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COM Questions TT's 1980

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SAIPAN -- The Congress of Micronesia (COM) expressed concern over the proposed decentralization policy for the

Trust Territory (TT) and over the 1980 target for ending the trusteeship in a letter sent this week to U.S. Director of Territorial Affairs Fred M. Zeder.

The lengthy letter, signed by COM senate president Tosiwo Nakayama of Truk and house speaker Bethwel Henry of Ponape, told Zeder: "We are a bit apprehensive as to how you stand on certain issues."

United Nations advisers are in Micronesia now assisting with an "indicative" economic-development plan.

Regarding decentralization, the letter said COM agrees "to the principle of decentralizing decision-making" but said will "reserve comment" on the plan to decentralize physically. A thorough, unbiased study should determine the best way to proceed, it added.

Another area of concern mentioned is that Zeder's office "has not officially acknowledged to us (COM) the existence of the draft constitution to create the Federated States of Micronesia, let alone given us a reaction."

"Perhaps there is a great disparity in the significance each of us attaches to our own constitution," Nakayama and Henry wrote.

Delaying implementation of a plan "would be in all our best interest" since there is to be a referendum on the constitution and since an indicative development plan is under way, the COM leaders contended.

Looking at the 1980 target date to end the trusteeship the COM leaders said: "It has become clear that 1980 is no longer realistic."

When Zeder was on Saipan in January he proposed that decentralization of the headquarters be given priority and that departments' operating divisions be relocated in the district most appropriate for each particular division or department.

"Politically this date may be acceptable, but it is obvious that a basic infrastructure...cannot be installed by 1980."

He suggested that the Marine Resources Division might be relocated in Palau, since it is the most developed in marine resources, while the Department of Education might be relocated in Ponape and the Transportation Division in the Marshalls.

Nakayama and Henry told Zeder that they do not feel it is in the best interest of the United States or Micronesia to set a termination date until "a clear picture emerges as to the potential of our economy."

"Now we have nothing more than a smattering of what can really be termed economic development and no new government can stand unless it is able to guarantee some measure of economic and social well-being to its people," Nakayama and Henry wrote.

Zeder's Task Force Report, released in January, contended that relocating departments would not cause a major impact on any district since there will be no major housing or infrastructure needs and since each district will receive some economic benefit as a by-product.

"If this overall plan is endorsed and affected increased accountability would have been effected. The American tax payer would benefit along with the Micronesians," the report stated.

Zeder's report recommended that decentralization be completed within three years allowing Marianas citizens to be phased into new jobs in the

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Marianas as headquarters functions requiring personnel are being phased out of Saipan.

The report pointed out that when separate administration occurs for the Marianas "a situation will exist where 75 percent of the headquarters employees are Marianas District citizens."

The U.S. has assured the some 500 Marianas citizens employed by headquarters that there will be no massive loss of jobs and that the private sector and additional government jobs with the Marianas District "will accommodate them if an early, aggressive program is carried out."

At the Trust Territory's Jan. 20 cabinet meeting Zeder discussed the decentralization "crash program" and asked all department heads to write functional statements of how their divisions operate now and how they could operate more effectively with decentralization. It was suggested that some departmental staff members could be relocated soon.

Emmett Rice of Zeder's office is to arrive in Micronesia this month to discuss decentralization.

In discussing decentralization on a "Dialogue For Micronesia" program last week Nakayama suggested that it would be better for everyone to remain on Saipan a few more years until a new capital is prepared.

The senate president indicated that he finds it difficult to imagine how supervisors could be kept on Saipan while the people supervised would be in the districts.

He reminded his audience that the central "TT" authority was in Honolulu before it was moved to Guam and finally Saipan.

He and Henry stated in their letter to Zeder that they fail to see the urgency in physically decentralizing.

The letter urged Zeder to bring COM "fully into the planning process."

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