

MARCH 12, 1980

Office of the White House Press Secretary

THE WHITE HOUSE

STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT

I am pleased to sign H.R. 3756, a bill "to authorize appropriations for certain insular areas of the United States, and for other purposes."

This Omnibus Territories Bill contains numerous provisions which will facilitate the administration of the U.S. territories and the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands and promote their economic and social development.

The bill also contains an important provision which confirms Puerto Rico's long-disputed ownership of submerged lands, including mineral rights, to a distance of three marine leagues (approximately ten miles). In doing so it resolves a question of law which has been of understandable concern to Puerto Rico and could contribute to the future prosperity of the Commonwealth. It establishes no precedent for the jurisdiction of States or other territories over submerged lands.

Although most of the bill's provisions accomplish worthwhile purposes, I have reservations about some:

- The authorization to pay interest on judgments arising out of land claims in Guam is inconsistent with settled law and practice. I agree in concept that reasonable compensation ought to be paid to any landowners whose land was unfairly acquired on the island after the liberation of Guam in 1944. But precisely because of this, I strongly urge the Congress to replace this anomalous and unprecedented provision with a solution that rights any wrongs with a more equitable and workable compensation procedure.
 - The requirement that Congress specifically authorize the transport or storage of spent nuclear fuel in any U.S. territory or the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands responds to a very real concern in the Pacific region. But the provision is an unnecessary impediment to the orderly conduct of this country's nuclear non-proliferation policies. Present law provides fully adequate assurances of Congressional oversight of nuclear transportation and storage plans. Congress should reconsider this new requirement.
 - The provision regarding health care and environmental monitoring for the residents of the Northern Marshall Islands is drafted very broadly. However, it is my intention that the Secretary of the Interior implement the provision to focus the benefits on those Northern Marshalls residents directly affected by U.S. nuclear testing.
 - The ban on termination of Federal programs for the Trust Territory after the end of the trusteeship could impose a patronizing and debilitating straitjacket on the peoples and governments of these areas. The final determination on this issue should be made by the Congress when it con-
- Association for the Micronesians

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(MORE)

- There are several other provisions in the bill which are poorly drafted or inconsistent with sound policies. We will work with the Congress to remedy all such defects.
- Finally, with respect to a provision relating to cost incurred in collecting customs duties and other fees directly attributable to the importation of petroleum products into the Virgin Islands, it is my understanding that the Congress intends that the United States will continue to be reimbursed for costs attributable to such collections until January 1, 1982 to prevent an unanticipated windfall to a private corporation under an existing contract concerning petroleum imports.

Despite these problems, the bill as a whole conforms with my Administration's efforts to improve relations between the Federal government and the U.S. territories and the Trust Territory as outlined in the comprehensive territorial policy I proposed to Congress February 14. In signing this measure, I again urge the Congress to support that policy framework as well as the corrective measures suggested for this bill.

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