

Dear Editor:

I was taken aback by your editorial which appeared in your August 19th issue titled "Sea-Law Conference Vital to Guam" which complained about your alleged lack of representation at the United Nations' Conference on Law of the Sea now underway in New York. Your first sentence that "...the people of Guam and Micronesia are getting short-changed...in a vital decision affecting the islands" deserves comment.

First, up until the separation of the Northern Mariana Islands from the remaining five districts of the Trust Territory on April 1, 1976, all the islands of Micronesia (excluding Guam) were represented at all the Law of the Sea meetings which have taken place since the Caracas conference in 1974.

In 1973 the Congress of Micronesia created its Joint Committee on Law of the Sea to study the issue of who will control the living and nonliving resources scattered throughout its then 3 million square mile ocean area. With the separation of the Northern Marianas, that area has now shrunk to about a 2 million square miles.

While other U.S.-administered territories such as American Samoa and Guam have been literally sitting on their hands doing nothing to formulate or advance a position on their territorial seas, Micronesia has already gained over two years experience at the international Law of the Sea forum. Initially the Micronesian delegation attended the conferences as part of the United States delegation. But a report from its four-member group told the Congress

of Micronesia last January of "fundamental and serious conflict" with the position taken by the United States. Concerning tuna, currently Micronesia's most lucrative living resource in the sea, the U.S. had taken a position which would have the effect of allowing the fishing fleets of more-developed nations to continue to exploit this precious resource. Foreign fishing vessels now take an estimated \$75 million to \$100 million from Micronesian waters in tuna alone.

The result of this conflict was that the Micronesian delegation obtained approval from the United Nations General Assembly to attend the meetings as "independent observers" apart from the United States delegation.

Another reason for doing this was that in recent years it has become known that valuable potato-shaped manganese nodules have been found lying loose on the bottom of most of the world's oceans. Interestingly, the largest concentration of these nodules have been located in the North Pacific Ocean, of which Micronesia covers a vast part.

Already, experts predict that the demand for such minerals will at least double in the next 20 years, as they have done in the last 20 years. Furthermore, the U.S. now pays billions of dollars annually to foreign governments for minerals and oil which the U.S. cannot produce itself.

Proof of the importance Micronesia now places on its ocean potential is witnessed by the fact that during the 8th round of Micronesian Status talks in June, U.S. Ambassador Williams

was presented with a proposal by the Micronesian side which would guarantee the islands (excluding Guam & the Northern Marianas) full control and rights over their 200-mile economic zones, similar to the unilateral declaration made by the United States on this issue several months ago.

AS for now, the eventual outcome of these two related sets of negotiations -- Law of the Sea and Micronesian status talks -- remains to be seen. However, in the meantime it seems to be that the governments of Guam, the Northern Marianas, and Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands have a responsibility to the people they supposedly serve, along with the local press, to keep the public informed on this vitally important economic and political issue.

I, for one, certainly wonder why this is not being done.

Then, again, we can recall that less than two months after the separate-status agreement for the Northern Marianas was signed by President Ford, the Director of the Office of Territorial Affairs, Mr. Fred Zeder, announced that the Shell Oil Company may soon begin exploring for oil in the waters of the Northern Mariana Islands. I seem to recall that the Marianas Commonwealth Covenant was silent on the issue of who will control the resources in those waters.

Hopefully, through the efforts of the Micronesian Law of the Sea delegation headed by Marshalls Congressman Charles Dornick and the Micronesian Commission on Future Status headed by Andon Amaraich of Truk, what has already happened to Guam and the Northern Marianas will not happen to Truk, Yap, Palau, Marshalls, Ponape and Kusaie.

Sincerely,

-s-Mike Malone

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