that much in rents alone. He allowed he didn't think he could accommodate the idea of a non-voting delegate to the U.S. Congress from the Marianas.

Williams stated the responsibility for the publication and distribution of educational material for the plebescite is in the hands of the Plebescite Commissioner. He suggested a primer translated into these languages and a list of questions and answers.

The Interior Department will cover costs of the plebescite, including printing of materials. If its resources are exhausted, additional funds may have to be sought elsewhere i.e. elsewhere in the Executive Branch or U.N.

Rules and regulations on the plebescite will be issued by the Commissioner and the U.N. will be kept informed. It may send observers as well. When questioned about the probably participation in the plebescite, Williams didn't know.

Later in the afternoon, Congressman <sup>Herman Q</sup> Guerrero representing the Marianas District in the COM made an appearance at the table. His concerns fell into the following categories:

1) Earlier Burton had mentioned a \$20,000 fund voted by the COM to people in the Marianas for the purpose of opposing the plebescite. Williams discribed this as \$10,000 set aside for the promotion of unity in Micronesia. He said it was made available to private individuals in the Northern Marianas without consultation with political figures.

Guerrero attempted to clarify the issue saying it was a \$3,000 fund originally to be divided up among the districts for the purpose of promoting Micronesian unity. Instead, it was sent to the Northern Marianas.

He was speaking softly, but I believe he said the money had been given to 2 COM members, Abus? and Mafnas? He assumes the operation was secretive.

Guerrero fears interference from the other districts -- implored the committee for ways to avoid this. He said the other districts are "feed" by the Marianas, and therefore do not want it to split. Benitey at this point interjected wanting to know what constitutes "interference", an important question because the term must be defined. On this subject, Williams has not given it any thought. He didn't know what form the no-vote group opposition was taking, but there is no boycott.

In response to questioning by Benitey, Williams thinks the plebescite can proceed on June 17, with no further action by Congress.

2) War claims - Thus far, according to Guerrero war claims are being processed slowly and only at the rate of 10% on the dollar. Emmett Rice insisted the war claims payment are proceeding on schedule and at the rate of 16 2/3 cents on the dollar as a prepayment. That level will ultimately reach 42 cents. But the amounts of money allocated is only less than half of what is needed. The COM passed a resolution directing the governments of the U.S. and Japan to make the 100% payment.

3) Alienation of land - Guerrero wondered what changes would take place regarding protection of the Marianas land from outside domination following the change in status. He didn't understand how the Marianas people could be American citizens and still forbid other American citizens from owning land. Burton reassured him that no change would take place because the Covenant is not subject to any unilatual change in its terms.

4) If Plebescite votes "No" - Again it was difficult to hear, but Guerrero inquired whether in the event of improper participation by the other districts the N. Marianas could have further separate status talks with the U.S. Burton replied the islands would then be treated together.

5) Taxes - Guerrero said some people in the Marianas are afraid they will be over taxed, some beyond their incomes. Burton reassured him that since income is much lower in the islands, possibly 90% would pay no taxes at all.

6) Migration - particularly of Philippinos taking over the labor force as has occurred in Guam. Thinks once the status is changed, there will be free migration. Burton said there is no need to worry as the Marianas will have local control over immigration matters.

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cc: Mr. Helfer