

United States Department of the Interior

Office of Territories

(Bureau or Office)

SUGGESTED MATERIALS FOR PRESIDENTIAL LIBRARIES

1. Type of Material: Statement of remarks.
2. Brief Description: Remarks by Interior Secretary Stewart L. Udall before Senate Interior subcommittee, May 8, 1968, in connection with S.J. Res. 96 and S.J. Res. 106, regarding the political status of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands.
3. Relation to President's interests and programs: In support of President Johnson's recommendation to the Congress of August 21, 1967, for establishment of a commission to make recommendations on the future political status of the Trust Territory.
4. Filed in:
5. Key dates:
6. Volume:
7. For further information contact Mr. George Milner, Interior Dept., 183-4736  
(Name, location, and telephone number)

STATEMENT

OF

STEWART L. UDALL, SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR, AT HEARING BEFORE THE SUB-COMMITTEE ON TERRITORIAL AND INSULAR AFFAIRS OF THE COMMITTEE ON INTERIOR AND INSULAR AFFAIRS, UNITED STATES SENATE, SCHEDULED FOR WEDNESDAY, MAY 8, 1968, IN CONNECTION WITH S.J. RES. 96, A BILL "TO ESTABLISH THE COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE POLITICAL STATUS OF THE TRUST TERRITORY OF THE PACIFIC ISLANDS (MICRONESIA)" AND S.J. RES. 106, A BILL "REGARDING THE STATUS OF THE TRUST TERRITORY OF THE PACIFIC ISLANDS."

For Release on Delivery

Mr. Chairman:

Several bills concerning the Trust Territory are on the agenda of your Subcommittee this morning, and many witnesses are here to be heard. My prepared comments, for that reason, will be brief. But with my brevity, I hope to be able to convey to you my own sense of urgency, and that of the Executive Branch generally, concerning the major issue before you this morning - that is, the bills relating to the political status of the Trust Territory.

During my seven years as Secretary of the Interior, there has been in my judgment no legislation of greater moment relating to Interior's territorial responsibilities than this legislation concerning the Trust Territory. Representatives of the Departments of State and Defense are present to tell you why this is so from the standpoints of their particular Departments. I will tell you why it is so in terms of the particular responsibilities of the Department of the Interior.

For over 20 years the United States has been responsible for the administration of the Trust Territory. The Trusteeship Agreement with the United Nations, from which our responsibilities derive, is clearly not intended as a permanent arrangement. The people of the Trust Territory,

some 91,000 in all, know it is not permanent. They know their current political status is transitional only, and they are increasingly anxious to take the next step. In the summer of 1966, their popularly elected legislature, by overwhelming votes in each house, called upon the President to turn to this matter. Their resolution states that "this generation of Micronesians should have an early opportunity to determine the future constitutional and political status of Micronesia."

More particularly, the Congress of Micronesia asked the President to establish a commission "to consult the people of Micronesia to ascertain their wishes and views, and to study and critically assess the political alternatives open to Micronesia."

In considering this request within the Executive Branch, we came quickly to the view that a commission, made up of representatives of the Executive Branch, and possibly the public, was not alone enough. We concluded that in order to develop the "meaningful proposals" which the resolution seeks, members of the United States Congress must surely be included. Accordingly, we recommended to the President that legislation be sent forward by which a commission would be created, with representation both from the Congress and, through appointments by the President, from the Executive Branch. The President transmitted the bill to the Congress last August. That bill, and others proposing similar commissions to study the political future of the Trust Territory, are before you this morning.

I should like to turn briefly to some of the considerations which have led to the submission of this legislation.

First, I have stated that our responsibilities in the Trust Territory derive from the Trusteeship Agreement, and that the Agreement is intended to provide a temporary arrangement. It contains no termination date, however, nor does it spell out the means by which termination is to be achieved. But there is general agreement that any termination procedure must include a plebiscite -- must include an opportunity for the Micronesians to go to the polls and register their own preference as to their future status.

Secondly, the Executive Branch proposal states that this plebiscite should occur by June 30, 1972. There have been some voices heard to say that this is too soon. We think it is not, and that the time between this date and 1972 will be ample to permit the foreseen Commission to do its job, to report its findings, and further to permit the Government of the Trust Territory to carry out its plans fully to inform the people of Micronesia of the Commission's conclusions and recommendations concerning political alternatives.

Thirdly, the Executive Branch has not offered any recommendations as to the options to be provided in that plebiscite. That is the principal job, in our view, for which the commission would be created. We know, and you know, what the theoretical alternatives are -- ranging from sovereign independence to Statehood. But the task that must be undertaken, in my judgment cooperatively by the Executive and Legislative branches, is not the delineation of theoretical alternatives, but rather the selection of "meaningful" ones. That is what the Congress of Micronesia also seeks. As my letter to the President, which he sent forward to the Congress last August, stated, we know that there is substantial sentiment in the Trust Territory in favor of some form of association with the United States.

We welcome this fact, because I believe that the United States and the Trust Territory need each other. But if the people of the Trust Territory do want political association with the United States, then it is crucial that the Congress of the United States become involved now in considering what form that association must take. The Congress has plenary authority on this subject under Article IV of the Constitution.

Fourthly, the bills before you differ as to whether Micronesians should be members of the proposed Commission. The Administration's bill does not include them. It is our understanding that the Congress of Micronesia, which has its own status commission, hopes that the commission foreseen in the President's bill would consult and work closely with the Micronesian status commission. If this were so, as we would hope and expect it would be, Micronesian membership would be unnecessary. Our recent meetings with members of the Micronesian status commission indicated that this was their view, as well.

Lastly, whatever options are offered to the people of the Trust Territory, my own very strong view is that they must be spelled out in sufficient detail so that those who go to the polls will be able to know with reasonable precision the consequences of their vote. They will need to know, for example, not only that the United States is offering political "association", but they must know what that means. Will they become citizens, or nationals, of the United States, or will they remain aliens? What will be the fiscal results, the tax and tariff treatment, of association with the United States? What powers can be expected to be conferred upon their legislative branch, and what form will it take? All of these questions, and

dozens like them, must be answered.

They cannot be answered in the absence of full consultation and discussion among the people of Micronesia, the interested Executive agencies, and the Congress of the United States. A commission, of the kind proposed in the bills before you, I believe is the best mechanism. I hope you will agree, and that legislation will be enacted that will create a commission which will report its findings to you, and to the President, at a very early date.

I will welcome your questions.