

TT Status Round-Table Planned In D.C.

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SAIPAN -- The Congress of Micronesia has accepted an invitation from the United States for a "round-table" meeting in Washington to discuss the Trust Territory's future political status of the Trust Territory (TT).

The COM leaders, Senate President Tosiwo Nakayama and Speaker Bethwel Henry, said, however, that the Micronesian representatives, possibly including people from the six district legislatures, "will have no authority to conduct negotiations on the future status of Micronesia."

Nakayama and Henry told Secretary of State Cyrus Vance and Secretary of the Interior Cecil Andrus, who initiated the invitations, that the Micronesian Commission on Status and Transition "is the only legally authorized and mandated body to engage in future political status negotiations with the United States."

The COM leaders added that they would like to know the names and titles of the U.S. representatives to the talks and to receive "further clarification concerning the subjects the U.S. government desires to discuss" during the meeting.

Nakayama and Henry suggested the talks also take up the questions of Micronesian sea jurisdiction, the referendum on the proposed Micronesian constitution, transition to new government, relocation of the TT capital from Saipan to Pohnpei, economic development and the appointments of the new high commissioner, his deputy and TT high court justices.

Reliable sources said Nakayama and Henry would press during the talks for U.S. approval of the legislation passed in February by COM calling for Micronesian control over fisheries within 200 miles of Micronesian waters. The legislation was voted by Acting High Commissioner Boyd Mackenzie, but COM overrode that veto and the measure is now awaiting action by Andrus.

The sources also said the COM leaders would press for approval of the draft constitution of the federated states of Micronesia, formulated two years ago, but still not voted on. Legislation directing the High Commissioner to call the referendum by July next year was approved by COM during its last session and is now awaiting the High Commissioner's approval.

Nakayama and Henry, according to the sources, would also ask for firm plans from the U.S. regarding transition from the present TT government to a new government controlled by Micronesians, and would ask the U.S. to honor a commitment made by former Ambassador P. Hayden Williams, that the U.S. fund the building of a new capitol in Pohnpei.

The sources also said the COM presiding officers feel strongly that a new high commissioner "ought to have demonstrated ability in public administration and management."

The COM leaders, according to the sources, have made it clear to Vance and Andrus the appointment of the new high commissioner should not be made "as a reward for political favor."

The sources also said Nakayama and Henry want Vance and Andrus to "completely overhaul" the TT high court because of "visible internal fights among high court justices" and Chief Justice Harold Burnett's poor health.

Nakayama and Henry will tell Vance and Andrus that the COM should have a say in the selection of TT high court justices and they want Micronesians trained to replace the American judges, the sources said.

All the district legislatures except the Marshall have indicated they will participate in the talks, according to the COM sources.

While COM and the district legislatures were invited to send representatives, the Micronesian Commission on Status and Transition was not invited. That prompted its chairman, Ardon Amaraich, to declare that the U.S. was again employing "divide and conquer" tactics against the Micronesians.

Paul J. Bennett, state liaison officer in Saipan, explained yesterday: "There is now a reassessment of the total U.S. policy towards Micronesia and we want everybody to hear it and we also want to hear from all the districts."

Bennett added that COM and district legislatures could send any representatives they wanted, including members of the various status commissions.