

## INTERVIEW OF LLOYD MEEDS

by Howard P. Willens

October 9, 1996

- Willens: Lloyd Meeds served in the United States Congress from 1965 to 1979. Mr. Meeds has agreed to be interviewed in connection with our historical project, and we are very appreciative of his willingness to give his time. Lloyd, if I could begin by asking you to give me a brief summary of your educational and professional background before you were elected to Congress in 1964.
- Meeds: Yes. When I was elected to Congress, I was prosecuting attorney at Snohomish County, which is the county just north of King County in Washington State. I am a lawyer. I served in the Congress for 14 years. I served on the Education Labor Committee first, and then just two years thereafter became a member of the Interior Committee.
- Willens: Did you have any particular interest in the subject matter covered by the Territorial Affairs Subcommittee?
- Meeds: As a matter of fact, I didn't originally. It was a committee assignment that I got probably by default more than anything else, because at that time there were some other Committees that were more sought after and junior members got what others didn't want.
- Willens: But I notice you did stay with the Committee for some ten or more years. Did you acquire some kind of an interest then in the problems that came before the Subcommittee?
- Meeds: I did indeed. After a trip there in 1968, I think, I developed a very, very keen interest in what was going on there. I kept that interest even until today.
- Willens: What have you been doing since you left the Congress in 1979?
- Meeds: I've been practicing law with the firm of Preston, Gates, Ellis, Rouvelas, and Meeds, and as such have been in contact with problems, particularly of the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas which we represent in the Congress.
- Willens: How long has the firm through you represented the Commonwealth in recent years?
- Meeds: About two years now, I think.
- Willens: Was that prompted in part by the increasing controversy in the Congress regarding some of the developments in the Commonwealth?
- Meeds: I don't know about that. It was adopted and developed more I think to achieve some balance with some of the people who came in our shop that had Republican connections rather than just all Democrats.
- Willens: As I recall, you were a Democratic member of the Congress.
- Meeds: Right.
- Willens: When you became a member of the Territorial Affairs Subcommittee, how did you go about trying to get familiar with the history of the Trust Territory and what generally what generally was going on there in the middle 1960s?
- Meeds: Well, my recollection is that my interest was really piqued by the trip we took through the Territories in 1968.
- Willens: Was that your first trip down in that part of the world?

Meeds: Yes, that was my venture out there. I'd been to Hawaii and stuff, but never to Micronesia. We actually spent 11 days, and we went through the entire area then known as the Trust Territories of the Pacific Islands. Starting in Majuro, I think, and ending up in Guam.

Willens: Who was with you on that trip, if you remember?

Meeds: Hugh Carey was Chairman of the Subcommittee, and he started the trip but had to go back for some reason. Tom Foley became the Acting Chairman of the Subcommittee at that time. My recollection is that Patsy Mink was there. I think Neiman Craley was on that trip too, although I can't be certain. He later went off to become involved in the High Commissioner's office in Saipan. And a fellow from New York who was a judge, and I've forgotten his name.

Willens: Was that Hays?

Meeds: No.

Willens: What prompted the trip, if there was any specific reason for it occurring at that time?

Meeds: Whether there was anything specific or not I'm not sure. But there was a stirring about that time to obtain more knowledge and get more people interested, and to begin to try to determine what should be done about the Trust Territories of the Pacific Islands.

Willens: I gather from what you say that Chairman Aspinall was not on that particular trip.

Meeds: Chairman Aspinall was not on that trip at all, no.

Willens: Had he previously visited the Trust Territory?

Meeds: You know, I don't know that.

Willens: As you can see from some of the documents I made available to you, the Executive Branch agencies in the early 1960s were trying to reach a common position as to what to do with the Trust Territory after the termination of the Trusteeship Agreement. The Departments of State, Defense and Interior were the key departments, and they had somewhat conflicting views. Were you aware when you first got involved with respect to the Trust Territory that President Kennedy had issued a directive in 1962 with the express objective of trying to bring the entire Trust Territory under U.S. sovereignty through a plebiscite perhaps as early as 1968?

Meeds: Yes, I was, and my very early recollections were that Foley and I and certainly Burton kind of agreed with that. We kind of had a feeling of manifest destiny about the Pacific and we hoped it would become a part of the United States. And I recall very well that when I first went out there I was very prejudiced in that direction.

Willens: Was it your view at least before the trip and perhaps afterwards that the Trust Territory and its various six districts might be kept together as a single unit in some future political status?

Meeds: I can speak only for myself, and probably Patsy Mink and maybe Foley and later Burton. I don't think Burton was on that first trip. He may have been, but I don't think he was. But I know certainly later, talking with him, he was very much of the same mind that we hoped the entire area as a solid block would become a part of the United States.

Willens: Before your 1968 trip, were you aware of some of the differences among the districts with respect to future political status, and in particular the separate desire of the Marianas for a close relationship with the United States?

Meeds: I was not aware before I went out there, but I was made acutely aware when I got there.

- Willens: How did that come about?
- Meeds: Well, in different places. The Marshalls felt different than the people in the Marianas. The one clear memory I have is the strong feeling of the people in the Marianas to be a part of the United States, stronger than anywhere else in the area.
- Willens: Do you remember any of the specific individuals in the Northern Marianas that expressed these positive views to you about a relationship with the United States? Let me just mention some names: Herman Q. Guerrero, Ed Pangelinan, Ben Manglona, Senator Borja, people like that who were leaders in the Marianas at the time. Do any of those names refresh your memory?
- Meeds: I don't know that anyone in that group stands out, although the strong message from people in the Northern Marianas was they really wanted to be closer to the United States. And this was against a backdrop that we'd been in other areas before we got there, and we were telling them that some of the other people didn't feel as strongly as they did. But they just really held steadfastly to that. And we were refreshed, incidently, to see that attitude because that happened to coincide with what we thought it ought to be.
- Willens: Coming at the end of the trip, as I gather it did. What kind of message did you receive when you visited the Marshalls or Ponape, Truk or Palau if those locations were on your itinerary?
- Meeds: They all were.
- Willens: Did you get the sense that people were ready to make some decision with respect to future political status?
- Meeds: I had the sense and came to the conclusion that if you were to have a plebiscite at the time we were there or shortly thereafter, in all probability that the majority of the people would be for closer association with the United States as contrasted to independence. They had different views of what commonwealth meant and things like that, but basically the majority (and it wasn't a big majority at that time—well, I don't know—it was a majority in my view) of the people whom we met and talked with would favor some kind of closer association. But I must say I think we saw that eroding even at that time, that that [sentiment] was less than it was a year before and a year before that. I don't have any empirical evidence of that, but that's my recollection.
- Willens: Did you get that impression explicitly from some people with whom you spoke, or was it basically your sense of the feelings of the people with whom you talked?
- Meeds: I think probably that I got that feeling from talking with people in the various places. And I clearly got that feeling from the Peace Corps people who were there.
- Willens: Did you have some encounter with Peace Corps lawyers?
- Meeds: Oh, we talked with a lot of Peace Corps people, not only leaders, we had meetings with the Peace Corps wherever we went. And I've got to tell you, the Peace Corps people were a force for independence in the Trust Territories. They were really out there telling these people they ought to be independent. I really thought it was a little inimical to what I considered to be our best interest at that time, and kind of wished [or thought] that (not that we could control what the Peace Corps people thought) they didn't have as good of balanced consideration of what the overall scheme was as they might have had.
- Willens: Did you feel this was coming particularly from Peace Corps lawyers, or was it Peace Corps volunteers?

- Meeds: No. Peace Corps volunteers generally, yes, very much so.
- Willens: As you recall, there was some immediate tension with the Peace Corps establishment out in Micronesia in that the volunteers began to assist the inhabitants in expressing criticism of the Trust Territory Administration in particular.
- Meeds: I don't remember that.
- Willens: But you do remember their expressing views about status.
- Meeds: I certainly do. I remember our meetings with them and they're telling us how they felt—the Peace Corps volunteers. And also in watching them work with the people and telling the people how they felt.
- Willens: What was your assessment at that time as to how well the United States was fulfilling its responsibilities under the Trusteeship Agreement in the TTPI?
- Meeds: I thought quite well. There might have been more judicious funding, like some of the courts and things could have been improved more than they were. The living conditions were very bad. There was tremendous agriculture potential in some areas and nothing was being done about that. But as I learned later, it always didn't work to have grandiose plans about how you did that, either. There was clearly no question in my mind that no one was pressuring them to do any certain thing, that no one was pressuring them to become part of the United States. The Peace Corps people were telling them they shouldn't, and nobody was saying anything to the Peace Corps people. The Interior people were administering, the State Department people were saying "This is a United Nations protectorate, we want you to do what you want to do." The Defense Department people were saying, "We'd like to have some defense installations here, and let's work it out so we get them." But everyone was very mindful (I think) that this was a trusteeship and that it needed to make its own determination about these things.
- Willens: Throughout the 1960s, funding levels did gradually increase in the TTPI. Was there any serious dissention within your Committee in Congress as to the need for additional funding? Was that generally accepted as something that ought to be done?
- Meeds: You know, I don't remember any serious arguments about that. The ranking Minority member who was from Pennsylvania at that time ....
- Willens: Mr. Saylor?
- Meeds: Mr. Saylor, yes. It seems to me he had some problems with it, but I just don't recall specifically.
- Willens: You mentioned the three departments involved. Did you have any particular relationship with people at Interior—Secretary Udall or John Carver, who was an Assistant Secretary, or Ruth Van Cleve? Do you remember any of the individuals who were active at the time?
- Meeds: I remember all of them. Stuart Udall was a good friend. Ruth Van Cleve later became a friend, although I didn't know her at that time. Carver I don't recall as well as the other two.
- Willens: Well, the Interior people seemed to believe that Congressman Aspinall was very determined to bring the Trust Territory ultimately under U.S. sovereignty and that their status should be roughly comparable to the Organic Act for Guam. The Interior representatives also had the feeling as reflected in the documents that the people out in the Trust Territory might not be ready for the responsibilities of self-government. Did you have any sense during

your visit as to the readiness of the people out there to make their own judgments with regard to future political status?

Meeds: I don't remember specifics. But I do remember in general of, not a heated, but certainly a fairly intense difference of opinion with Chairman Aspinall about that. My recollection (and I hope this is correct) is that he really kind of wanted to impose almost a territorial status on them by something done in the United States Congress. I and Patsy Mink and I think Foley (although I don't remember him saying anything specific about it), certainly Burton later, felt very strongly that they ought to vote on this in the Territories. And we felt at that time we could win such a vote. As it proved later, if you'd had that vote later, some of them went this way and some of them went that way, and they fractionated. But early on, I think we could have won a plebiscite vote, particularly if we had manifested our interest that we wanted them. The thing about the State Department was that they really were "Caesar's wife" in this thing. You know, the Russians were screaming at the U.N. but, my God, the State Department people were out there all the time saying, "You've got to make up your own mind on this thing—if you want to be free, if you want to be independent, you can be independent," and everything. Interior was kind of middle of the road, and Defense really didn't care what the status was as long as they had land. And my recollection is that they really wanted first some areas down in Palau and then some areas in the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas—in Tinian, I think.

Willens: What was the sense on the Hill about the State Department's concern with respect to the U.N.? The materials suggest that there was some opposition within the Committee to any State Department position that seemed to reflect a concern for the United Nations. You have indicated that you recognized that there were certain responsibilities under the Trusteeship Agreement. How did that all play out ultimately with respect to the need to secure U.N. approval to a future political status?

Meeds: Well, I think it played out very much as the State Department had wanted it to, and more to the liking of Interior than to anybody else, because there were a series of these plebiscites or local decision-making, and different decisions were made. And the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas was the only one that really decided to take association with the United States—as a part of the United States.

Willens: In the last year or so of the Johnson Administration, there was an Administration proposal to create a presidential commission, including members of Congress, to study and to make proposals with respect to the future political status of the Trust Territory. This seemed to be opposed by Chairman Aspinall who thought that the Committee itself had sufficient expertise to handle this matter. Do you have any recollection of discussions about that presidential commission proposal?

Meeds: Not specifically, but that certainly is in keeping with not only Aspinall personally but with the tradition of chairmen at that time, in which they felt that any kind of commission delving into the subject matter of their Committee jurisdiction was an incursion. And Aspinall would be particularly sensitive to that.

Willens: On several occasions, Chairman Aspinall told the Executive Branch representatives that if the agencies within the Executive Branch could ever reach agreement on a common plan that he might be receptive to listening to them. They would often respond by telling the Chairman that they did in fact have agreement. What was the point of that exchange, if you have any recollection along those lines?

Meeds: I don't recall it specifically, but again, that's a person who might want to maintain the status quo. That's always a good way to do that—to say, "Well you guys have got to come

in with a balanced position.” He had to know, as I knew, that the State Department and the Defense Department and the Interior Department probably had different views. And to ask them to consolidate their views was to ask for something that probably wasn’t going to happen, which is probably what he wanted.

Willens: On one occasion of an executive session, based on at least these memoranda reporting on the executive session, Congressman Saylor is quoted as being very outspoken and critical of the State Department. Was that a view that was held by others on the Committee with respect to the State Department?

Meeds: Not that I’m aware of. That comports with my recollection of what Saylor would do.

Willens: What was Chairman Carey’s particular point of view with respect to the Trust Territory, if any?

Meeds: You know, he became Chairman of that Subcommittee I think largely due I think to seniority, and he never really manifested much interest in the Trust Territories. I think he was more interested in Guam than he was in the Trust Territories. And probably Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands, which were on the East side.

Willens: Representative Mink seems to have taken an active role at various times.

Meeds: Very.

Willens: What do you recall being her principal objectives or views with respect to the Trust Territory?

Meeds: Very close to mine, which were basically that we hoped that the entire area would become a part of the United States, probably a territory then later maybe something more than that. But I think that that desire was not lessened, but maybe leavened a little bit after our trip out there, when we recognized there were so many different views and so many differing heritages and cultures. The people of the Northern Marianas very much wanted to become part of the United States. The people of Palau were very stand-offish at the time about closer association. Or the Marshalls, I think the Marshalls were the most independent-minded at the time. History will probably be a better guide than my memory on this; in fact, I’m sure it will be. But my recollection was that Amata Kabua, was he the . . .

Willens: Yes, he was the chief and a key member in the Congress of Micronesia at the time.

Meeds: Yes. He was very pro-independence, or pro-not-United States, because he talked about all the cultural and tribal ties of chiefs, and I think he recognized that in a free society he wasn’t going to be what he wanted to be. I hope I’m being fair to the guy, but that’s my recollection.

Willens: There certainly was a sense that one got in later years that some of the other districts through their leaders had a concept of building their own nation and that they might have more access to power and prestige under such a political status. I think that is a fair comment. At the time of your trip in 1968, you were probably aware that the Congress of Micronesia had established a Future Political Status Commission which issued an interim report in the summer of 1968 and then a final report in 1969. As these materials reflect, you seem to have been aware quite clearly that the Future Status Commission of the Congress of Micronesia had espoused a position of free association as its preferred objective with independence as a fall-back position. Do you have any recollection of how you became aware of the results of that Future Status Commission and what your reactions were at the time?

- Meeds: We met with the Congress of Micronesia, and there were really some very capable people.
- Willens: Do you recall who you did meet from the Congress of Micronesia?
- Meeds: Oh, we met with a lot of people. I remember Lazarus Salii. I was very impressed with Salii. There were some people from the Northern Marianas—Guerrero?
- Willens: Herman Q. Guerrero might have been involved in the Congress of Micronesia at that time, I'm not sure.
- Meeds: Panglinian?
- Willens: Ed Pangelinan?
- Meeds: Yes.
- Willens: You met with some of the members of their Future Status Commission?
- Meeds: Yes, I did.
- Willens: There was Andon Amaraich who became active later on.
- Meeds: I remember him.
- Willens: Did you get the sense that the Congress of Micronesia members had a common objective with respect to status, or did you see within the Congress of Micronesia some of the different points of view that you saw also out in the districts?
- Meeds: I saw both those things, and the Congress of Micronesia was really kind of a melding of all these differences. Kind of like the United States, you know. We weren't all the same when we got together. There was a belief that they would never be able to hold it all together, and then there were some of us who were hopeful it could be and wanted to think that way, I guess. And we really believed that of those alternatives, closer association, where we could begin to deal with them and show them the value of even closer association, was the best way to go. About that time (or maybe a little later), the Magnuson Fisheries Act passed the Congress, which set a 200-mile limit for fisheries jurisdiction. I know Foley and I and Burton envisioned this vast inland sea out there, which would enable Micronesia to have the greatest fisheries resource in the whole world. And they would have, you know, had they become a part of the United States or had they become more associated with the United States and had we applied the Magnuson Act to the Territories. Some of us always had that in mind.
- Willens: I never quite understood at what point the Law of the Sea issues became important in the Congressional consideration of the Trust Territory.
- Meeds: I don't know that they ever were. I don't know that anybody else held these views, but I know that Foley and Burton and I, who were aware of the Magnuson Act, were aware of the consequence of applying it to them, if Micronesia stayed together, because almost all of the sea in that area would become part of the fishery jurisdiction of the United States.
- Willens: That's a very interesting point, which I've never really heard before. The sense is that if all the Trust Territory were under U.S. sovereignty, then the ocean in between the islands would all be a part of a United States fisheries area.
- Meeds: Absolutely. That's correct.
- Willens: With some right of international transit?

Meeds: With a lot of right of determination of who fixed it and what the limits were and a whole bunch of things.

Willens: That is interesting. In 1969 in the summer the report of the Future Status Commission did come out with the recommendations that I made reference to earlier. Do you remember reading the report or at least some summary of the report?

Meeds: I don't. I'm sure I probably did.

Willens: Since I sent you some materials, I went into the Congressional Record, and I have some comments that you made on September 30, 1969 when you introduced your proposed legislation providing for a Constitutional Convention in Micronesia. [Let me give you a minute to just skim that over.] Lloyd, I gave you a copy of some remarks that you made on September 30, 1969 that make reference both to Secretary Hickel's trip to Micronesia earlier that year and also your proposal in two parts looking toward a Constitutional Convention in Micronesia and then perhaps an organic act that might bring Micronesia into some close relationship with the United States. Do you have any recollection now as to what prompted your thinking?

Meeds: Yes, a little bit. I think it's part of all this thing that I was telling you—that the relatively strong feeling for Americans that I first sensed when I went out there in 1968 was eroding. If we were going to be able to bring Micronesia into the United States, or as a part of the United States or closer to the United States, there would have to be U.N. okay for that. There was not going to be U.N. okay of anything that was not the wish of the people of Micronesia. So a constitutional convention and a plebescite was the way to get at that and to provide some kind of interim stability to begin to do some of the infrastructural work that needed to be done and other things.

Willens: Was it your sense that the Micronesians could draft a Constitution that would provide them some internal self-government before they decided on any relationship with the United States?

Meeds: Yes. Well, they really were doing a lot of that through the Congress of Micronesia at the time. We had a High Commissioner out there and all that, but we were giving them more and more say about their everyday lives all the time, and as we did later, much more.

Willens: Your strategy as reflected in this proposal seems different from Chairman Aspinall's strategy at the time, which was to try to get an organic act drafted by the Executive Branch and enacted by the Congress, perhaps even without any consultation with the Micronesians.

Meeds: That was the problem with it. This is kind of a melding of the idea of getting an organic act which would give you some stability to operate, but the ultimate decision had to be made by the Micronesian people. And this provided that possibility.

Willens: Did you make any effort with particular Executive Branch officials to try to get their support for this kind of approach?

Meeds: You know I don't remember. But I do remember my great concern that things were unraveling in Micronesia.

Willens: Well there was a first round of negotiations in October of 1969, about at the same time that you introduced your proposal. As you may have gleaned from the documents that I made available to you, the Executive Branch committees that were looking at this thought long and hard about your approach, and they decided to reject it and reserve it as a fall-back position.



- Meeds: I don't remember that.
- Willens: So you were not aware of what their strategy was when they went into the first round of negotiations?
- Meeds: No.
- Willens: Well, the result of the first round was, as you just have suggested, somewhat murky. The Executive Branch officials seemed to approach that round of negotiations with some uncertainty as to what the Micronesians wanted. Now you, either based on your visit or your interest or your review of the Status Commission, seemed to have a fairly clear idea. They wanted something called free association. Did you think that was a firmly-held view of the Micronesians at the time, or did you think that perhaps if they adopted a constitution and so forth that they might then be more amenable to a permanent relationship with the United States as a commonwealth?
- Meeds: The latter was really what I had in mind. The emotions were very mixed out there and getting even more so as 1969 and 1970 came on than they were when I first went out there. I saw this erosion taking place, and it didn't fit with my idea of what I thought ought to take place, of bringing in the entire area as part of the United States ultimately.
- Willens: As a single member of the Subcommittee, was there a way for you to try to advocate your views within the Committee and try to get more consensus within the Committee as to how this ought to be handled?
- Meeds: Well, I don't remember specifically, but I'm sure the introduction of this legislation was part of that effort.
- Willens: Do you recall any reaction from Chairman Aspinall to your approach?
- Meeds: Not specifically, although I do recall having differences with Aspinall about the Micronesian people having a major say in what happened to them. I thought that was an absolute essential.
- Willens: What would be his response to that kind of position?
- Meeds: You know I don't recall that specifically. But again his general position was that we ought to do as we'd done with Guam and adopt in the Congress an Organic Act and kind of rule the place like a territory, which I thought, number 1, was not the best way to bring the people into the United States, and number 2, really was a violation of the U.N. Trusteeship. We had promised, as I recall, that these people would make a decision on their own about what they wanted to do.
- Willens: That's clearly right. The Trusteeship Agreement did obligate the U.S. to prepare the people for self-government or independence.
- Meeds: This was at the time when we'd seen Belgium just letting loose of colonies, and France and Portugal in terrible administrations of colonial and of trusteeship possessions and of areas. I was horrified that the United States might at some point just let these people go in a state of confusion, and you'd have that kind of situation.
- Willens: You made reference to Secretary Hickel's trip in May of 1969. In the early months of the Nixon Administration, there was a re-examination of policy toward the Trust Territory, and Secretary Hickel went out authorized to state publicly for the first time that the United States had an interest in some kind of long-term relationship with all of the Trust Territory. Did you have any personal dealings with Secretary Hickel on this subject?

- Meeds: Not that I recall, though I would applaud that. But as I pointed out here, it couldn't be a 25-year situation in which we would impose our will on them for 25 years and then let them decide.
- Willens: Do you have any recollection of an aide of Secretary Hickel's named Harrison Loesch?
- Meeds: Sure I do. Yes.
- Willens: After he left the Interior Department, I think he worked briefly with the Committee with respect to territorial matters.
- Meeds: Well, I remember the name very well, yes. I don't remember where he was.
- Willens: I think he was an Assistant Secretary at Interior, and he sort of carried the laboring oar with respect to these negotiations in the fall of 1969. He and Secretary Hickel tried to put together a compromise that would satisfy the Micronesians by giving them some of the authority they wanted over land in Micronesia, but Defense and State opposed this kind of resolution. Did you have any awareness in late 1969 as to how those negotiations had been conducted and what the results were?
- Meeds: I don't think so, but I certainly have a recollection of the abiding conviction of the Micronesians—everywhere—that they really had to have control of their land. That was a major factor, as I recall, in all negotiations, in all discussions we had with them. Land was probably the most precious thing and the most guarded thing with Micronesians everywhere. Even above religion, which is not always the case.
- Willens: Did you think that your program would ultimately put them in a position where they would be able to exercise the control over their own land that they wanted?
- Meeds: Well, I thought they would come up with a resolution of how to handle land which would fit their desires of how you handle land. You know, we're doing that in the Northern Marianas today. It's different than it is in the United States, but it is a way in which they have asserted their position on that issue or very nearly their position.
- Willens: The Micronesians were quite upset in the months following October 1969 that the United States had not agreed to their desire for a constitutional convention, and there is in the materials that I've provided you a letter in from Lazarus Salii early in 1970 saying that unless the United States agrees to a constitutional convention, there's not much point to going further. Do you have any judgment now as to whether the United States might have been better advised to offer a constitutional convention early on, rather than reserving it as a fall-back position as they did?
- Meeds: Well, I don't recall specifically, but I'm sure I felt that it should have been offered. And again, this is part of that erosion that I saw taking place. It was my feeling that we ought to get in there, show them we were good people, they ought to be part of us, and get them by love and by respect rather than imposing our will on them and then later trying to have some kind of corrective action which would make everything right. You know, the whole world was going absolutely 180 degrees different than that at the time and still is, incidentally.
- Willens: The Micronesians in 1970 announced their Four Principles, the first of which would be that the Micronesians under a future political status would have sovereignty. Another of the Four Principles referred to the right to unilaterally terminate any relationship with the United States. When you became aware of those Four Principles, did you have the sense that things were really slipping away farther and more rapidly than you had anticipated?

- Meeds: Well, I don't recall specifically, but my belief that we were going to be able to resolve this as a total thing, I think at about that time, began to erode pretty rapidly.
- Willens: Did you personally have any encounters with Micronesian or Marianas representatives at the time that led you to believe that perhaps the Marianas should be dealt with separately from the rest of the Trust Territory?
- Meeds: You know, I think I was out there in 1974.
- Willens: You were out there in January of 1974, that's correct.
- Meeds: All right. Sometime along there, and I don't know whether it was then or as a result of that trip or sometime before that, I began to believe that the chances of holding Micronesia together were almost gone. And that we ought to hold as much of it as we could in closer association. The Marianas were clearly still in that position.
- Willens: You obviously were alerted to this early on, because there is a letter in the file here dated June 9, 1971 from Assistant Secretary Loesch of Interior addressed to Chairman Burton. It refers to an inquiry you made at a recent briefing session on territorial matters where you asked as to the legality of the severability of the Trusteeship Agreement, and you made specific reference to the current secession movement in the Mariana Islands District. So there must have been something that prompted your inquiry, because actually Representative Mink apparently made a similar request. You both got legal opinions from various sources that said that, although technically you could separate out the Marianas, that politically it would not be advisable. I think this might have been prompted by the somewhat flamboyant statements made by Marianas elected leaders in February 1971 that they were going to secede if necessary with force of arms and there was a burning of the Congress of Micronesia buildings.
- Meeds: Oh, I remember that, yes.
- Willens: And there were other rather dramatic events out there that highlighted the Marianas separatist view. Does that refresh your recollection?
- Meeds: Yes, a little bit. It was clear, though, from the very outset of my association out there, that the Northern Marianas really were totally committed to closer association with the United States. When I first started dealing with them, it was my hope that their strong feeling on this would help bring the rest along. At some point, I don't know where it was, I began to lose hope that that would occur and began to think we ought to take what we can get.
- Willens: The Executive Branch consistently up until April of 1972 said that it would not agree to any separatist movement and that the entire Trust Territory had to be dealt with as an entity.
- Meeds: And I remember disagreeing with it, too.
- Willens: Do you? What is your recollection about that?
- Meeds: Well, at some point I became convinced that freedom for part of that Trust was as important as freedom for all of it and that they shouldn't dictate what the Northern Marianas would do. I'm sure part of it was also a practical feeling that that was probably all we were going to get, and I wanted to get it for us, for the United States.
- Willens: Ambassador Williams was appointed in March of 1971. Did you have any reaction at the time to the idea of appointing a single representative at the Ambassador level to handle these negotiations?

- Meeds: My recollection is that I was favorable to that. I thought we should give it that kind of priority and that kind of level of consideration.
- Willens: Did you have the sense that that kind of appointment was needed in order to present a consolidated Executive Branch position, or was it just because it gave more visibility to the problem?
- Meeds: Probably that it put more prestige on the line and more visibility.
- Willens: He made a considerable effort over the next several years to brief members of the relevant Committees. As some of these materials suggest, he wanted for the most part to limit his briefings to the majority and minority senior members.
- Meeds: Not unusual at the time.
- Willens: What was your general sense about the briefings you and the Committee received with respect to the negotiations?
- Meeds: If it was that, and I don't recall specifically, it doesn't surprise me if it was that. If it was that, I probably objected because you know what Aspinall and Haley and those guys felt. But some of us down in the trenches had different ideas.
- Willens: He seemed to have some particular concern about Subcommittee Chairman Burton. I gather from the materials that Burton was Chairman of the Subcommittee at least in June of 1971. Did he just succeed by virtue of seniority?
- Meeds: You know, I think that's probably when he became Chairman of the Subcommittee, right in there.
- Willens: And his predecessor had retired from the Congress?
- Meeds: Well, in terms of seniority Burton was one seat above me there and also in Education and Labor. Burton came on Interior the same year I did, I think.
- Willens: I see.
- Meeds: And Foley, who had more seniority than either of us on that Committee, probably could have taken that Subcommittee, but he was very tied up in the Agriculture Committee, where his constituent interests were. So I imagine Burton took over about that time.
- Willens: What would be sort of your capsule description of your colleague Burton?
- Meeds: Very complex man. Capable of immense good; capable of immense harm. The latter very rare—and almost never wielded where a lot of people, particularly less prosperous, less advantaged people, were concerned. He had a very strong concern for people and particularly people that other people didn't pay attention to. He really envisioned his role as Chairman of the Territories Committee as representing all those people who were under-represented in the Territories and in Micronesia and in other places. He had a very strong and abiding desire to help them.
- Willens: Did you and he have any significant differences as to how to deal with the future political status of the Trust Territory?
- Meeds: You know, I don't remember any. I do remember very clearly that we felt very much alike initially and that we really felt Micronesia, all of Micronesia, ought to be part of the United States. And Patsy Mink felt that way, and Tom Foley felt that way. I don't know about other people.
- Willens: Did your views diverge at some point as the matter progressed during the 1970s?

- Meeds: You know, I don't remember, and I should, too, because when I went out there in 1974, I went to the Northern Marianas and he didn't. I really went to the Northern Marianas to carry his views and my views and to report back to him as Subcommittee Chair. He may have gone to part of Micronesia, or maybe he went to Samoa or something. I don't remember what it was.
- Willens: What seemed to have happened is that he did go out to Guam and Saipan in January 1974 along with other members, and you and Congresswoman Mink were also in the Trust Territory, so you may have reached Saipan a week or two after he did.
- Meeds: All right.
- Willens: He met with the Guam Legislature and with the Marianas Political Status Commission. In the memos I've provided you there is a long report that I received from a lawyer in Saipan who was working with me on the Commission. At that point, there were some aspects of the negotiation that were of concern to Congressman Burton and other members of the Subcommittee. I gather from what you say then that when the U.S. finally agreed to conduct separate negotiations with the Marianas, you felt that was a good idea.
- Meeds: Yes. That's my recollection.
- Willens: And generally at the various oversight sessions that the entire Committee had with Ambassador Williams, did you feel that he was keeping you sufficiently informed so that you knew what the Executive Branch was doing in the negotiations?
- Meeds: You know I don't remember that specifically. I do have a nagging kind of feeling that I felt that the State Department, and hence Williams, held on too long to the view that the thing couldn't be separated. I just have that feeling. I don't know if you have anything that shows that or not, but that's my recollection.
- Willens: Well, they certainly were under a lot of pressure from the United Nations and the Micronesians generally not to acquiesce too soon to this request for separate negotiations. But in 1970 there was a commonwealth proposal that was advanced to the entire Micronesian delegation, and it really was not a commonwealth proposal, if I may editorialize, it was just an organic act with another name, and it was rejected by the . . .
- Meeds: Congress of Micronesia.
- Willens: Congress of Micronesia Committee. The Marianas representatives, however, thought it provided a good starting point for defining a relationship that they would be interested in. So that was sort of the beginning of driving home to the United States that there were very different objectives here. For a considerable time, the Executive Branch had difficulty in understanding that the Micronesians wanted something called free association and that they meant it. Did you come to the point of view that they meant it?
- Meeds: I really did, yes. And I recall thinking that if we grabbed this—and you know this is like how you spin something—we grabbed it and said this is great and really made it work, that they'd want to be even closer to us, rather than as I saw a prolonged dispute with them about where they were going and still having this obligation to see that they were ready to emerge as something rather than nothing—and the conflict in these two views and really feeling very strongly that we ought to let them define things initially and try to shape them, try to work with them.
- Willens: When the negotiations with the Northern Marianas started producing some preliminary agreements, the documents suggest that there were numerous problems that the Executive Branch and members of the Committee had with respect to the negotiations. One issue

that was raised throughout was to what extent would this future relationship differ from Guam's status, and Representative Won Pat was active in those days. Did you have any view at the time that the Marianas should be confined to the same kind of status as Guam had, or did you think there was some flexibility as to what could be developed?

Meeds: I thought there was some flexibility. I really felt that we should be flexible.

Willens: Did you think that one could be flexible and still achieve U.S. objectives of bringing the Marianas under U.S. sovereignty?

Meeds: Yes. In fact, I thought that was about the only way we were going to do it.

Willens: Chairman Burton had strongly-held views about the tax provisions, and he felt that the tax provision in the Northern Marianas ought to be the same mirror image approach as in Guam. Originally the United States had agreed with the Marianas Political Status Commission that the Marianas could develop their own tax system as Puerto Rico did. Did you have views one way or the other on that particular issue?

Meeds: I don't remember that. It ended up as the former, though, rather than the latter.

Willens: It ended up as adopting the mirror image.

Meeds: The Burton approach.

Willens: The Burton approach, in part because we on the Marianas side concluded that he felt so strongly about it that it was asking for more of a problem than perhaps we needed.

Meeds: Kind of like the non-voting delegate.

Willens: Well, that's right. On the non-voting delegate issue, of course, the United States said they thought that was most unlikely and the Marianas representatives recognized that the small population out there argued against it.

Meeds: That's my recollection of Burton's position, too.

Willens: What is your current perception of that position? Do you think now that the Marianas have achieved a more substantial population that they are entitled to have a non-voting delegate?

Meeds: I don't know. I haven't followed that.

Willens: Did you feel that you were generally informed as to the substance of the Covenant at the time that it reached you for hearings and a vote in 1975?

Meeds: You know I'm sure I was, but I don't have as much recollection of that as I really ought to, so maybe I wasn't as active in that as I had been earlier. I don't know.

Willens: You did make the trip out there in 1974, and actually you were preceded by Mr. Sander.

Meeds: Right. He went with Burton.

Willens: He went with Burton and the larger group as your representative. Do you recall learning anything on that particular visit that illuminated the issues or otherwise helped you make some judgments on the issues.

Meeds: I don't know what it was, although I do recall that Burton was very fond of Sander and trusted him greatly. I remember that. He was very complimentary of him when they got back.

Willens: When the Covenant was being negotiated, I and other representatives of the Marianas would visit with staff members and members of the Committee (to the extent they were

- available) to report on what we were doing and what the issues were. Representative Clausen took an interest in the matter, but he and others made it clear that the members of the Committee were just bystanders. They didn't want to interfere in any way in the negotiations, and they were quite discreet about what they would say to us as to their views. Was that generally the posture that the members would take when the Executive Branch had the lead in conducting negotiations?
- Meeds: Well, I'm sure on the surface, yes, that there was always a feeling that you didn't want to present a divided front. But I'm also sure that some of us had fairly strong views about things, which we had to let people know somewhere. It was probably Haydn Williams and his group that we talked to.
- Willens: Ambassador Williams from time to time was at odds with our approach to establish our own lines of communication with members of the Committee and their staffs. I thought it was a perfectly natural thing to do.
- Meeds: You could be the old State bureaucrat who thought there was a line of command, you know, a chain of command that had to be followed.
- Willens: What is your recollection of Congressman Clausen's interest in the matter? Any particular point of view that he as ranking Republican member of the Committee brought to the issues?
- Meeds: You know, I don't recall very well, although I do recall that he was active and contributed. I don't know who'd been ranking before that, but Saylor certainly never contributed anything. There may have been somebody in between.
- Willens: Two staff members who were most active on the House side during those years are now both deceased. One is Adrian Winkel, and the other is Tom Dunmire.
- Meeds: Yes.
- Willens: What is your recollection of those two individuals?
- Meeds: I remember Winkel better, he was Burton's guy, as I recall. I remember probably agreeing with him on a lot of what he said.
- Willens: When the Covenant came before the House, it was to be considered more or less along the lines of a treaty, namely, either to approve all of it or disapprove it, but not to amend it. Did you have any difficulty with that approach in considering the negotiated document?
- Meeds: I don't remember. I think probably my reaction to that kind of thing was to recognize that you couldn't be amending the thing on the floor of the House because that's what people had agreed to somewhere else, and you couldn't go around changing it and still have an agreement. That would be my general approach to that kind of thing.
- Willens: There were some hearings in April 1975 before the vote on the Covenant, and in those hearings you raised an interesting question with Commissioner Canham, who was the Plebiscite Commissioner.
- Meeds: Canham?
- Willens: Canham, the editor from the *Christian Science Monitor* . . .
- Meeds: Oh, yes, right.
- Willens: . . . who was appointed to assume those responsibilities. Everyone was very pleased with that appointment, and he certainly performed to expectations. You asked a question about the fairness of the ballot language that was being put to the people. You made the point

obviously expressed to you by some Micronesians that the voters would be given the chance to vote “yes” in favor of commonwealth as defined in the Covenant, but if they voted “no” they weren’t given any indication as to what would happen. This was one of the main lines of criticism that took place at that time, because opponents of the Covenant said, “Well, if we vote no, we really mean that we’re for commonwealth but we think that we could strike a better deal.” Do you recall any concern or discussion you had about the plebiscite vote?

Meeds: No, I don’t really. I’m sorry.

Willens: Do you recall any lobbying efforts that Micronesians made with you to oppose the Covenant or lobbying efforts by the U.S. or Marianas people to urge your support?

Meeds: No.

Willens: There wasn’t any significant opposition to the Covenant in the House of Representatives, but when it got to the Senate side, there were some very significant lines of opposition. There were those who thought that this was fragmentation and violated United Nations principles; there were those who thought this was just another way of having a colony and it was contrary to the anti-colonial movement; there were those who thought the base in Tinian wasn’t needed and so why should we do this. Did you have any dealings with opponents of the Covenant that reflected one or more of those views?

Meeds: No, I don’t remember any. Sorry.

Willens: Looking back with what you’ve said, you recognize that there are now four separate entities out there in the Western Pacific. What is your overall assessment of the way in which those negotiations ultimately worked out? Are you generally satisfied with the achievement of U.S. objectives out there or would you have wished it had come out somewhat differently?

Meeds: Well, first of all, I would have wished that it would have come out differently. I wish they would have all stayed together, or even more of them had stayed together. And frankly I expected that, Howard. I really thought that probably Truk, Ponape, Yap, would have stayed together. First of all, I knew that the Marshalls was going to go. Kabua was just pulling them right out of there. Palau, I didn’t know as well but was not surprised that they asserted the independence they did. I was really a little surprised about the middle districts—Yap, Truk, and Ponape.

Willens: It’s now called the Federated States of Micronesia, and some of the names have been changed. It’s Chuuk.

Meeds: Yes. I really thought maybe those people would come in with something which would assimilate them into a closer relationship with us sooner. I think that’s still possible with them. I think the Federated States are more willing to talk with us about a closer association. But I was very pleased I felt the way I did about the Northern Marianas, because I think that’s worked out very well.

Willens: Do you think that the decision to conduct separate negotiations with the Marianas led to the separate negotiations with the Marshalls and Palau or after 1975 did you think there was some chance of keeping them together?

Meeds: No. The other way around. I don’t know when I reached that conclusion, but I reached the conclusion that we’d damned well better cut the Marianas loose and let them negotiate separately, because some of the rest of them, particular the Marshalls, were going to go.

Willens: You thought some of others were going to go separately anyway in a different direction.



- Meeds: Yes.
- Willens: So you would not accept entirely the criticism that the separate negotiations with the Marianas caused the separate future status of the Marshalls or Palau.
- Meeds: Not at all. I think it was an exercise of pretty good discretion to do it, because to have not have done it would have been to doom the people of the Northern Marianas to a different fate than they really achieved ultimately, I think.
- Willens: After the Covenant was approved by the House in 1975 and then ultimately by the Senate and became law in 1976, did you continue your interest as a member of the Committee in what was happening in Palau and the Marshalls and the Federated States?
- Meeds: I did continue my interest, but I don't think it was as intense. I felt badly that they'd fractionated the way they did. Not only did I feel that way emotionally but kind of intellectually. I didn't really expect them, other than the Marshalls and Palau, to go off the way they did. I knew the Marianas would do so and I felt that the middle states would do something different too.
- Willens: To what do you attribute the great delay that occurred with respect to ultimately deciding what Palau's future status would be? Do you have any judgments?
- Meeds: Well, you'd have to understand Palau better than I do. All the things that happened down there with Lazarus Salii's death, the drug business and all that stuff really profoundly disturbed me and bothered me, because I thought Palau had such a great brilliant future as a tourist area. They've got the biggest island and great potential for agriculture on Babelthuap. I was really very intellectually disturbed by what happened.
- Willens: How often have you gone back to the Northern Marianas in the past 15 or 20 years?
- Meeds: I was there eight months ago.
- Willens: You had been there of course in 1974. Did you go there in the late 1970s or the 1980s on one occasion or another?
- Meeds: No.
- Willens: So you went for the first time eight months ago?
- Meeds: Yes.
- Willens: Just summarize for me your reactions to the changes that have taken place.
- Meeds: Oh, fantastic changes. I think that the confidence we placed in them in resolving things like land in their way and other problems was well justified. They've still got some problems, but basically the economy of the Northern Marianas is functioning, they're balancing their budget (in fact they have a surplus now), they're not taking a lot of money from the federal government. As you know, the Governor said we don't want your money. They do have some labor and immigration problems, but they're really getting on top of them a lot more than they were say two years ago.
- Willens: Do you think the Covenant is threatened by some of these problems and the alleged inability of the Commonwealth to deal with them adequately?
- Meeds: Well, I'm disturbed by the kind of "seat of the pants" approach that the Congress takes to the Covenant. You know Murkowski just will do this or do that without any consideration that the Covenant reserved the right of the Marianas to handle immigration and minimum wage. And he'll say, "Well, we'll do this. We won't impose it on them, but we will impose it on them." And that disturbs me. So I think the Covenant is being observed very closely

by the people in the Northern Marianas and I think observed in the breach by the United States Congress.

Willens: There have been problems certainly over the last 15 or more years within the Executive Branch too from time to time.

Meeds: Oh, sure. Stayman thinks he can do any damned thing he wants out there.

Willens: Is this just attributed to sort of a lack of continuity within the Executive Branch or within the Congress, or does it reflect some skepticism that we needed to have any different relationship with the Northern Marianas than with Guam or whatever?

Meeds: You know, I don't know that. But I wish I could explain it a little better, because I've wondered about why this cavalier attitude about the Covenant on the part of both the Administration and the Congress. It really is. Stayman should know better. He's been through this. He knows how that Covenant came into being. You know, you don't go around violating an Organic Act.

Willens: That's certainly true.

Meeds: And you certainly don't change it without some very severe provocation and some very serious discussions with the people of Guam or of the Virgin Islands.

Willens: But you're generally optimistic then I gather then at least about the ability of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands to solve these problems.

Meeds: Oh, very, yes. And recognizing that they've got some problems and they gave to show some restraint in some things. That relationship is not a license either.

Willens: Anything else you'd like to say in terms of recollections? That was very helpful to me, and off the record you've made some suggestions as to additional lines of research that I might pursue. Any concluding comments?

Meeds: Well, I still wish it had all been held together. But in view of the fact that it couldn't, I'm glad that the Northern Marianas went the way they did. I hope that we still have lines of communication and relationships with the Federated States so that we could assume and achieve a closer relationship with them at some point in the future. I don't know what it would be. I don't pretend to describe it at this point, but it would have to be something that was acceptable to them and to us. I think we have very substantial reasons, both political and military, to be involved in the area. And that there is a reservoir of good will out there that unfortunately we just let slide.

Willens: Thank you, sir. We appreciate your help.

Meeds: Okay. I am glad to provide my recollections for your project.