



House of Representatives
NORTHERN MARIANAS COMMONWEALTH LEGISLATURE
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MEMORANDUM

July 16, 1985

TO: VICE CHAIRMAN, COMMITTEE ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT

FROM: HOUSE LEGAL COUNSEL'S OFFICE

SUBJECT: Ramifications of creating three official languages for the Commonwealth.

Designating three official languages for the Commonwealth will tend to increase the size of government rather than decrease it, as the Convention has expressed an intention to do through other proposed amendments to the CNMI Constitution. Such a policy would be impractical and costly. The government would encounter great difficulty in communicating with the federal government in Washington D.C. ; the place from where all the supplemental Commonwealth funds flow.

Even intra-commonwealth, how would government agencies and employees function if they are given a choice of which official language to use? If one agency uses Carolinian to send out correspondence and the receiving agency has employees that do not understand that language, it must have the message translated into Chamorro or English. Thus an employee will be required to devote some of his work time to translation. In addition, if the transaction requires a response, that response will be delayed by the time it takes for the translation. Furthermore for every communication there will be at least two pieces of paper that say the same thing, assuming that the translation was accurate.

I think one can continue this hypothetical situation on and on, but the point should be clear that such a procedure will not only slow down the functions of an already sluggish bureaucracy but it will also deplete the declining resources of the Commonwealth. The maintenance of a bi-lingual system should be emphasized in the learning environment of the schools, not in government.

In Canada, the province of Quebec has two official languages: French and English. There all government communications must be published in both languages at great expense.

The comments contained herein are not of a legal but more of a practical, common sense nature intended to expose the pitfalls of what may appear, at first glance, to be a proposal with minor consequences. You have asked for my comments and I have endeavoured to make them as factual as possible. As always, you are the elected delegates and should do what your conscience dictates is in the best interests of the Commonwealth and its people.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Timothy H. Bellas".

Timothy H. Bellas
Deputy Chief Legal Counsel