

INTERVIEW OF MAGDALENA C. CAMACHO

by Deanne C. Siemer and Howard P. Willens

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- Siemer: Magdalena Camacho is in charge of the Commonwealth Scholarship Office, and she was an elected delegate to the First Constitutional Convention. She has also worked for the Commonwealth Legislature and the Marianas Visitors Bureau Ms. Camacho has graciously agreed to give us an interview. Ms. Camacho, to start out with, could you describe your family background and tell us a little bit about your father's family and your mother's family?
- Camacho: Okay, my name is Magdalena Guevara Castro, that's my maiden name. My father's name is Juan Cabrera Castro and my mother is Esperanza Pangelinan Guevara. My father passed away some twelve years ago and my mother is still alive, thanks to God. I come from a family of fourteen children. I am sixth from the youngest. There are eight men and six of us women. To date, two of my brothers and sisters passed away, so we now have twelve in the family. One of my sisters lives in California and two brothers live in Guam. I married Fred Flores Camacho, and it is almost 20 years since I got married. It has been a long time. Let me see, we met at the University of Guam where I was going to school after a couple of years in Hawaii. I took my Associate Degree in accounting in Honolulu, Hawaii. Then I transferred over to the University of Guam where I obtained my Bachelor's Degree in accounting. After that I moved to Saipan and started working as an administrator in the life insurance department with MIU. It's Micronesian Insurance Underwriters, the only insurance company here.
- Siemer: This was in the private sector?
- Camacho: Yes. I decided to work for the private sector because I felt that the money was there and I have always believed in a small size of government. It is going to cost less to the public, taxpayers and everything, so I always believed in that.
- Siemer: How long did you work there?
- Camacho: I was working there in the insurance department for about two years. Then I decided I wanted to go into my profession of accounting, and I wasn't really practicing accounting then. So I moved over to Townhouse, they just had the new Townhouse Department Store. They expanded from Payless Supermarket to the department store, so I was part of the accounting department.
- Siemer: What year was that?
- Camacho: I graduated in 1974, I got married in 1975 so 1977 I was an accountant. And let me see, going back, gee I am going to backtrack here to education. I was selected to represent it was then Micronesia because we were still under the Trust Territory where a group of students from Micronesia were part of that foreign exchange program which is called the American Field Service international scholarships, where they have exchange students from different parts of the world coming into the United States as well as Americans going abroad. I was in Wisconsin where I graduated in high school, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.
- Siemer: What year was that?
- Camacho: 1969, 1970.

Siemer: So you went from Milwaukee to college in Honolulu?

Camacho: Yes, because as recipients of that particular scholarship we weren't allowed to come to the continental United States. That was part of the policy of the program so that we don't, you know, just get married with [Americans]. You know how foreigners are. The Americans are always skeptical in getting foreigners into the States and letting them be immigrants. So they put that as part of the conditions. I had to ask special permission for me to go to Honolulu, being a U.S. State. But because of the uniqueness of the areas here where we didn't have a higher level of education, I had to go over to Honolulu to go to college there. So I was awarded also a Congress of Micronesia scholarship. That's why I am glad to be in the Scholarship Office. They gave me a scholarship, now it's time that I help on that.

Siemer: How long did you work at Townhouse?

Camacho: I really wasn't really working there that long, because the pay was bad and my former boss with the insurance [department] decided to take me back as a controller, in my field. So he brought me back and I started working as a controller for the insurance company.

Siemer: And how long did you stay there?

Camacho: I stayed there for three years. In fact, that was the time that I decided that I didn't really like to work in accounting. I found out that my interests are not with figures. Within that time too, I was involved in the First Constitutional Convention. Right out of college a couple of years, one year of working experience, then I jumped right into politics. Not that it's new to me, because I have always been a politician even when I was very little. I would debate to an extent with my classmates as far as issues are concerned. You know how the political parties before were very, very strong, so my father really got me going.

Siemer: What political party were you working with?

Camacho: My father has always been known in the Popular Party (which became the Democrat Party) and that's where we still are.

Siemer: Where did you work after you worked at the insurance company as the controller?

Camacho: I went over to the Marianas Visitors Bureau. I took another different type of work, and I was working there as an administrative assistant. But I did get involved. I guess everybody who works the MVB gets to be involved in the tourist industry, participating in conferences here and abroad.

Siemer: Who was head of MVB at that time?

Camacho: Ever since the inception of MVB, J. M. Guerrero was the executive director, managing director they called it. And when I got out, he was still there.

Siemer: How long did you stay there?

Camacho: Two and half years. Then I realized that I really jumped from one job to another and I really tried, you know, tried to figure out why is that. But when I get bored and there's no challenge for me, then I want to move on. That's how I am seeing myself. I always say that when I was working for the insurance [department] I could just close my eyes and I could close the books on a monthly basis to produce statements because I also have accountants working on receivables and papers. Anyway, so I worked there, and I went to back accounting working for Frank Ferrera.

Siemer: What year was that?

Camacho: Oh my gosh, I can't remember the year. I think it was 1970. I may be wrong with my dates

here. I don't know. Let me get my records straight here. I have been bouncing from one place to another, and I don't keep track of where I work.

Siemer: About how long did you work for Mr. Ferrera?

Camacho: I didn't work there that long. When I was pregnant, I decided to take a leave because I had two babies, one right after another. I felt that I should stay home. So I didn't work for two years. For a couple of years I didn't go to work.

Siemer: At some point you went to the States?

Camacho: Well, it was just recently that I went to the States. After working for Ferrera, after my baby was a year older, I went back and I worked for the Legislature, the Fourth Legislature. So that was, oh my gosh, what was that date? Maybe 1989? No, I am not too sure about the dates.

Willens: 1985 to 1987 was the Fourth Legislature.

Camacho: Okay.

Siemer: What did you do at the Legislature?

Camacho: You know, the Legislature comes up with names, different names, every time they changed administration they changed names. Committee assistant for HEW.

Siemer: What kind of work did you do there?

Camacho: Well, I scheduled meetings, I researched, I go out and gather information.

Siemer: Did you work for a particular Congressman or Senator?

Camacho: Yes, I worked for Congressman Victor Hocog. I drafted some letters for him, drafted some resolutions, bills, or whatever he asked me to come up with.

Siemer: How long were you there?

Camacho: I was there for two years. That's the only time that Victor was in Legislature. Well, he was in the following term, but he switched parties. In fact, his vote was the one that got another party into the administration of the Legislature, the lower house. I was so mad at him.

Siemer: What did you do after your work for the Legislature?

Camacho: I worked for the Bank of Guam. They took me in as a management trainee, and then after a year I was managing the commercial department for the loan department.

Siemer: How long were you there?

Camacho: I worked for three years. Then this firm from Guam, Pacific Financial, came over and they had been going around looking for a local person to handle their branch, so they pirated me over for more money, more responsibility, more authority, more everything. I got into that position. I know the Bank of Guam would never give a local person the opportunity to manage a bank. And that was a chance for me to manage a financial institution here.

Siemer: So how long did you stay with them?

Camacho: I stayed with them for three years, and then I went to the States.

Siemer: What did your family do when you were in the States?

Camacho: Well, you know, because of the fact that my daughter went to school in the States when she was in tenth grade, and she felt that she didn't want to come back and attend school

here. She would prefer to go there. But at the same time she felt that she needed her parents around, which was also mutual on my part. That's why I stopped working, and I went to the States. My husband did not join us though. So my daughter graduated from high school after two years. We, that one I know, 1992 we left and we were back in 1994.

Siemer: Then when you came back here you headed up the Scholarship Office?

Camacho: Well, you know, I really had other ideas about where I would want to work. I just went and I met with the Governor to see where I could work. Actually, the Governor has been a friend of mine since way back. We have been in the same party and all that. So one time he asked me if I would return to Saipan, and I said: "Sure." So I came back, and I was looking around for jobs. I was eyeing some positions but by then some of them were already taken. One time I was in his office with some people from the College and the executive order about the reorganization has already taken place. Actually they had appointed Lupe Borja already to head the Scholarship Office. But after awhile she decided she didn't want it, so it was up for grabs. Agnes McPhetres, President of the College, said: "Why don't you give it to Maggie." The Governor said: "Well, how about it?" I said, "Do you want me to help you? I will take it. I will take any job. I feel that I am qualified for almost anything that you toss out to me." Although I was really eyeing to be the deputy of the Department of Commerce. But they didn't have any budget, so well, I can't be choosy, so that's why I'm ending up there.

Siemer: You said that your father was active in the Popular Party. Was your father born here on Saipan?

Camacho: Well, yes, I forgot to mention that. My father and my mother were born here in Saipan. They have always lived here all their lives.

Siemer: How about their parents?

Camacho: You know, their parents have also been out here, lived out here. In fact, the Cabrera family is one of the largest, aside from the Sablan family, here in Saipan. So their roots are really over here.

Siemer: Were your parents educated under the Japanese system?

Camacho: I wouldn't say they were really in a formal way of being educated by the Japanese. I don't think so. They probably just went through some kind [of training] or they just learned the language, but did not necessarily go through some kind of education.

Siemer: Why did you decide to run for the First Constitutional Convention?

Camacho: Well, to a certain extent I think I was pushed by the Party.

Siemer: Who was head of the Party at the time?

Camacho: I remember Mitch Pangelinan and Herman Guerrero. Those were the figures of the Popular Party. And at the same time, I think my father just wanted one of his kids to be in the political arena as well. And I have always had some interest in politics, too.

Siemer: How did the Popular Party go about picking its candidates for the delegates?

Camacho: For the First Con-Con?

Siemer: Yes.

Camacho: They had this central committee before, so they tossed out names, and they came up with a list of names. The screening committee, you know, I think it was just the central

committee, they just went over the listing and decided who would make the move. They chose the people whom they think would garner the most votes.

Siemer: Were there a number of younger candidates at that time?

Camacho: There were, because I remember Joe Borja was one of the members and he is younger, a couple of years younger than me. And he was also in the same Party as I am. I always thought he is. When I go into that I really never think of which Party they belong to because, although I'm in politics, I always go with good people not necessarily with the Party line.

Siemer: Did you have to meet with the central committee or a convention of Popular Party people to express your ideas?

Camacho: Yes, I think at one point in time we did, you know, get together and we aired our concerns and also at the same time let them know of our aspirations. And then we were going campaigning also.

Siemer: Had you run for any political office before that?

Camacho: No, that was the first time and the last I ever did.

Siemer: How about anybody in your family, was anybody elected to office in your family?

Camacho: No.

Siemer: What do you recall about the campaigning? How did you go about that?

Camacho: Well, it was kind of frightening because of the fact that you would, I knew I would be at the public's criticism. My family helped, I mean both my husband's side and my side, because it wasn't supposed to be a political election. We tried as much as possible to be neutral. But I thought it was frustrating and challenging at the same time, because it was the first time where I would go out and speak and I didn't know what I was saying.

Siemer: In what sense?

Camacho: Well, in the sense that I tried to say something and I just lose my thoughts because I know the people were hearing me. You are put in a spot and then, what can you say when you go up there, just ask for votes. The people's mentality, sometimes they not really looking for what you want to say, especially before [the new government was formed], the elections were not that sophisticated. So whoever makes the biggest noise, you know how it was before, it was . . .

Siemer: What number were you on the ballot?

Camacho: Oh, gosh, I think I was No. 16.

Siemer: So you said, "Vote for No. 16?"

Camacho: No. I don't remember what number it was on the ballot. I came in 16th. I am sorry, I was referring to that.

Siemer: You did well in the voting.

Camacho: There were three or four of us women that ran at that time. I don't remember the names. All I know was that Mrs. Reyes and I were the only women in the Popular Party.

Siemer: In the Popular Party?

Camacho: Yes.

Siemer: And you were the only one who won?

- Camacho: Yes.
- Siemer: Do you think it was more difficult for a woman to get elected back then?
- Camacho: Well, back then, yes, it was very difficult. In fact, a lot of people were saying that I had no place in politics whatsoever. And you know, I guess I proved them wrong.
- Siemer: Did that come up when you were campaigning? Did people ask you questions suggesting that you shouldn't be in politics?
- Camacho: Well, maybe that was just the opposing team. Because during our campaigning I tried to stress the importance of having a woman be present in that Convention. I always say that, behind a successful man, there is a woman. So I always say that there should be some women in there. And I would be very obliged to get in there and kind of be part of that group. A woman has intuition about motherhood and that whole shebang about being a woman.
- Siemer: Do you think people respected your college education and that was one the reasons that you did so well in the voting?
- Camacho: To a certain extent, I think it had some pull, yes. Not only that, but being born here and going through schools here, my classmates or even my students, other students, know me and they know how aggressive I was and probably my capability of always holding some responsible positions in every class.
- Siemer: Which high school was it?
- Camacho: I went to Hopwood High School. That was the only high school then aside from Mt. Carmel.
- Siemer: When the election was over, the Territorial Party at that time, the Republicans now, had won many more of the delegate seats than the Popular Party. When you came into the Convention, how did that affect your work as a delegate being from the Popular Party with many fewer delegates having been elected?
- Camacho: Well, you know, going back to that Convention, I felt frustrated for one part because being a minority is really, sometimes I feel, useless. Not only was I a minority with the Party, I was the minority on the gender side. You know, what could I do? A lot of delegates then were just kind of respecting me because I was a woman. And sometimes they just nod their head and just bypass me in an agreement. But in the back of their mind, they are not thinking the way I think because they are just trying to shut me up. I mean that is just the way of getting me to shut up or go away. I didn't really contribute as much as I could or as I would.
- Siemer: It certainly didn't stop you from speaking in the committee or on the floor though.
- Camacho: Well, that was the only opportunity I could speak my mind, to get probably some of my feelings out. But not necessarily to get something constructive done.
- Siemer: You were assigned to the Finance and Local Government Committee, and that Committee was chaired by Ben Fitial.
- Camacho: Yes, Ben Fitial.
- Siemer: What did you think of the operation of that Committee?
- Camacho: Well, I respected the way things were handled in there. When the opposite party is chairing it, the composition of [the committee] also is basically the other party. It wasn't really that much friction.

- Siemer: Did you have an opportunity to speak? Were the rules or the procedures that were used fair?
- Camacho: You know to be honest with you, I didn't think much of that because, when I was in there, I tried to put everything aside and tried to be just working cooperatively and not trying to do any set backing on any part. We had a job to do. We are not there to argue. We are not there to struggle for power. I don't know how the others felt, but I felt that it shouldn't be used as such. So I didn't really pay much attention to the way the rules were done or how they were conducting things as long as the majority of the inputs were for the betterment of the Commonwealth. I wasn't really very suspicious of what they were doing. I was never in that situation.
- Siemer: One of the difficult issues that your Committee faced was how to structure local government.
- Camacho: Oh, yes that was the hardest.
- Siemer: What do you recall of your own views at the time about how local government would best be done among the three islands?
- Camacho: Well, that goes back to minimizing the cost of the government. You recall, we tried as much to get the commissioners out and we wanted to put a mayor in, but at the same time it should be eventually phased out. Because being in the transitional time you have to get used to a gradual change. The local government, this always has been some kind of disagreement between the islands. And they always identified themselves as such. Well, but that comes again to a power struggle because some of the islands, being a majority of one party, they just want to have it all. And because of the dissemination of the services, they were afraid in the delivery of the services that they are separated by waters.
- Siemer: What did you think about that argument at the time that after constitutional government came into force and people from the Marianas were running their own government and it was not the Trust Territory anymore that there would still be discrimination against Rota and Tinian. That was what they argued. What did you think of that at the time?
- Camacho: I always thought that was very foolish of them to think that way. But like I said, they're just trying to protect themselves in their own comfort zone. I don't believe in that. I think that everything should be just channeled from the Governor down. I don't think that the mayor should have that much power. Granted, they're the mayor of that particular island, but I don't think that it would be fair as far as the political services are concerned. I know that from hiring practices.
- Siemer: So you were in favor of the proposal to do away with the municipal council.
- Camacho: Exactly, yes. I am in favor of doing away with the municipal council. I think it's costly, very costly. You talk about elections that cost money, to run that is another cost. I don't really know how much or what they can do when we do have the delegations, a delegation for each senatorial district.
- Siemer: Back then, when you were debating about the mayor's office, did you have any idea that the mayor's offices would grow to be as large as they have now?
- Camacho: We never anticipated that. Foremost in our minds was to cut down the size of the government. And that's why Rota and Tinian walked out of the First Con-Con. We also tried to minimize the number of congressmen, but it didn't work.
- Siemer: There were some strong, younger delegates who seemed to have the same position that you did, John Tenorio, Ray Villagomez. Would it be fair to say that the younger people

tended to want to cut the government down and the older people were interested in maintaining the structure.

Camacho: Well, I believe yes to a certain extent. And I would go back to the fact that they are already eyeing what positions they are going to be in, while the younger ones are not really concerned with that. Maybe most of the younger ones who got in [to the Con-Con as delegates] have college degrees and so they really didn't think about all those things. We don't go in there having a set preconceived model of where we are going to be. It is just a matter of putting out what is the best document for the Commonwealth.

Siemer: Then, while your Committee was working on that, the Rota and Tinian delegates, some of the senior delegates, came up with a plan for three lieutenant governors. Do you remember that?

Camacho: Yes, I was just going to say that. Instead of mayors, they wanted lieutenant governors. There was a compromise to have a mayor because actually we didn't want a person who is on the same level to oversee [island matters] especially to have [power over money]. Mind you, they wanted it elected within their own, the lieutenant governor, within their own senatorial district.

Siemer: There was some effort on behalf of your Committee to do away with local government.

Camacho: We did, we did. Well, you know, we never anticipated to have this many people to begin with.

Siemer: What do you think happened over the years, that the mayors' offices have grown to have so many jobs attached to them?

Camacho: Duplication of services, extra budget. Their office has just expanded because of the fact that they do have a mayor, and the mayor had the power to hire and they keep asking for budget. That was a leverage they pulled on the Legislature. The outer islands, if I may Tinian and Rota always seem to get their way because we are always out-numbered in the Senate. That's why we still want to see whether we can have a unicameral [legislature]. It's really hard to get things done.

Siemer: What was your view back in those days, in the First Constitutional Convention, about that proposal with respect to lieutenant governors who would be elected one from Rota, one from Tinian, and one from Saipan?

Camacho: Well, you know that the name really doesn't mean a thing. It's the authority and the jurisdiction on what he can do. I never agreed with that, simply because as a Commonwealth it is supposed to be considered just one unit and they're just segregating themselves by doing that. I believe in the democratic form of government where you have the chief executive officer and everybody falls down there. They should be able to accept responsibility and delegate responsibility as they see fit. And not fight over it. It just got out of control because of the mayors that were voted into it. The small islands over here, that's bound to happen. Everything here, even if you step out outside, is politics. We have to face reality. But you see that was what we were trying to do, to try to do away with politics. But it got away. When Rota had so many employees, Saipan said I am going to have so many employees, too. It's unfair. So they tried to substantiate it by the number of people they represent. Fine. So that's why it really got out of hand. Now we have this suit about resident directors, Mayor Inos, and I don't know.

Siemer: What was your expectation back in those days, back in 1976, about the Northern Islands? What did you think would happen up there?

- Camacho: Well, to be frank I didn't really think that the Northern Islands would ever develop. That's why it is still part of the Saipan Senatorial District.
- Siemer: What did you think of the proposal to give them a separate mayor?
- Camacho: We fought that. I didn't think we wanted that. It is just that it was a compromise that they put in there. I don't remember who was the mayor then, but it was compromise, just a room. It's like a leg somewhere, or some part of a wing of something that wasn't really given full power. It's just to have a person in there so that all the affairs would go through that. I didn't really think much of it. I didn't really bother to fight about that thing because I never knew it was going to be made into another Senatorial District.
- Siemer: Then there was a considerable number of discussions about the size of the lower house. There was a proposal for 16 representatives from Saipan, two from Rota, and one from Tinian. The Rota delegates were very interested in having two representatives rather than one. Do you recall that?
- Camacho: Yes.
- Siemer: And then Ray Villagomez proposed a smaller composition of 12-1-1.
- Camacho: That's how I liked it, that's what we came up with.
- Siemer: So you favored that proposal.
- Camacho: Yes, I did. Like I said, we wanted so much we even tried to put in the cost of their salary, remember? We put in theirs so that they don't raise their salaries.
- Siemer: So you were in favor of the Constitutional limitations on salaries?
- Camacho: Well, with the Legislature nowadays I believe everything should be in the Constitution. Even the Constitution, they tend to change it every time they have a Convention. It was just like a basis the first time we put it in there. I don't believe it should be in the Constitution. It was, just like I said, something to give them an idea of what they are going to do. But I think we should have a salary commission that would go into that and be very equitable in the way salaries and wages are done.
- Siemer: Were you surprised as a delegate when some of the Rota and Tinian delegates walked out?
- Camacho: No, I wasn't really surprised. And if they walked out, it was their loss. I always thought that they were immature at that time when they did that. Well, going back to that proposal of two [representatives] for Rota. They have identified who is the person to be the mayor, who is the person to be in the Senate, and who is to be in the lower house. They have a blueprint already of what is going to happen, so that is why they are proposing it in that Convention.
- Siemer: I always wondered why it was worth walking out of the Convention over the difference between two representatives in the lower house and one. You think it was because somebody was already designated for that job?
- Camacho: Well, they tried to compromise. I think that they were just going back and forth. You see what they were trying to do is with the two they couldn't very well make a difference even if they walked out because they wanted Tinian as well. So with Tinian and Rota, that was when they actually just walked out.
- Siemer: Were you concerned at the walk-out that the Convention might come to stop?

Camacho: Not really, because I had instances where I was talking to some of the delegates from Rota and Tinian and some of them stayed behind.

Siemer: Did you know that some of them were of a mind to stay?

Camacho: Yes, they were threatening, you know. Even now if they made a move to secede, to me I don't really care now. Because if they want to live differently, let them, but not at the expense of the other people. We have really suffered. I always think that they get more of the pie where there are less people than Saipan. I think it's unfair. Maybe, if the mayor is different or the congressmen have changed or the senators have changed, maybe if we put younger people in there or people who do not really care about politics and they are not really so geared to that idea of Rota is for Rota, then maybe you have a unified Commonwealth and not for Rota, Tinian and Saipan.

Siemer: What was your view back then about the Article 12 restrictions?

Camacho: I like that restriction. Well, because it is in the Covenant too. My view was that we tried. I am really disappointed that they extended the term of the lease. I am really disappointed, in fact. Our intent was that we should try to keep it [the land] and let the next generation benefit. Siemer: Let the next generation have another opportunity at this.

Camacho: Yes, right. And let them benefit from whatever this generation leased out, with the option, of course, for an additional 15 [years]. But they just went ahead and made it even longer. I felt that it has to a certain extent proven to be a constitutional matter that was upheld by the United States Supreme Court. They didn't question that. That's one of the things that is very unique on our islands.

Siemer: What did you think would happen if there were no such restrictions?

Camacho: If there wasn't any restriction there is no person, very few people now, who would be holding onto their land. Even the mere fact that we have that, there's a lot of people before they even get their homestead land they are already selling the piece of property because of the way the economic boom came in here and then in and out. I think it would have been very disastrous if we didn't have that.

Siemer: Were you in favor of the restrictions on homesteads, as well?

Camacho: Oh, yes. They should have even more stringent restrictions. And I think they put that in there later on too, a few years down the line when they made it mandatory that, as part of the policy, they cannot sell for it 10 years. Before, there were some lands that were just sold right away. And even that 10-year restriction, they are still being sold underneath. So, I think that people just got greedy. They just wanted a share of the wealth.

Siemer: Were you satisfied with the structure that the Constitution set up with respect to the public lands at the time?

Camacho: Oh, yes. And with Article 12, as I said, my only dissatisfaction was with the extension of the lease term. Siemer: Let me ask you about one of the delegate proposals that you put in a very, thoughtful proposal, No. 134. Do you remember what caused you to put that together?

Camacho: I don't remember what made me. I always think that there has got to be some kind of a way to restrict some members from being in everywhere.

Siemer: One of the pieces of the proposal is that legislators cannot hold other public positions?

Camacho: Yes, right. Everything there is different.

- Siemer: One of your other ideas was that appropriation bills would need a super-majority of three-fourths of each house.
- Camacho: Yes.
- Siemer: Why did you think that was a good idea?
- Camacho: Well, look at what is happening now.
- Siemer: Yes, it is very relevant to what happening now.
- Camacho: When I read this I say it should have been in there because that's what is happening now.
- Siemer: That is why I was interested in that proposal, and where your ideas came from, and why you had focused on those particular things.
- Camacho: Probably I had an intuition that we needed these things.
- Siemer: Being interested in politics at home.
- Camacho: Yes. But those proposals were, if you look at those sections or items there, I think all of them should be now in place or they are being provided for.
- Siemer: Another one is No. 133. Let's see if you remember that one. Those are some Bill of Rights proposals.
- Camacho: Capital punishment, we don't have that. A lot of these they said could be provided by law.
- Siemer: One of my questions had to do with the protection with respect to national origin. That would have covered Filipinos and other aliens here on the islands. And I wondered if you had focused on that at the time.
- Camacho: Well, I think I never really thought of that, because the influx of foreigners was not so relevant then. I didn't have that foresight. Of course, there were other people from Micronesia who were here and I was looking into that. They have contributed to the economy here.
- Siemer: At the time, were you and your fellow delegates concerned about the number of aliens who were here not other people from Micronesia but Filipinos, for example, or Koreans or Japanese?
- Camacho: At that time we weren't really concerned because we always thought that our statutes on immigration would accommodate all those needs. Because we always thought that the Constitution is not the document to be amended every now and then. It should be provided by statute so that as time evolves, and whatever takes place, make the necessary laws to take care of those.
- Siemer: What do you think of the idea of having a mandatory constitutional convention every 10 years?
- Camacho: It is the poorest thought of anybody's mind. I don't see the need to have a constitutional amendment every 10 years. If the Constitution provides that we can do an amendment through legislative and popular initiative, I don't see the need to have a convention.
- Siemer: When you have conventions, you do seem to have many amendments.
- Camacho: Exactly, too many bright people, too many heads. There were more amendments during the Second Constitution Convention than the First. Well, some of them are okay.

- Siemer: Here is another proposal that you submitted with Herman Q. Guerrero. It is No. 126. This one deals with the power to reorganize the Executive Branch and you were proposing to give that power to the Legislature. Did you have a concern about the Governor exercising that power?
- Camacho: Well, I didn't really at that time. The way I saw it was that it could have a much more balanced nature. The Legislature [would] establish it and the Executive would just fall into place. But I'm glad it didn't go in because the composition of the Legislature is questionable. The way they have been handling [things], they are supposed to be making laws but I don't know. I am glad it didn't [become included in the Constitution]. We felt that maybe the Legislature had more people to do this instead of just one person. But now I see that it would be very inflexible to do that. I don't think it's good.
- Siemer: The next one I wanted to ask you about is Proposal No. 123, which also was submitted with Herman Q. Guerrero.
- Camacho: I don't think this is a good Constitutional proposal.
- Siemer: One of the things I wanted to ask you about is the concept that every resident has a right to employment. Was your idea that the Government should provide jobs if the private sector did not?
- Camacho: Well, part of it was that in the back of our minds there were some students who went to school and came back only to find that there were no jobs. But at the same time, we wanted to make sure that unemployment is taken care of. That's one way of letting the people know that their rights are not really hindered or undermined, that they are thought of during this Constitutional Convention.
- Siemer: You were not an advocate of big government. You weren't an advocate of everybody of having an government job?
- Camacho: No, but this doesn't say that the government is going to provide them jobs. We are saying that they should work. We should go out and find jobs for them.
- Siemer: To some extent, that is the way it worked out though. The government did become a very important employer here.
- Camacho: Always has been.
- Siemer: Is it fair to say that people looked to the government to have a job that it's their right to have a job in the government if their political party has won?
- Camacho: Well, you are dealing with different issues there. If you looked at it, the majority of the people are very comfortable in the government because the fringe benefits far exceed [those provided by] any private employer.
- Siemer: Retirement for example?
- Camacho: Retirement is one thing, and that came later on. I think that was passed during the Third Legislature, the retirement bill. Another thing is that the pay is higher. The sick leave, the fringe benefits are the ones, it just surpasses any private institution around here. Because I was working for the private [sector] and if there is a typhoon, we don't get paid if we don't work, but for the government you take off and you get paid. Or on religious holidays [in the private sector], you can't get off, you cannot. In government, you can sign leave and take off. In the islands, some of the cultures tend to come into your workplace so even taking the babies to the hospital, you cannot take off. I don't believe in absenteeism.
- Siemer: Well, you have been a supervisor in private enterprise?

- Camacho: Yes, and I have always worked most of my life in private [enterprise] and that is why I like it. There's not much red tape, bureaucracy. I believe we should go to work, but it is just that they are lazy. We didn't think that we were going to [have that problem].
- Siemer: When you finished your work with the Constitution, were you satisfied with the overall document that the Convention had put together?
- Camacho: I was. I was satisfied. I was much more overwhelmed by what we did. I think it was something that I can always go back and really wonder or think whether I was actually in there. It was never part of my plan to be in there. When I was growing up, I set up my goals. When I reach 50, I want to get into politics and that is just my goal. But I never really dreamed of getting into the Constitutional Convention.
- Siemer: Are there other things that we haven't covered that you remember particularly about the Constitutional Convention?
- Camacho: Well, I think it was just going back to some of the frustrations and obstacles that I went through as a delegate, being a minority. I think that we should have had more women. And I think that every delegate as soon as they get in there should forget about political affiliations and just work for the betterment of the Commonwealth. Not just fight over who introduced the most bills, and which bill took. A lot of these bills are duplicate in nature because one person or a couple of persons would come up with the idea and then the majority would just grab that idea and toss out your bill and here we are. I mean that's politics, you know. And that's what they have been doing and I think it's very unfair. They should be much more responsive to the needs and not for their own individual interests.
- Siemer: Near the end of the Convention you worked on the Style Committee. Do you remember that?
- Camacho: Gee, I don't even remember. What was that Committee?
- Siemer: Well, as the Convention went along, and as articles were put together, it became necessary for the lawyers to make style changes that is, to make the wording in one section be the same kind of wording as there was in another section. I, for example, was always hounding them to take out all the "he's" and not having "he's" in the Constitution and I was always after our lead consultant, Mr. Willens, to make sure there were no references to "him" or "he." I referred to those as style changes because they did not have to do with the substance of what the provision was all about.
- Camacho: Okay, the text. the change in the wording.
- Siemer: And the legal consultants were trying to find a way to do all these changes without getting all the delegates stirred up again about changes to their favorite provisions, because some of these provisions had taken a very long time to get passed in the Convention. So, Pete Atalig, now Justice Atalig, put together a committee on which you were a member.
- Camacho: I could very well be a member but I don't remember. I probably wasn't in the meetings, probably just by name. I don't remember that.
- Siemer: Do you remember working on the arrangements for the signing ceremony?
- Camacho: No.
- Siemer: That Committee did that as well and got the Constitution printed and did things like that.
- Camacho: Well, I think Pete just took the lead.

- Siemer: Just did it.
- Camacho: Yes, did everything. I don't remember being [on a committee]. All I know is I was told to go for the signing of the Constitution but as far as the Style Committee, I don't remember that. I probably didn't work that much, or contribute that much in there.
- Siemer: Did you work on any of the activities, the education activities after the Constitutional Convention was over?
- Camacho: I don't remember doing that. Having been gone from my job as the controller, I just couldn't really devote much of my time for educational purposes.
- Siemer: Do you remember back then whether there was significant opposition to the ratification of the Constitution?
- Camacho: I don't think so. I don't think there was much here in Saipan. Could be in Rota but I didn't know. I try not to think of the negative part of it. I was just optimistic that we should try to pass it because it was the first document.
- Siemer: And it certainly did pass with a big, big majority.
- Camacho: Yes. I remember going out on some forum trying to ratify it, but not so much. But I did it on my spare time.
- Willens: What do you think has accounted for the fact that so many more women candidates ran for the Third Constitutional Convention and were elected?
- Camacho: Well, I am really impressed. I feel that that's their place. I really feel that they should be there. They could contribute much more and the women that got elected are very bright, intelligent, and that is one of the signals that would encourage more women to run or get involved in the government. Not necessarily in the Legislature, but to be very vocal in the government or the Commonwealth as a whole. I think that they should be given the opportunity to hold more responsible positions and be accepted for what they are. And not be put aside because of the difference in sex. Although I don't think it's that prevalent nowadays. I know of some people who are still male chauvinistic in the government. I think it's a stepping stone for them to get into the Legislature, and I feel that the women should go in the Legislature and try to do something about it. I think they are a working team instead of just occupying seats.
- Willens: Do you think that the men are more open-minded today about recognizing women as equals in the political environment than they were 19 years ago?
- Camacho: Yes. I have been talking with some men and they also feel that women should be in there. And they felt that they have given opportunities to the men in the past and they are easily swayed in their decision-making by self-interest. And maybe they would want a change. I think they are looking for a change.
- Willens: Do you think the women as a group have some common agenda as distinguished from men as a group?
- Camacho: I don't think so. They all share very good ideas. In fact, they are just teaming up with the men. Being intelligent, I think they put away the differences of what they are and try to come up with the best they can.
- Willens: I gather from what you say that you think one of the principal objectives of the Third Constitutional Convention should be to try to reduce the size and cost of government?
- Camacho: That's what I think. It just went berserk. The government just kept hiring as the

employment agency in the Commonwealth. I think it has tripled in size, employment over the years. And the Governor himself is also looking into minimizing the cost of government. We still want to go back to privatization of some of these agencies on the island.

- Willens: If you had to identify one or two other priorities for this next Constitutional Convention, what would they be?
- Camacho: You mean the whole text of the Constitution, what issues?
- Willens: Are there any other major issues that you feel strongly about?
- Camacho: One of the things, too, is I think the local people, the residents, are sacrificing a lot on the part of education. There are times when our children cannot be enrolled because of the influx of foreigners. The budget for education is not enough to take care of the needs. We would be denied to enroll our students or kids within the school district because of the fact that they are full. And I don't think we should be denied that, because where can we go? I think in the First Con-Con we put a "free" for all. I think we should put a dollar sign in there. I think every person should now try to pay for the cost of educating their children.
- Willens: You would want to . . .
- Camacho: I would want to go into putting some kind of a price tag on public schools, as well, just like in the States.
- Siemer: You would keep it compulsory but make people pay?
- Camacho: Yes.
- Willens: But you would apply a fee to everyone, local people and aliens as well?
- Camacho: Yes, local people and aliens. I think they should pay part of taxes that should pay for the cost of schools.
- Willens: That is very helpful. Thank you very much for the interview. It's most informative, and we learn something from everyone we talk to. Thank you.