

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

★ news release

REMARKS OF UNDER SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR JOHN A. CARVER, JR. AT CEREMONIES OPENING THE FIRST SESSION OF THE CONGRESS OF MICRONESIA, SAIPAN, MARIANAS ISLANDS, JULY 12, 1965.

This is indeed an historic day--not only for Micronesia, but for the United States of America and the Free World everywhere. For today we participate in the founding of a new political institution through which the democratic will of 90,000 people may be worked.

For me personally this is an especially sentimental occasion. When I first visited the Trust Territory just a little over four years ago, it was a journey of familiarization--to learn more about this territory of small islands scattered over a vast expanse of sea, to meet with the people and learn of their aspirations, and to confer with Mr. Goding who had just assumed his new duties.

In that era, Saipan was maintained apart from the rest of Micronesia, the seat of Trust Territory government was not even in the Territory but in Guam. The essential ingredient of a democratic society--a popularly elected legislative assembly--was not in existence. Public expenditures for education, health and sanitation lagged further and further behind the needs. Economic activity in the Territory was practically at a standstill.

No miracles have occurred in the last four years--but the changes in Micronesia are measurable. It is one governmental and territorial entity under unified administration. Its headquarters is located within the territory. There is a hum of progress in education, medical care and in the economic life of the area. And today we meet to mark the taking of that first long stride toward the ideal of responsible self-government.

This should indeed be observed as an occasion for congratulations and well wishes for future success. But it must also be the occasion for sober reflection. For the assumption of democratic prerogatives also carries serious burdens of responsibility. You are the chosen leaders of a community which is widely dispersed by geographic distance, language differences, unequal levels of social and educational advancement. It is elemental that you must work

for the greatest good to the majority of the Micronesian people. But you must be ever mindful of the rights, the aspirations and the essential human dignity of the minority. It is one of democracy's greatest virtues that the majority rules, but always attempts to protect the fundamental rights of the minority--not only to disagree, but to live according to its own precepts so long as they do not endanger the rest of the community.

This is the reason that the American Bill of Rights is embodied in the Code of the Trust Territory almost from its inception--and why it is incorporated by reference in the charter for this legislative body. We do not urge the concept of individual freedom just because it is American--or even because we claim any particular genius in its development. It represents, rather, the democratic idealism which has evolved from man's earliest attempt at governing himself in an atmosphere of freedom. We are as indebted to the ancient Greeks and the French and British political philosophers as we are to the actual authors of our own basic political documents. We think them the best set of rules for the regulation of the social community.

There will be some--there may be some already--who will criticize Secretarial Order No. 2882 as being imperfect in one way or another and in one degree or another. I cannot quarrel with such a conclusion. But we must remember that no constitution which evolves from the free consent of men will ever be perfect. By its nature, democracy is and must be a system of compromises. Its products will therefore never fully satisfy those who want to achieve perfect symmetry. But, by the same token, compromise of the majority's position is the only proven method for protecting the minority against tyranny.

What has been done in this order is to start the Trust Territory on the path to self-government. It will be long, and sometimes difficult. Some aspects of legislative authority are limited or circumscribed--not because we want the Congress of Micronesia to be permanently deprived of the full scope of legislative power, but because our best judgment is that it is better to move gradually and well than to shoulder the total burden suddenly and badly. We are able to develop political and legislative skills through the process of experience. Those peoples whose independence was achieved without a background of training in self-government have labored under a great handicap. Democracy stands in jeopardy in those nations where strong central rule became the only answer to the confusion and conflict of undisciplined legislatures. We think Micronesia can and will be spared that kind of experience.

Legislative self-determination is welcomed by the administering authority in many ways, but most particularly in reference to the pace of change that is occurring in the Territory. As the sovereign charged with protecting and advancing your welfare, it has been our stated policy to interfere as little as we possibly could with the customs and mores of the community. Yet we know that the people are demanding and will demand increasingly that changes be made in the customary way of life. It is fitting and proper that

the pace of change be set by representatives of the people, rather than an outside authority no matter how sympathetic and well-intentioned that authority might be.

In creating this legislative body and in participating in this opening session, we voice confidence in the future of Micronesia. But this confidence must be tempered with realism. What, in terms of stark reality, is the future of this area?

In terms of social and political development, the progress of the recent past gives us confidence that the people of Micronesia can be relied upon to produce institutions adequate to meet their needs.

They are interested in and eagerly seek the education necessary to govern their own affairs and to cope with their environment. As the younger people achieve higher levels of training, they can take over the task of improved health conditions and a generally higher standard of living.

But Micronesia will still be faced with many physical facts of life that present serious problems. Geographic dispersion, a limited land base with a vastly expanding population load, relatively meager resources, and strategic location between the contesting forces of East and West pose grave questions for a viable economic and political community on any kind of a self-sustaining basis.

We must plot a course for the ultimate decision on future political status and association. The ultimate determining factor, so far as the United States is concerned, will be the will of the people who have elected you to represent them in this Congress. But how we arrive at making that choice and how we implement the chosen alternative will involve highly complex negotiations within the United Nations and careful weighing of the national policies of my own country.

We have said in the past that the people of Micronesia should not be called upon to decide their political future until they had been provided the tools with which to make a wise choice--those tools being education sufficient to cope with the modern world, economic development and experience in self-government. These remain valid criteria to govern the timing of that critical decision.

We are bridging that gap of educational lag. Today we launch the latest in a series of steps toward experience in responsible self-government. Economic viability remains as a substantial hurdle to a truly free choice. This Congress, in conjunction with the administration, must concentrate its attention on the hard task of converting resources into an economic fabric which will supply the people with the standard of living to which they aspire.

The history of American administration over the past two decades in this area has been an honorable one. Considering its strategic character in this

unsettled world and the constant threat to freedom that has been posed by totalitarian powers, our commitment to the welfare of the people has been constant and overriding, albeit at some times underfinanced. Now we have more than doubled our level of investment in your future. Probably this will have to be increased further in support of your progress toward whatever goals you seek to achieve.

Just as we have confidence in your competence to assume management of your own local affairs, so also do we believe that you are convinced of our good faith in the larger task of protecting and developing your homeland. The world is not likely to become less tense over the next few years, much as we might hope for it. The Trust Territory will, very likely, continue to be a strategic factor in the defense of freedom--yours as well as the United States'. Thus we have a community of interest which is based on mutual confidence and friendship, coupled with necessity.

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