

4
OFFICE FOR MICRONESIAN STATUS NEGOTIATIONS

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20240

April 18, 1975

usc
03
567,243

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

Subject: Interior Subcommittee Briefing of April 14, 1975

MORNING

Representatives Present:

Chairman Philip Burton, California (D)
Don H. Clausen, California (R)
Joseph P. Vigorito, Pennsylvania (D)
Robert J. Lagomarsino, California (R)
Jaime Benitez, Puerto Rico (D)
Antonio Borja Won Pat, Guam (D)

Mr. Burton opened the questioning by asking for additional assurances from Ambassador Williams that there will be no interference in the "unfettered exercise of the will of the people of the Mariana Islands". He also asked that current voter registration lists of the outer islands be certified as is for conduct of the plebiscite. The Ambassador responded that the Executive Branch had given its assurances that there will be no interference in the plebiscite in the proclamation by the Secretary of the Interior. The Ambassador also stated that Mr. Erwin Canham will be the judge of the qualifications necessary for fair voter registration. Before Mr. Burton left, he stated that the Covenant would be approved or disapproved without change and any limitations would be enacted outside the four corners of the Covenant, as would be the case if the Covenant were a treaty. The Ambassador agreed that this procedure would be best. Mr. Burton asked if after twenty-five years, must the government of the Northern Mariana Islands take specific action to prevent alienation of land. The Ambassador answered that the Northern Mariana Islands must act to change this provision but need not enact legislation to maintain the prohibition of land alienation.

Mr. Clausen complimented the choice of Mr. Erwin Canham as Plebiscite Commissioner, a statement joined in individually and collectively by all the Congressmen present. Mr. Clausen asked about specific safeguards to prevent interference in the plebiscite by Americans, Japanese or others. The Ambassador answered that the Plebiscite Commissioner was charged to promote the conduct of a fair and impartial plebiscite. The primary safeguard would be a comprehensive political education program which gives the people the facts necessary to make a decision. Mr. Clausen also asked for an explanation of why we agreed to a waiver of the one man one vote provision in their future legislative body. The Ambassador said that it was a political compromise in order to maintain the participation of Rota and Tinian in these negotiations.

03- 034969

Mr. Vigorito asked whether we were going to split the Trust Territory into six political entities. He commented that fifteen thousand inhabitants could probably easily live off the interest of the \$20 million which we are giving them for the military land without considering the other sweeteners added. He concluded that he would not consider having a non-voting delegate in the Congress for fifteen thousand people.

Mr. Benitez noted that the Commonwealth agreement contained many things of current interest to the people of Puerto Rico. He asked about our estimation of how the United Nations would react to this plebiscite and questioned the size of the vote. The Ambassador noted that the Trusteeship Council had recognized and formally acknowledged the aspirations of the Marianas people. He added that he would provide the size of the electorate for the record. Mr. Benitez asked also why the plebiscite was held first and then the approval of Congress. The Ambassador answered that this is the way the Congress wishes to do it.

Mr. Lagomarsino told the Ambassador that the current position of this committee was that no statement be made either for or against the Commonwealth in order not to influence the outcome of the plebiscite. However, he added there exists the possibility that this policy may be interpreted as an indication that the Congress opposes the new commonwealth, which is certainly not true for this committee. The Ambassador responded that many people are not aware that he has fully consulted with the Congress. Statements have been made that Congressional silence on this matter means that the Congress will not approve the new arrangements. Mr. Lagomarsino asked about the provisions to limit the power of Congress and its application to the land alienation section, and U.S. powers of eminent domain. The Ambassador stated that the Congress would voluntarily limit its power to change the section on land alienation but this would not affect in any way the U.S. Congressional powers of eminent domain in the Marianas.

AFTERNOON

Representatives Present:

Mr. Burton and Mr. Benitez

Mr. Burton repeatedly questioned the requirement for pre-registration for voters in the plebiscite especially in the outer islands. The Ambassador noted that new voter registra-

tion lists would not be an inconvenience in the outer islands considering the small numbers of people to be registered. Mr. Burton then asked about taxes, whether the Northern Mariana Islands can unilaterally lower federal income taxes. The Ambassador said they could not do this. However, as the federal tax would be a local tax, money could be rebated; but the level and those affected could not be changed. Mr. Burton then asked about the sources of funds for the plebiscite and the type of objective material for the plebiscite. He continued to question the procedures to be taken to prevent either American or foreign interference in the conduct of the plebiscite. He asked about mechanisms to prevent interference from non-Northern Marianas sources and asked that a record of column inches and advertisement expenses be kept of business organizations during the plebiscite campaign.

Mr. Burton then asked for any comments Mr. Herman R. Guerrero wished to make on the subject. Mr. Guerrero noted that \$10,000 was given to two members of the Marianas delegation to the Congress of Micronesia for activities promoting Micronesian unity, and asked point blank what authority the U.S. has to prevent the other districts from interfering in the Marianas plebiscite. Mr. Benitez asked for a definition by the Executive Branch as to what in its judgment would constitute interference in the plebiscite. Mr. Burton answered that he would be hesitant to advise the other districts about their proper role in the plebiscite, however, he added the people of the Marianas are the best judge as to whether the other districts are interfering and will vote accordingly.

Mr. Guerrero asked questions about war claims. Mr. Burton said that if this matter was not solved soon he would introduce legislation calling for 100% compensation for war claims victims and put it as a rider to the covenant legislation. Mr. Rice noted that it would take approximately an additional \$50 million to fully compensate victims under Title II and probably another \$20 million to do so under Title I. The Ambassador offered to provide the Congressman with a status report on the current situation with regard to war claims. Mr. Guerrero then asked that the Marianas be treated separately in order to speed adjudication and payment of claims. Mr. Burton stated emphatically that he would be opposed to special treatment for one district as all have suffered. He stated again that he intended to introduce a bill requiring 100% compensation for war claim victims. He asked that the State Department provide him with a letter containing its approval to legislation giving 100% on the dollar for victims of World War II claims in Micronesia.

Mr. Guerrero asked if the section preventing the alienation of land to other U.S. citizens was constitutional. Mr. Burton

stated that it was constitutional and moreover it was his understanding that the section was introduced at the specific suggestion of Interior and Insular Affairs Subcommittee. Mr. Guerrero asked a question about the level of federal taxation. Mr. Burton noted that the majority of the people of the Mariana Islands would fall below the income levels for any tax and therefore would pay less tax than they presently do now. Mr. Guerrero asked about immigration especially by naturalized American citizens from the Philippines and other parts of Asia. Mr. Burton said that present laws would not prevent any American citizen, naturalized or not, to immigrate to any part of the United States. However, he understood that permanent resident aliens would not be able to immigrate to the Marianas without the approval of the Northern Mariana Islands, as is presently the case. This latter provision will most likely be preserved and extended to other island communities including the Virgin Islands and Guam.

ACTIONS NECESSARY

1. Mr. Clausen: Explain one man-one vote provision.
2. Mr. Burton: Record of advertisement expenses and articles for and against the commonwealth.
3. Mr. Burton: Sources of funds for the plebiscite.
4. Mr. Benitez: What constitutes interference in the plebiscite.
5. Mr. Burton: Status report on current war claims situation.
6. Mr. Burton: Draft of approval by the State Department of giving 100% on the dollar for Micronesian war claims.
7. Mr. Vigorito: Does the United States intend to divide Micronesia into six political entities.

EEArcher:kkc

034972