

## INTERVIEW OF ESTEVEN M. KING

by Deanne C. Siemer and Howard P. Willens

April 7, 1995

- Siemer: Esteven M. King is a Senator in the Commonwealth Legislature representing Tinian. Senator King was a teacher on Tinian and worked in the community development office. He served as a delegate to the First Constitutional Convention. Senator King, thank you very much for helping with this interview. At the start, Senator, would you tell us something about your family, your father's family, your mother's family, and how they came to Tinian?
- King: I do not know much about my father's family because he was Korean. He was on Tinian since the Second World War. According to my understanding, when the U.S. invaded Tinian they intended to send the Japanese and others back home. Apparently my father married my mother in order to stay on the island. So when he married and got baptized, he got a new name, Juan King. Actually our last name is not King, you know. For the record, the Japanese pronounced it as King rather than Kim. So his last name actually is Kim. But we learned that when we grew up and it's kind of hard for us to change now. At that time my mom and dad had no intention in changing it, because it was that way from the date that they got married. So, I don't know exactly who are the family of my father. My mother is a Chamorro. She has a big family, many relatives living here on Saipan and Rota.
- Siemer: What is your mother's family name?
- King: Manalo Aldan. Aldan is a big family here on Saipan. The Aldan family is one group of clans that are related. She has a couple of sisters and one brother. When my father died I took care of the family.
- Siemer: Are you the oldest?
- King: I'm the second oldest among the boys. I'm the third oldest in the family.
- Siemer: How many all together?
- King: Eleven. After my father died, we added two brothers from our stepfather. That's a total of thirteen nine brothers and four sisters.
- Siemer: Was your mother's family, the Aldans, originally from Saipan?
- King: Not exactly. They're from Yap. But my mom was born on Saipan. She traveled back and forth, she traveled to Rota, she traveled to Tinian. We have group pictures of all the people or her classmates at that time when she was young and before she was married.
- Siemer: Was your mother employed at the time she was traveling back and forth to Rota and Tinian?
- King: According to her, she didn't work as a child or teenager. She was only helping her mom at the house doing housework.
- Siemer: Where were you educated?
- King: Here on Tinian and then to Saipan for junior high school. Then I went to Guam. I graduated from John F. Kennedy high school in 1969. Then I took some undergraduate college courses. I planned to join the military at that time but that's when my father passed

away. My mother did not want me to join the military, but wanted me to come back and help the family. I decided to listen to her. But during that time I took college courses for about one year, but did not finish college.

Siemer: When did you go back to Tinian? What year?

King: I went back to Tinian in 1972.

Siemer: Where were you working at the time?

King: I worked on Saipan as a junior high school teacher. During that time I took courses and also had the opportunity to go and attend a seminar.

Siemer: How long did you work as a teacher?

King: Two years.

Siemer: From 1972 to 1974?

King: Actually it's not really two years. It's about a year and a half. From 1971 to 1972, and about half of 1973.

Siemer: Where were you employed after that?

King: I went to Tinian. That's when I needed to stay close to my family, because we were a big family and many were still young. So, at least I could stay with my brothers and sisters and try to push them to go to school and try to finish school. We were without a father, so I tried to help my mom as much as possible, so at least all my brothers and sisters graduate from high school.

Siemer: Were you working on Tinian at the time?

King: Yes.

Siemer: What were you doing there?

King: I continued to work as a teacher there for a couple of months. I worked part time at the Micronesian Development Company, from about 5 o'clock to 7 o'clock part-time, and also Saturday and Sunday. I got into an accident during my part-time job. I fell off a truck and had a severe fracture, a compound fracture. I was still teaching at that time. I was hospitalized on Guam at the Navy Hospital for three months. When I was discharged, I continued to teach while still on crutches. After that I found a more challenging job at the Administration. At that time Mr. Francisco Chong was the Administrator on Tinian. He hired me to work as the community development aide on Tinian. It was a new office and he needed somebody to look after that office.

Siemer: How long did you work in that office?

King: I worked in that office for a long time but had increased responsibilities. I handled some of the federal grant-in-aid program. We had many projects under this grant-in-aid program. I worked there from 1973 to 1985. I was regularly promoted to higher positions. I started getting interested in entering politics. I started to try to influence the voters and to accept and understand the political environment. Perhaps for these reasons, I was terminated in that department. Subsequently my former boss, who was very close to me, took me back after two years. Instead of working on Tinian, where I had differences with the other political side, I worked with my boss here on Saipan in the same department.

Siemer: When did you come back to Saipan?

King: I don't exactly recall the date. But after that, also, I decided to run again. Then I resigned

and went back to Tinian to run for public office. I worked on Saipan for six years. I resigned when I decided to run for the Constitutional Convention.

Siemer: Let's talk for a minute about the Covenant prior to the Constitutional Convention and thinking back to the 1972 period. You'd just come back from school in Guam and you were here in Saipan?

King: I had the opportunity to attend the Portland University but I did not finish that school. I went to the mainland but did not finish because of the hardship in the family. I really would have liked to continue and finish my school.

Willens: When do you remember first becoming aware of the fact that the Northern Mariana Islands were seeking a separate future political status relationship with the United States?

King: That's in 1973, I think, or 1974.

Willens: Were you on Tinian during those years?

King: Yes, I was on Tinian at that time. That's when I took over the community development position.

Willens: In May of 1973 the United States announced that it was interested in taking over the entire island of Tinian for military purposes and then leasing back to the civilian community the southern one third of the island. Did you participate in any of the meetings at which that proposal was discussed?

King: Yes. There were several meetings in which I participated. I was against the military coming to Tinian to take that large portion of the land. I have no personal grudge against the military. As a matter of fact, I mentioned earlier I almost joined the military. But I was against the plan to take more than half of the island. And the second reason I opposed the military then is that they were selecting the richer part of the land and they gave us no choice on the remaining. At that time I was a strong advocate to vote against the military taking over the two-thirds.

Willens: When the United States first put forth its proposal, it planned to relocate San Jose village.

King: Yes.

Willens: It planned to build new modern houses for the people on Tinian. Did you think that the relocation of the village would be a good idea for the local citizens?

King: Yes, at that time, because if the military's going to help our local people in relocating, of course it would come with a very sanitary environment. It would involve not only relocating at that time but, according to my recollection, building better roads there and more modern facilities compared with San Jose village at that time. So, I agreed with the condition that the military relocate the village and build new houses, and also put up other things that would help the environment of the area. Yes, I agreed with that.

Willens: Some of the records indicate that many of the older residents on Tinian were in favor of the military and were very much impressed by the benefits that would come from relocating the village. Did your mother have any view on this subject that you can remember?

King: Yes, I explained to my mom what's happening, why the military wants to move us, why the military wants to take that, why we are changing the government. I discussed this situation with my mom. My mom at that time was getting older. She said that you children know about this, you're now in an American system, you went to school, and you're educated, so I will listen to you. But she would have liked to have something like

that. So I have no doubt that she would not have refused to have a house from the military in a very decent place.

Willens: Some of the citizens on Tinian opposed the relocation because it took them away from the port and the desirable beaches and removed them over to a part of the island which they thought was less attractive. Did you have any view on that subject at the time?

King: Well, those are the reasons. They wanted access to go to the beaches, especially those beaches down close to the dock. Mainly it's not because of the beaches, but because of their fishing. I feel that that's the main reason that they won't stop them from going to the beach or to the dock. It's a normal for them to go down to the beach and fish and also to fish from the dock, especially when we have that kind of small fish, the baby skip-jack and the mackerel, from June to December when these fish come in.

Siemer: Are those the ones they usually throw nets for?

King: Yes, throw nets and also use the bamboo poles. They don't have to go out on the boats so they stay on the dock of the beach and start fishing. In addition to that, during the weekends they want to go to the beach. But I feel the main concern was that they wanted to go out and fish along those areas and did not want the military to block the area.

Willens: One of the active political leaders at the time was Felipe Mendiola, who became mayor in the early 1970's. What is your recollection of Mayor Mendiola?

King: Mayor Mendiola was a good mayor. He listened to the concerns of the people. Maybe because he knows the differences between the U.S. Administration and earlier administrations. He was in the Japanese Administration, Navy Administration, then this Trust Territory Administration. Maybe he had more experience than we did. At that time the people only know that they want to protect the land because they want the land for their children and also the liberty that they have to use their land. Also at that time Mr. Mendiola had a huge grazing pasture on Tinian, so he was concerned on that. Taking that area and relocating or what would happen to his grazing?

Willens: Was his grazing land in the part of Tinian that the United States wanted to take over?

King: Yes.

Willens: So he would have lost access to that land if the United States' request had been accepted?

King: Yes.

Willens: Did you regard Mayor Mendiola as an outspoken opponent of the U.S. military proposal?

King: Yes.

Willens: Did you basically share his views?

King: Not entirely. Because at that time I did not have any grazing land. I know there were some points that individuals were raising because of their personal interests. But there were other points that reflected their legitimate interest in surviving and improving their opportunity. By surviving, I mean to trade your very small house for one that is more typhoon proof and secure. Some people had that interest. So there was a different mix of interests right there. But at that time the principal concern was the amount of land that the military wanted to take over and the closing of the beaches. That's the main concern that I saw. But other than that, everybody would have liked to get something out of a deal with the military. Although it's very hard to judge, our basic position at that time mainly was that we are against the military. When I say mainly I mean that it's simply

too big and for a long term. In addition, the money paid by the U.S. was going to the central government and not to Tinian. They might have some say so but would have to go through the central government where Saipan had the strongest voice. That contributed to the negative views of our people at that time.

Willens: Tinian had two representatives on the Marianas Political Status Commission during the negotiations. The most outspoken representative of Tinian on the Commission was Joe Cruz. What is your recollection of Joe Cruz as a political figure?

King: Joe Cruz was a good politician. I'm sorry that we mention it tonight because he has already passed away. God bless him. He wanted to accomplish something and to establish his image before the United States. When he was in U.S. Congress he stood up and sang "God Bless America." I think that was a piece of history for him to do that before the Congress. Nobody had ever done that in U.S. Congress. So here was a guy from a small area testifying who did not speak only from the paper, he spoke from his heart and that really touched the people in the U.S. Congress chamber. And Cruz was open and effective. We share the benefits of his effort in the bicameral [legislature] that he negotiated. All Tinian is lucky to have this bicameral legislature because our island is small compared to Saipan population-wise, and equal representation in the Senate is very good for us. The only things that we might disagree on today is the feeling of the younger generation about the exchange of our land for all of the benefits provided under the Covenant. The money that comes in under the Covenant goes to the central government. It doesn't give us the opportunity to get that money and start developing our island. The money stays in the Marianas Public Land Trust. That's the dissatisfaction of the people. The people of Tinian have the impression that it is their land. It is in the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas, but the people of Tinian must be respected as to how we decide to use the land and spend the money.

Willens: Did you think that Joe Cruz was a stronger supporter of the U.S. military request than Mayor Mendiola was?

King: These two were against each other.

Willens: Were they of different political parties at the time or were they of the same party but still of different views?

King: I don't know exactly. I think at that time it was different political parties.

Willens: Were you affiliated with a political party at the time?

King: Yes. Yes, I was on the side of Mayor Mendiola. I think at that time Mayor Mendiola was in the Territorial Party.

Willens: Yes.

King: Okay, and at that time the Popular Party was Joe R. Cruz. I'm more on the side of Mayor Mendiola. Also one guy from Saipan that really helped in campaigning against this military was the former Speaker of the House, Oscar Rasa. He was a strong advocate in helping us to oppose the military taking of our land.

Willens: Do you remember Oscar Rasa coming over to Tinian when the political campaign was on before the Covenant was voted on?

King: Yes, before we voted on the Covenant.

Willens: You remember Rasa coming over to campaign against the Covenant?

- King: Not campaigning out before the public, but with a small group in the Territorial Party leadership, giving information to the leadership.
- Willens: During a later stage in the Covenant negotiations, the United States changed its proposal by reducing the amount of land it wanted by about 2,000 acres and decided that it no longer needed to relocate San Jose village. There was some disappointment on Tinian that the U.S. had revised its proposal so that relocation of the village with all its benefits was not going to take place. Do you have any recollection of how you felt at the time when the U.S. changed its proposal?
- King: Well, I remember that when they changed the proposal I said that it's hard for the United States to give us everything while it's also hard for us to give them everything. That's a matter of compromise. We want just the land but we're not going to relocate you, see? But our position at that time was that we would like them to reduce the [amount of] land [taken for military purposes] but we also wanted them to relocate and help us. But it required a compromise between the local people and the military because the military needed the dock and the northern part of the island. And they did not want the locals to stay there and start disturbing some military operations. I think the changed proposal was okay, we'll give you a little bit of your land back but we're not going to relocate you. I don't know whether I'm right or not, but at that time I was focusing on the money issue. The military did not want to spend more and give out more money. When we started these negotiations, I think the U.S. negotiation team wanted to give the local people on Tinian the courtesy of consulting them and trying to get their support for the U.S. plan. I think they believed that it's possible the Tinian people might support the plan, but we have to approach the people whether they like it or not. We have to talk to them and see what's their reaction. See? If they like it, then that's their decision. If they don't like it, then there is no relocation.
- Willens: Do you remember attending any meeting at which Ambassador Williams came to Tinian with his staff to meet with the people and respond to questions about the U.S. proposal?
- King: Two occasions that I remember.
- Willens: What do you remember?
- King: That he came down to Tinian and I was in the meeting.
- Willens: Did you protest against the meeting by holding up signs on the way along the drive in from the airport to express your opposition to the U.S. proposal?
- King: Yes, I participated in that.
- Willens: How do you think he handled himself at the meeting?
- King: The guy's very good. He's really a diplomatic person. He took pressure. He relaxed. He respected the decision of the people, but he was there as a representative of the U.S. on a mission. But his behavior and his attitude, you know, impressed me as noble. He knows how to handle problems especially from people who very strongly opposed his position. He has a very noble approach.
- Willens: Do you remember any specific people who spoke up and criticized the Ambassador or the United States?
- King: They did not criticize during the meeting. They did not tell him right in the meeting directly, but I heard a lot of people outside talking about it. "You better go home, we don't need you here, you're not the one to tell us what to do here." Those are the things that I heard outside. The only comments that I can recall is when some of our people asked him:

“Why does America want to take Tinian? Why Tinian? Is there a choice? Why cannot they cannot go to the Northern Islands and pick one of the islands there or Goat Island because they have the money and they can make an airport and a dock? Why do they choose Tinian when we have people living on Tinian? You had it before and you left, now you coming back when we have this population already on Tinian.” You see? Those are the questions that I remember. Why Tinian’s the choice? I cannot remember what good answers they responded with. The only one I can remember is that Tinian as a more suitable for the defense area strategy. That’s the only main reason that I can remember. The military or the U.S. are recommending Tinian as a more suitable place for this military strategy. But still, what’s the difference between Tinian and Goat Island? And you people don’t have to lease Goat Island. Just go to Goat Island if you want to build your base there. So, the feeling of the Tinian people was that they’re already there on the island and they did not want to leave it. They had built up their life on that island and, once you get used to a place, it’s hard to adapt yourself to another. You know, you want to stay there and protect what you have. It was very difficult for us to move out at that time. There were a lot of other people opposed to the U.S. proposal at that time. There’s one person that I can remember, Carl Young, a long-haired person who had a map showing the people of Tinian what was here. He said, “You have to keep your land and don’t give it away, because the Americans know that there’s a mine there that they want.” Maybe you heard about the oil that we have down in that area. So those are the other reasons. These people came in and told the people about the things that we have on the island and that the Tinian people can make more money by not having the military lease your land. But who’s going to find those oil [deposits], you know? But they used those arguments to go against the military proposal.

- Willens: The chairman of the Marianas Political Status Commission was a young lawyer from Saipan named Ed Pangelinan. He would appear at these meetings with the Ambassador and sometimes do the translations. He and other members of the Commission tried to persuade the people on Tinian that the Commission would represent their interests and try to get the best possible deal for the entire Northern Marianas. Did you have some concern about the Commission because its leadership was from Saipan rather than from Tinian?
- King: Yes, at that time we had a very bad feeling and the impression that these people were not really representing us and bringing our concerns before the Ambassador and the military officials. We had that impression. As a matter of fact, our thinking at that time was that these people, because they hold property on Tinian, wanted to get rich by selling their property to the U.S. They’re favoring the U.S. proposal because of that.
- Siemer: The members of the Commission had property on Tinian?
- King: Right. And also other people that were in favor of bringing the military to Tinian, people who were not staying on Tinian but had property on Tinian.
- Willens: Just to finish up, Senator, about the Covenant and its provisions regarding Tinian, do you feel that the people on Tinian were fully informed about the Covenant before they voted on it in 1975?
- King: To answer you straight on that, no.
- Willens: In what respect were they not informed?
- King: I cannot blame the U.S. entirely on that. I think that’s the fault of our people here, not only on Tinian but throughout the Marianas. The Commission members had these meetings, but they never called the people together to explain the process of the negotiations. They

focused on just one issue: the military wants to take the land and what's good for you people. But there's still a bit more there that the people wanted to know, as I mentioned earlier: Why does the U.S. want only Tinian? That question still remains, I believe, and has never been answered. Why not the Northern Islands? That's never been answered. The only time that we had the chance to say whether we liked it or not was when we were about to vote on the issue. That's when they started coming out and discussing it. But there was no gradual communication between the Commission members and the people. The same thing happened a couple of months ago, when we got land returned under the lease-back from the military. The only time that the people knew that we have this deal is when they published that they were going to sign the agreement.

Willens: You're talking about the lease-back that was recently negotiated?

King: Yes, right.

Willens: That was handled by the Commonwealth government?

King: Right, between the Government and the military, but there's not enough information on that. You know the only time that we knew about this was when we were asked to gather down on the pavilion on the beach for the signing of the lease-back. That's when the people heard about it. Regarding the Covenant, there was not enough communication between the negotiating team and the people. My belief is that there was not enough time or a good dialog between the Commission and the people of Tinian.

Willens: Let's turn then to the Constitutional Convention.

Siemer: Tell us why you decided to run for the Constitutional Convention back in 1976?

King: I liked to be involved in the political process. I had tried before to run for the Municipal Council. Unfortunately, many times I was unsuccessful. I said to myself maybe I'm not a good politician.

Siemer: You had run several times before for the Municipal Council?

King: Yes.

Siemer: As a Territorial Party member?

King: Yes. I think I lost three times. So, you know, I was just about ready to give up. But then we have this Constitutional Convention, which is non-partisan, and I decided to try. So this time there were not a lot of people opposing me. I had the educational background, I held a good position in the government, and at that time we did not have a lot of people coming out from college. So people like me were respected as educated even though we were not a graduate from college. Also I had the experience in government, and my social activities. So they encouraged me to run.

Siemer: Did the mayor encourage you to run?

King: Mayor?

Siemer: Mendiola?

King: Yes. He encouraged me to run so I said "Okay, I'd like to try." At that time they wanted to have this selection unopposed. So the Democrat and Republican officials got together. Apparently what happened at that time is that they already had four, because we supposed to have five members.

Siemer: The Democrats had already selected four?

- King: The officers had started to select candidates. So apparently they had four already: Senator Manglona, Larry Diaz, Tony Borja, and Joe R. Cruz. They want a young person to come in. During that time I expressed my interest. Henry Hofschneider, now the delegate to the Third Con-Con, also raised his interest and asked Adrian Hofschneider, his uncle, to also express his interest. There were now three of us, so the group decided to vote on which of us was going to take the fifth seat. So we have to lobby and to talk about it. Then we had to stand up, deliver our speech, and identify our issues. I was the successful person to take the fifth slot. And I thought that was the final decision and would not be opposed. But Henry Hofschneider was dissatisfied and continued to pursue his intent to run. He ran as an opposition slate, so was five against one. It was supposed to be non-political, of course, but the people saw that they liked Henry more than some of the people running with me. But still the outcome had to be the five with the highest votes. Hofschneider is running [against] all of us. Whoever gets the five highest votes are going to be the delegates. We are campaigning on a non-political basis. I'm a little bit scared at that time, because I felt that I hurt him when the group nominated me to take the fifth slot. I had the impression that Henry had a grudge against me. So I said, "Well, I have to work hard." I went around and visited friends, family, and talked about it. The people that I visited expressed their concern that they really wanted to have at least three older people and at least two younger people with an educational background. Regarding the older people, it was just a matter of practical experience. They have that impression, so, I feel that it's safe on that. But during the commotion of the campaign, the two gentlemen took the opportunity to go to the other camp. They thought that nobody knew what's going on or what they're doing, and each assumed that the other one had no knowledge that he was switching sides.
- Siemer: Who was that?
- King: Tony Borja and Joe R. Cruz. They're the oldest.
- Siemer: They went over to the Popular Party?
- King: No, they went over to the Henry camp. But it was a bad image, because we are five candidates and Henry's only one, so why don't we just stick with the five? But what these two did is that they went over there and each one of them assumed that the other one did not know. So they did their own work. It turned out that one of them lost.
- Siemer: Mr. Borja lost?
- King: Mr. Borja lost. So they fought and that's what happened. That's when we knew what had been happening during the campaigning.
- Siemer: Was Joe Cruz in the Territorial Party at the time or was he in the Popular Party?
- King: Popular Party at that time. Popular Party and also Mr. Larry Diaz, Tony Borja. The Republicans were me and Mr. Ben Manglona.
- Siemer: And what about Mr. Hofschneider. Which party did he wind up in?
- King: Republican.
- Siemer: When you campaigned, you described going to family and friends. Were there other kinds of public meetings during the campaign?
- King: Yes, we had small groups like a pocket meeting. That's when we expressed what we were going to do, what kind of proposals we had.
- Siemer: After the election was over and you were elected, what do you recall about meetings with the delegates from Rota?

- King: Well, we called the delegates from Rota to obtain our one common concern. That was to maintain the mayorship of the individual islands at that time. But Delegate Manglona, former Lieutenant Governor Benjamin Manglona, was pursuing the idea of three lieutenant governors rather than mayors.
- Siemer: Did Benjamin Manglona come to Tinian before the Constitutional Convention to meet with those of you who had been elected?
- King: We went to Rota. But I think only once. We normally met here on Saipan.
- Siemer: When you did get to Saipan did you have any contacts with the pre-convention committee?
- King: Yes, I did.
- Siemer: What do you recall about how your delegates from Tinian were assigned to committees. Did you pick which committee you wanted to be on?
- King: We were not assigned. We picked. We mostly selected the local government committee.
- Siemer: When you came to Saipan did you have meetings with the other Territorial Party members who'd been elected from Saipan.
- King: Yes, we met for the purpose of discussing who's going to be selected or chosen as the president of the Convention. That mainly was the purpose, and also who is going to chair the standing committee. But on issues of common concern normally the Tinian and Rota delegates got together.
- Siemer: At the time that you met with the Territorial delegates from Saipan, did the Tinian and the Rota Territorial delegates explain what they wanted by way of three lieutenant governors and the kind of proposals to protect the Tinian and Rota interests?
- King: No. The strategy there was that you have to persuade your close friends. Each one of us had friends in there who would really listen to us and help us, although maybe not 100 percent. We had people like Joe Mafnas, who was a delegate, Oscar Rasa, and the president, Larry Guerrero. We gave our vote to Larry because Larry's a Republican and the Republicans promised to listen to our concerns and support our proposals.
- Siemer: Who else was seeking to be president at the time, do you remember?
- King: I think Carlos Camacho, if I'm not mistaken, the former governor.
- Siemer: Anybody else at the time?
- King: The late Francisco Palacios.
- Siemer: Once the Convention got underway and the delegates were meeting, the Tinian and Rota delegates brought forth two key proposals: one for the executive branch and one for the legislative branch. Ben Manglona stood up and made a speech, asking for togetherness and solidarity, and laid out exactly what the Tinian and Rota delegates were seeking. Before Ben made that speech, had there been work done by the Tinian and Rota delegates to agree on what exactly you were going to ask for?
- King: Yes.
- Siemer: At that point you were asking for four, four, four in the Senate and quite a large lower house 25 for Saipan, three for Rota, and two for Tinian. And you were asking for three lieutenant governors. What was your view back then, very early on in the Convention, about how those lieutenant governors would work?

- King: At that time, to be honest with you, I was young. I did not have much experience in government. I had some experience working with the government in a small office. But listening to them and considering the history that I had read in school regarding the process of the U.S. government, I really thought that we should have only one central government. And that time I thought that we would have mayors to help on local matters. But, of course, the central government would have to give some sort of courtesy to local officials before anything could happen on Tinian or Rota. But the person who had to oversee and handle all these governmental activities was the governor, running the central government. But when I started listening to this debate I had the impression that these Manglona brothers were trying to get power from the central government and wanted Constitution to mandate such an arrangement. Although my thinking at that time was different, I followed along with the current of their argument. I began to consider that the islands are separated by water so it might be appropriate to have more local control. I started to get on board, to support their position.
- Siemer: But your own view at the outset was that it would be helpful to have a strong central government?
- King: My view was that since we're going to have this self-government, let's establish our central government first. I thought we should have just one, a Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas. But at that time I remembered that we separated from the TT because we did not want the TT telling us this and that, with the TT having the power to get most of the benefits. Now it seems they're adopting the system from the TT. At that time, I was a little bit confused. The Rota and Tinian leaders were concerned that the majority was going to treat us like the Trust Territory.
- Siemer: How did that feeling develop that the Commonwealth Government would treat Rota and Tinian like the Trust Territory Government had done.
- King: Well, the mayors at that time were strong advocates for trying to get more power.
- Siemer: Was it primarily the experience of the mayors in trying to deal with the Trust Territory government that led them to believe that now that you had power in the Commonwealth Government yourselves, you owned the government, that it was going to be the same?
- King: I saw it differently at that time. You know, Tinian, Saipan, and Rota are different. Rota and Tinian are the most compatible. But I was kind of scared to have the full power for Rota and Tinian. If you look at Saipan, you get a different impression. If there are checks and balances there, the system in Saipan is more democratic than Rota and Tinian. Rota and Tinian are only one village each and that at times has turned out to be a Jonestown village. If one person gets all the power, it's scary. If one person has the power continuously for 14 years in either Rota and Tinian, he can manipulate and monopolize everything on the island, especially if you have a strong family. It's different on Saipan. So, that's the part that concerned me. But I do like the idea of decentralizing. But at that time when I looked at it, I said, "If I'm a small family and a big family controlled the power, then I will never get to do that because the big family would dominate the small family." Presently I like the decentralization of power. Only the main reason for me is to help the process and coordinate the activities of the central government, but not to use the power as a super authority, doing things that are not supposed to be done, to punish someone, or just to get some personal benefit out of it.
- Siemer: A considerable amount of the debate once the Rota and Tinian delegates made their proposal for lieutenant governors was about whether there should be a mayor and council system along with the lieutenant governor system or whether the Convention should

adopt one or the other. And many of the Saipan delegates seemed to be adamant that you were going to have to pick one or the other that you couldn't have this entire large structure. What do you recall about how the Rota and Tinian delegates felt about that choice that the Saipan delegates wanted them to make?

King: We felt that Saipan would disagree, especially when we proposed the three lieutenant governors but we just wanted to move on and try it.

Siemer: When the three lieutenant governors were defeated and the municipal councils were abolished, how the Rota and Tinian delegates feel about the local government system then?

King: When they abolished that at that time, we accepted it. The reason that we accepted it was that we wanted to get this new number in the house, to get additional representatives in the house.

Siemer: Why was that important?

King: Although we might be a minority inside the house, our delegates could gain by compromising on the choice of the speaker. Saipan most likely would be split between the parties. So Rota and Tinian would support the conadidate who would give the most advantage to our islands. But one delegate is too minimal; two is more effective than just one. If you have two then you'll have four for both islands. And four delegates could play a more significant role in the organization of the legislature.

Siemer: Did you attend the public hearing on Saipan?

King: At that time?

Siemer: Once the Convention got its initial draft together there were public hearings.

King: I remember only one hearing I attended here on Saipan and one time on Rota.

Siemer: Do you recall the opposition in Saipan from the Chamber of Commerce and others with respect to the size of the legislature that had been proposed at that time?

King: Yes, but we cannot compromise because of the one man/one vote rule. I was on that committee [when the consultants] showed us the comparison between one man-one vote structure and the proposed two representatives for each island. But even though the Senate had the equal representation, defeating the one man/one vote role, we still have to protect each island's rights. So that's why we still pursued two representatives for each island if we could not get three. And that's when we walked out.

Siemer: The first formulation when the discussion of the smaller legislature began were 16 for Saipan, two for Rota and one for Tinian so that Rota and Tinian together would have three. And that proposal seemed to be acceptable but when it began to go down to 12 and one for Rota and one for Tinian that was not acceptable.

King: If they want to reduce, then reduce Saipan's members.

Siemer: Was there some discussion of the possibility that the Rota and Tinian delegates would walk out over this issue before it happened?

King: There were three important issues that influenced our decision. We had a meeting, all the Tinian and Rota delegates, and we decided if they cannot give us what we want then we're going to walk out.

Siemer: In other words, there were three things that you wanted at that point?

- King: The three things were public services decentralization, the mayor, and the composition of the legislature.
- Siemer: When was the meeting held? Was it the same day that there was a walkout or was it before?
- King: Before. Then we had it to reinforce it the same day. But somehow some of them stayed. A few of them stayed and most of us walked out.
- Siemer: What was your own view about whether you should walk out or stay in the Convention?
- King: The understanding when we had the meeting, I remember, was that if Tinian doesn't get what it wants, then we walk out. That means we have to support each other. If Rota doesn't get what it wants, then we walk out. So that's the only understanding of the delegates. But then I came back. I returned because when we walked out it was over the problem of Rota trying to get two members of the lower house. So when that's defeated, we walked out. But when we walked out we chatted outside and waited for the others to come out. They didn't. I said to myself, what's wrong? This is not our problem, this is not Tinian's problem, we said we have to support each other. What happened to your delegates? I said this to the Rota delegates. I think two from Rota stayed behind and three walked out. So that's why I went back. Because it's not my issue, but I committed myself that I'm going to support you on the condition that everybody should walk out. Everybody should walk out. But two remained so that's why I returned. I went back.
- Siemer: Not all of your colleagues from Tinian walked out either, did they?
- King: Well, my colleague Henry Hofschneider make a speech there that he was elected to represent the people of Tinian to work on a constitution and they expected him to bring back a constitution. I believe that's his speech at that time. He wanted to complete the draft and bring the constitution back to his constituents. That's legitimate. I have no argument against that. But was that the purpose that we had in our understanding that if Rota doesn't get what it wants, Tinian would support Rota. But it did not end up like that.
- Siemer: What did Benjamin Manglona tell you about why the other Rota delegates didn't join you and walk out.
- King: Because they did not know what they're doing. Just leave them to make their own constitution.
- Siemer: What did you think about whether it was better for Tinian to have a constitution, although it wasn't everything you wanted, or not to have a constitution at all? What discussion was there about what would happen if there was no constitution at all?
- King: Well, our feeling was that it's better to have no constitution if Rota and Tinian do not get what they want.
- Siemer: And what do you think would happen then? How would the government continue if there was no constitution?
- King: It would be between the government and the legislature at that time to deal with that. I don't know. All I can remember is that it's better to have no constitution rather than Tinian and Rota not getting what they wanted.
- Siemer: Did you think that there would be another constitutional convention called the following year to try to do this again?

King: That's the impression. Either that or they would become sympathetic and give Rota, Tinian what they wanted.

Siemer: That the Saipan delegates would become more sympathetic once they saw that you were all together and that you would walk out.

King: Yes, the impression was that most likely Rota and Saipan want a constitution but to protect their interests. So the Saipan delegates would be more sympathetic if we walk out because there's going to be no constitution without the two islands. But it required that [total] walk out because one person from Rota and Tinian would meet the quorum requirements. Also the main focus was that, if we doing this then we have to do it strongly because Saipan really wants to have the constitution. That was our discussion and plan, but it turned out differently in the chamber.

Siemer: At the time that the Rota and Tinian delegates were discussing whether to walk out of the Convention, do you think that your colleagues understood what enormous power you had because of equal representation in the upper house?

King: I don't know exactly. I talked to Henry, Ben Manglona, and Mr. Diaz and said "How come you people did not walk out?" They said they didn't walk out because even all the Rota delegates did not walk out. That's the only reason I got from them. We had no problem in Tinian; it's okay. But even then the Rota delegates were not unified; three walked out and two stayed. So it's not our problem but, as I said, we have to support each other. But look at them, they're not supporting each other. So that's why I stood up when I came back and expressed my reasons for waling out and then returning. I walked out because that was the understanding of the group, but it's not a problem of my island, but I committed myself that if Rota doesn't get what it wants, then we'll support Rota and walk out. But if they disagree among themselves, then it's not my problem.

Siemer: There are a couple times when you were speaking that I'd like to go back to and see what you remember. One of them was a time when the delegates were talking about whether there should be a strong central government or whether most of the power should be in the mayors and the local government. And this appears on page 123 of the Journal. We'll go off the record for a minute so you can take a look at it.

King: Well, I delivered these comments after discussion with my group. I try to make my argument in support of decentralization in connection with Rota and Tinian. So, I stood up there to support the questions on decentralization because the people most involved at that time took this position.

Siemer: For your group?

King: Yes, they're the ones most knowledgeable mayors and former mayors, Prudencio Manglona, Ben Manglona, [Felipe] Mendiola. So I talked about this decentralization of power. When I look back, I see that we are separated by water and, at least, the Saipan delegates should recognize that. Because it's hard just to travel from Tinian to Saipan, by plane or take a boat. So, at least, I'm asking them to recognize this situation and give more responsibility to us. Giving some responsibility or power to us is not really letting us get away from the central government. It just means expediting the services to the public, services to Tinian, services to Rota. Giving us this power would mean that we don't have to come to Saipan, we can make a decision here for our island

Siemer: Do you remember the briefing papers that the delegates received before the Convention?

King: Yes. Mine was messed up when we had a typhoon on Tinian; it got so wet that I could not use it. I'm looking forward to getting another one.

- Siemer: Did you have time to look at those before the Convention back in 1976?
- King: No, I didn't see that one. I'm sorry that I didn't see that one. I heard about it but somehow I did not obtain a copy.
- Siemer: What was your view at the time back in the First Constitutional Convention about setting the salaries of legislators in the Constitution rather than leaving it for the Legislature?
- King: I disagree with putting the salary of the Legislature in the Constitution. But sometimes your position does not prevail. We are five delegates, you know, and if four want to go for it, sometimes I bite the bullet and just accept the majority position. But, personally, if I was going to make my own decision, then I would leave it up to the Legislature.
- Siemer: In the committee meetings, not on the Convention floor, you were a fairly young delegate. Were you satisfied that when you wanted to speak the chairman would recognize you and you could speak?
- King: It was very good and open. I remember that Mr. Fitial was my chairman on that committee.
- Siemer: He was also a fairly young delegate at the time.
- King: Yes. He was older than I was but he was young and bright.
- Siemer: How about in the Committee of the Whole, did you feel that when you wanted to speak you had an opportunity to do that?
- King: My observation is that we were not given enough time or recognized to speak. I had the impression that the president recognized the people close to him or that strongly support him on the issue. Even though the Convention had a non-political agenda, it just turned out to be political because the delegates there were typically from the political arena.
- Siemer: So, it's kind of hard to separate.
- King: Yes, it's hard, so the way they operated was like a political movement. I felt that there should be a good opportunity for everybody to participate since that's the First Con-Con. I thought we should have more time and more dialog among the delegates before coming up with a draft constitution.
- Siemer: Shifting to another subject, what was your own view with respect to the proposed restrictions on homesteads that an owner claiming a homestead would have to hold it for a certain number of years before they could get title and then would have to hold it for a certain number of years before they could sell it?
- King: Yes, I originally disagreed with that approach. But after the military took two-thirds I was trying to protect the remaining one-third as much as possible. I supported that because of the limited land that we have left in Tinian. Even though the military now has returned some land, it's not my recommendation to just open it. As a matter of fact, I told one of the delegates to this Third Con-Con: do not cross that out. If we want to change it, reduce it down to five years. With the situation in Tinian, I still support the ten years but others want to change it. So I said, change it, but change it to five rather than just delete it entirely.
- Siemer: What was your view back then as to whether people would sell their land and outsiders would buy it or whether people would hold on to their land?
- King: At that time everybody was thinking of leaving their land or selling it to our local people. As you know, our people down on Tinian were just farming the land. This was an

opportunity for investors to come in. The only resource the people had was land. Again the hope was for more money, better houses, schools, and cars a better life.

Siemer: Were you concerned that people from Saipan, for example, would come to Tinian and buy up land that had been homesteaded and ultimately the people on Tinian would not own as much land as people on Saipan did?

King: The Saipanese already have land down there. Some of them have larger holdings than the people of Tinian, because at that time the people of Tinian were selling their lands very cheaply, although reasonable at the time. But the owners with the most moneys can sell the land or lease it. They have no intention to live on Tinian but they can use the money and the land to make money. If the military comes in, they can lease it to the military. So they have nothing to lose. It's a big difference for those of us that live there. We have to stay down there. We have to hold our land. Maybe the Saipan buyer just bought the land on Tinian in order to help a friend. But in case they want to get rid of the land, they want to make money. The people coming in from outside our islands are mainly to invest and start a business. But the people of Saipan, I don't know. They can buy land now. But they would not buy the land if it is just going to be sitting there. They will buy the land if they see, for example, that a casino is going to be built down there, in order to make money by leasing the land to somebody. Instead of outsiders coming in directly and leasing the land, those people on Saipan will come and lease the land and then sublease it to the outsiders. They're the ones who look for the outside people to lease to. It's not their intention to stay.

Siemer: In the final voting on the proposals that were before the Convention, you voted against the article on natural resources. That's the one that covered marine resources and it set aside some of the Northern Islands as bird sanctuaries and so on. Do you recall what the issue was that caused you to vote against that particular article?

King: I voted against that because I wanted these areas to be open. At that time I felt that we should give our people the opportunity to go to those places. We don't have the kind of resources on our islands compared to the United States. We don't have any mines here. I just did not want our people to be prevented from doing something. I considered the people here to be poor. And one way or the other they would have to make a living to survive. Some of liked to go hunting, to go fishing, rather than being employed at a very low minimum wage. If you are going to impose these restrictions, where are these people going to go? That's what I was thinking then. But when I look now, it's different. I see how fast the development process has gone and now I'm thinking it's good that we protected those areas.

Siemer: How about the article with respect to initiative, referendum, and recall. You voted against that one as well. Do you remember what was concerning you at the time?

King: It's just personally my feeling I don't like the recall.

Siemer: You thought it'd be too disruptive?

King: Yes. If you're no good, then the voters can remove you at next election.

Siemer: How about constitutional amendment? You voted against that article as well. That's the one that set up the formulas, how many people would have to vote for a particular amendment in order for it to pass. Do you remember what you were worried about with respect to that?

King: I do not exactly recall what my vote was there.

- Siemer: There's a provision by which the Constitution could be amended if petitions were signed by enough people and it was put on the ballot. There was a method by which the legislature could propose amendments to the constitution that could be put on the ballot and there was a provision by which there could be a constitutional convention called and amendments could be put on the ballot. There were a lot of debates about the various formulas. Should it be a three-fourths majority? Should it be a two-thirds majority? Should the legislature be able to do it at all?
- King: The reason I don't like that is because of the legislature. I did not want the legislature to come in and do it because the majority of the house is from Saipan. But I agreed that the amendment could take effect only if confirmed by two municipalities. But without that, I was against the amendment. There was no safeguard for the people of Tinian; that's what I was looking at. But when we require approval by two municipalities, then that's when I was satisfied.
- Siemer: At the very end of the constitution after your work was finished, you made an important speech. It's on page 333 and 334 of the Journal. Let me ask you if you'll just take a look at that. What were your views at the time about whether the people of Tinian would be satisfied with the work that their delegates did in the Constitutional Convention?
- King: Well, my impression now, which is shared by other people that I have talked to on Tinian, is that it is better to leave the original language of the Constitution than to amend it. The more we amend our Constitution, the more personal interests get into the document. I talked to several people during this Third Constitutional [Convention] process down on Tinian and said "Yes, we are all in the Commonwealth and we have to respect the government no matter what. But the Constitution requires that we have to look at it." At the same time, the Constitution recognized that our rights should be respected. Although we are all part of the Commonwealth, the people of Rota and Tinian have their rights which the constitution should recognize. Then I said, "If we start looking back at the United States Constitution, the United States Constitution was not ratified until they established the Bill of Rights, because when they formulated the Constitution of the United States they were merely thinking of the government and they forget about the people." Now here, I wish that the delegates of Saipan would not think only of themselves. They should not think that Rota and Tinian are part of Saipan. They should recognize that the islands are separated by water. I share the concern of Saipan to unify us as one Commonwealth, as one government. But they must always recognize that, because of the water that separates us and the limited land, the people of Rota and Tinian have our rights. If you call me, you don't call me Saipanese, you don't call Rota people Saipanese, you call them Rotanese. Saipan should try to understand that we have rights down on Tinian, we have the rights to say something about our island. We have rights to determine how our island's going to be developed. It's different than Saipan. Rota as well. I accept that this Commonwealth has brought us together with one central government. But, the central government should not treat Rota and Tinian as a single island; they should recognize that they are separate. Although we are one government, we have separate islands. Even in Saipan when they use the word commonwealth, they put only Saipan as the commonwealth. If you refer to commonwealth, most people outside think that Saipan's the only island that is commonwealth. It's not Tinian. It's not Rota. I don't want Saipan to feel or to treat us as not part of them. We are part of them by the Constitution, but they should recognize the geographical situation. And that's why I made the speech. It's not that a lot of the Constitution is bad; it's mainly a question of the person who applies it, in my opinion.

- Siemer: After you finished your work in the Constitutional Convention, the Constitution was put before the public in an election to approve or not approve. Did you think back then that the people on Tinian were satisfied with what you had done and, therefore, they would vote in favor of it?
- King: Well, the way I look at it now on Tinian, they're not satisfied but they have no choice. Some of them say they just voted because what's the difference, we agreed to join with the United States. Others say that, even though we don't like parts of it and want to change it, it's a question whether it's constitutional or not. Because the United States Constitution is supreme, some of the voters were concerned that they were prevented from making changes because of the U.S. Constitution. We cannot do this or that, so let's just vote. So, some of people accepted it; others did not. But some of the people who did not like it just voted because they had no choice.
- Siemer: Did you work on the public education campaign back in Tinian?
- King: Yes.
- Siemer: What kinds of things did you do?
- King: I mainly explained the local government provisions.
- Siemer: Who else worked with you on the public education program?
- King: Me, Henry Hofschneider, Ben Manglona, almost everybody. We shared the duties during the public education.
- Siemer: After your work on the Constitutional Convention, did you run for office again?
- King: Yes.
- Siemer: When was that?
- King: In 1979.
- Siemer: You ran for the Legislature?
- King: Yes. I lost.
- Siemer: And when did you run again?
- King: I ran in 1981, 1983. I lost. I ran for the Senate. I moved to the Democratic Party and I lost.
- Siemer: Then when did you run again?
- King: Then I ran for the Municipal Council. I had tried enough partisan politics, so I ran for the Municipal Council which is non-party. That's after we had the Second Con-Con. But when I lost, going back to 1981 and 1983, then I ran for the Constitutional Convention as a candidate and I won. So that's when I see that the people like me for non-party positions; they don't like me for political positions.
- Siemer: After you served in the Second Con-Con when did you run again?
- King: Then I ran for the Municipal Council. Then I was supposed to run for the Senate, but I stepped down when another candidate expressed his interest. And I decided to run for the House, but the same thing happened and so I stepped down. I said, okay, I will run for the Council. That was in 1989 when I ran for the Council and won.
- Siemer: You served on the Council for two more years then?

- King: Yes, two years. Then I ran in 1991.
- Siemer: For the Senate?
- King: For the Senate. I lost.
- Siemer: Which party were you in 1991?
- King: Republican. I moved back to the Republican Party because I ran as a non-partisan for the Municipal Council in 1989. When I ran for the Senate in 1993, I was successful. I had spent a lot of money trying to get elected. I spent \$76,000 in 1981 for the Municipal Council; then I spent \$130.00 in 1991. When I ran in 1993, I spent about \$11,000.
- Siemer: How did you do that?
- King: The more you spend money, the more the people cheated you.
- Siemer: Really? Thank you Senator King. We appreciate very much the time that you've given us and the very valuable recollections that you've had about your work over the years.
- King: Well, sometimes in a position like this, you have to decide not to pursue your own position even though you think it has more merit than the alternatives. But you decide to change your position because of the flow of the majority or your relationship with other people. We are in a political process in the world and sometimes you have to bite the bullet and swallow it, even though you don't like it. It's very hard in this situation, especially right now when I'm sitting here as a Senator. The mayor is a Republican and sometimes I don't like what the mayor's doing. But I say, what would happen if I'm the mayor. Will I be like that? The difference here is we are from a small community and sometimes we're trying to change the system down here to make it more like Saipan's. But it's hard, because you just heard me mention about the cost. It costs more to run on Tinian than to run on Saipan because of the number of voters there that you're trying to get. So that's what I'm saying, on Tinian it's very small and also very family related. Sometimes your relationship with your colleagues is good today, but not good tomorrow, because things move very fast. Normally, the way I look at it, especially during my time here, some of the issues are taken too personally. One example is when the Governor submits a proposal and by the time they are reading the proposal, it's what they call it? "dead before arrival?"
- Siemer: Dead on arrival, yes.
- King: Dead upon arrival or dead before arrival. It's because it's too personal. I have submitted some good proposals but I don't know what's happened to the chairman that you have to convince or what. Even though they're politicians, the legislators have to exercise some professionalism. But sometimes if I have more bills, they react on a personal basis. If you already have ten bills, then they have to hold the next one because you otherwise will be faster than the others. But they should not do that, they should look into the merits of the bill. If they're good, then move forward; if they're not good, then we have to decide. But this give and take is too personal: scratch my back, I will scratch your back. That's why most of the bills that we are passing now are just overnight laws. The next day they are changed. That's why the first Constitution was good. I feel it's better not to change it. When we proposed amendments during the Second Con-Con, we had more problems. The more you get into details, the more you're trying to put in. There should be a limit. There should be a strict limit. I don't mind Tinian getting the power, but the way I look at it and sometimes say this is too much because it's not that they want the power, it is because they want to abuse the power.

Willens: Those comments are very important, Senator King, and it will be interesting to see whether the delegates to the Third Constitutional Convention take advantage of the experience and the wisdom that you and others have based on your public service. Thank you very much, sir.