

FILES

9-5-75

A. R. Kasdan, GC

Mariana Political Status Change

I met with Sandra Wojahn, Desk Officer, Micronesia, with respect to ACTION programs in the Northern Mariana Islands. The Northern Mariana Islands are in the process of establishing a political union with the United States. During the meeting we reviewed a memorandum which I prepared to David Searles dated July 23, 1975, which pointed out that the Northern Mariana Islands would become eligible for Federal domestic programs within 180 days after the United States Congress has given its final approval to the agreement with the Islands covering the political union. The memorandum stated that to accommodate the development of full-time domestic volunteer programs, Peace Corps programs in the Islands should be gradually phased out. The memorandum concluded by saying that one staff person could not run both IO programs in the United States Trust Territory and DO programs in the Northern Mariana Islands because each program is operated pursuant to separate legislative authority and personnel systems. This requires that Peace Corps programs be operated by Foreign Service Reserve employees and domestic programs by General Schedule employees. I made the following additional comments during our meeting:

1. Both DO and IO could plan a joint effort to recruit Peace Corps and VISTA volunteers for similar type programs in the Trust Territories and the Northern Marianas. This would permit the IO and DO staff to plan jointly for such programs even though they would have to be administered separately. The terms of VISTA service could be made quite similar to those of Peace Corps. ACTION legislation permits VISTA volunteers to serve for period up to two years. The allowances which both Peace Corps and VISTA volunteers receive might be similar in amount since the

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cost of living may not vary too much within this area of the world. With respect to readjustment allowances there is a difference since Peace Corps volunteers receive \$75 a month and VISTA volunteers only get \$50 a month. We indicated in the July 23 memorandum that both programs could be housed in the same administrative office. This means that overhead could be shared proportionately.

2. I mentioned one other possibility which was not included in the July 23 memorandum. This would permit Peace Corps to operate programs both in the Trust Territories and the Islands. This is so because: The Peace Corps Act defines the United States only to include the separate states and the District of Columbia. This does not include United States Territories, the Virgin Islands, Guam, and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. Thus, the term "abroad" in the Peace Corps Act by implication would include these territories and Puerto Rico. The Peace Corps Act was amended to remove the Territories from the definition of the United States in order to permit Peace Corps volunteers and trainees to enjoy certain benefits relating to sickness and disability compensation associated with service abroad during training of Peace Corps camps in the Virgin Islands, Guam and Puerto Rico. As a policy matter Peace Corps has never operated programs in these areas principally because they were considered to be integral parts of the United States and not abroad.

ACTION could approach its legislative oversight committees and indicate that it is programatically more feasible and more economical to have ACTION represented in both the Trust Territories and the Islands by Peace Corps. ACTION would point out that as a technical legal matter there was nothing in the Peace Corps Act itself which barred Peace Corps from putting volunteers into a United States Territory or Commonwealth.

Before we would approach Congress, the Agency should make a policy decision that this is the way we are going to handle full-time volunteer programs in the Islands. My personal guess

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is that Congress will not accept Peace Corps as the ACTION full-time volunteer program for the Islands but that is a personal opinion and if the Agency wishes to pursue this matter then it should.

3. Sandra asked me about a statement in my July 23 memorandum which appeared confusing. This is the statement: "Allocating staff salaries proportionately between appropriations is possible, but difficult." I indicated that I was not exactly sure what I intended to mean by that statement but my best recollection is that I was trying to point out that it would be very difficult to divide a staff person's time proportionately between IO and DO programs. It is hard to imagine treating a staff member as employed under the Peace Corps Act four hours a day to handle Peace Corps programs and then employed four hours a day under the General Schedule.

cc: David Searles, HANEAP
Sandra Wojahn, HANEAP
Ronald Gerevas, DO with July 23 memo

cc: GC Subj; GC Read; ARK Chron

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