

INTERVIEW OF WILLIAM B. NABORS

by Howard P. Willens and Deanne C. Siemer

March 30, 1995

- Willens: William Nabors is the Chief Executive Officer of the Office of the Mayor in the Municipality of Tinian. He is a lawyer of distinction and many years of service in the Trust Territory, with the Marianas District Legislature, and a variety of other capacities. He has agreed to be interviewed by us in connection with our historical project. Bill, thank you very much. Would you begin by giving us some background information about where you grew up and your education?
- Nabors: Thanks. I grew up in a little town called Talledega, Alabama, and did my undergraduate work at Talledega College and subsequently at Harvard University and Freton, Omaha. I graduated and took the bar examination in Nebraska in 1959.
- Willens: Your law school was at University of Nebraska?
- Nabors: No, Freton.
- Willens: Freton.
- Nabors: Yes. And I became a member of that bar and have been a member inactive member for a number of years. I went to work for the Department of the Interior early on and, in 1963 an opportunity presented itself that I could come to Saipan as an Assistant Attorney General and prosecutor. And I came out November 9, 1963 to Saipan. That was just as the Navy had turned over the Trust Territory to the Department of the Interior. The Trust Territory government was headquartered in Guam at that time.
- Willens: It was still headquartered in Guam when you came over in 1963?
- Nabors: Yes. And when we came to Saipan, we inherited all the naval facilities, the naval commissaries. There were no supermarkets, no gas stations except those operated by the government.
- Willens: How did you learn about the opportunity with the AG's office in Saipan?
- Nabors: A gentleman by the name of Kaleb Udui with whom we worked in Washington, D.C. when we were going to law school came to Saipan after he graduated in 1963, and then wrote a letter asking if I would be interested in coming to Saipan for a job with the Attorney General's office.
- Willens: Was he with the Attorney General's office at that time?
- Nabors: Yes, he was. He graduated and came directly back to Saipan to work for the Attorney General's office.
- Willens: Is he was one of those very first Micronesia lawyers. Is that correct?
- Nabors: That's correct.
- Willens: What is your general recollection of Mr. Udui it's UDUI?
- Nabors: Yes. Udui.
- Willens: What is your recollection of his background and his talents.
- Nabors: Kaleb Udui (that's KALEB) I believe was a good lawyer but with the Micronesian mentality.

By that I mean he was kind of subservient to stateside people and his superiors. He grew up in Palau, and was raised by his aunt. He was adopted into that family. Kaleb married a stateside lady and, as a result, became more aggressive than the average Micronesian. Kaleb and I had a good working relationship. I guess we need to go back and talk about the Council of Micronesia. That was a predecessor to the Congress of Micronesia. Kaleb was selected to be the legal counsel to the Congress of Micronesia.

Willens: To the Congress or the Council?

Nabors: Congress of Micronesia. We lawyers in the Attorney General's office provided legal services for the Council of Micronesia which was a forerunner to the Congress of Micronesia. The Council of Micronesia was represented by individuals selected by the High Commissioner from each of the six districts. Early in 1964, before the formation of the Congress of Micronesia, the people of Saipan learned that the Congress of Micronesia was going to become reality. Dr. Forelli—William Forelli who spent many years working in Palau, and I believe now he still a consultant to the Palau government. He lives in Honolulu. At that time Dr. Forelli was in the Department of Education.

Willens: At the Trust Territory.

Nabors: Right, for the Department of the Trust Territory. He was not the director, but he called me one evening in my house asking if I could come down to Chalan Kanoa in Saipan, the main village because there was a meeting taking place at which there were problems of civil unrest. I went down there and attended that meeting and the next day I reported to my boss who was Robert Shoecraft, the Attorney General. They had called the meeting, a joint session of the leaders of the district legislature and the municipal council. And they wanted an explanation about this Congress of Micronesia that was to be formed. They specifically stated that they did not want a Micronesian lawyer they wanted me. So Bob Shoecraft, my boss the Attorney General, agreed with John De Young. John De Young was a political affairs person early on the Trust Territory Administration. They agreed to my going down there. So we went down there and I met with the local leaders. I tried to explain to them as best I could about this Congress of Micronesia that's to be formed and reported back to headquarters at the end of that meeting. My report among other things indicated that the people of Saipan knew little or nothing of this formation of this Congress of Micronesia. They had not disseminated any information to the local leaders about this thing that was about to happen.

Willens: It's my understanding of the idea for the Congress of Micronesia came from the Council of Micronesia in part.

Nabors: That's correct.

Willens: Is it your understanding then that the Marianas participants in the Council of Micronesia did not fully inform the political leadership in Saipan what was going on?

Nabors: Precisely.

Willens: There also was a draft of secretarial order creating the Congress of Micronesia that was widely circulated in Washington for comment and indeed made available to the U.N. visiting mission in 1964 for comment. Had you seen a copy of the draft secretarial order before you went down to Saipan?

Nabors: No, I had not

Willens: When do you recall first seeing the secretarial order that in fact created the Congress?

Nabors: Very late 1964.

- Willens: Was it before a final version?
- Nabors: No. It was complete when I saw a copy.
- Willens: But do you think anyone in the Trust Territory Administration or in your Attorney General's office or elsewhere played any kind of substantive role in developing that order?
- Nabors: Yes. An as a part of my report in a joint meeting, I pointed fingers at particularly John De Young, the political affairs person, for not disseminating information concerning that event earlier. And I recommended that the military on Guam should be alerted to a possible civil unrest that was going to take place as a result of this secretarial order being rammed down the throats of the people of Saipan who prior to that knew nothing of its existence.
- Willens: Why were the political leaders on Saipan so upset with this?
- Nabors: I think that they thought that the Congress of Micronesia would out balance the political power mostly from Caroline Islands. And that they would no longer be the rulers of their own land as it were.
- Willens: There was a record of Marianas resolutions of one kind or another as to a future political status with the United States. Do you recall knowing of those expressions of sentiment after you reached Saipan in your new position?
- Nabors: Yes. And as a matter of fact they thought that the Congress of Micronesia—formation of the Congress of Micronesia including the Northern Marianas Islands—would impede their desires to become a part of the United States more readily than through the Congress of Micronesia.
- Willens: Did you feel the Trust Territory Administration was fully aware of these Marianas separatist tendencies?
- Nabors: Of course, they were fully aware and as a matter of fact, there was sentiment within the headquarters in Trust Territory government that these desires and aspiration should be suppressed and or ignored.
- Willens: And why was that?
- Nabors: Because of the United Nations belief that they should remain one entity.
- Willens: How long did you serve with the Attorney General's office?
- Nabors: One year, nine months and sixteen days.
- Willens: That's an approximate figure.
- Nabors: Exact. My boss called me soon after this meeting took place—the joint session of the local leaders in Saipan and offered me TDY status to go back to Washington, D.C. on salary and on daily per diem to finish my contract doing whatever I wanted to do in Washington, D.C.
- Willens: Was there a close relationship between your going to the meeting and reporting back and this generous invitation to go to Washington?
- Nabors: A direct cause. The High Commissioner was furious that I would have pointed a finger at a member of his staff for being derelict in his duties and responsibilities and not advising the people of Saipan of what was taking place. He directed Bob Shoecraft to fire me. Bob Shoecraft, my boss, the Attorney General asked if he could ask me to leave on my own free will and remain on payroll and get per diem for the remainder of my contract. He

consented and Bob made me that offer. And I told Bob Shoecraft that the people of the United States, the U.S. Congress did not appropriate any money for the Trust Territory government to be used in that fashion. And his offering me, to voluntarily leave the Trust Territory, was unacceptable. And I refused to leave. Consequently, I received a notice of a reduction in force that there was not enough legal work to justify keeping all the lawyers and staff. I appealed that reduction in force to the Department of the Interior alleging among other things discrimination. And a basis of my claim of discrimination was that Micronesians were given preference over Americans, not racial. So they sent a hearing officer off to Saipan and he conducted his review and made his report. The Secretary of the Interior ruled that he did not believe that there was justification for the reduction in force. However, he would honor the High Commissioner's decision to do so. And they could not appoint anyone to my position for a period of two years. So I decided that I would stay here for at least two years and make sure that nobody was hired to fill my position. To be able to go to work for the local legislature, I applied for an entry permit that all Americans who did not work for the government at that time needed, and the High Commissioner refused to give me an entry permit.

Willens: You were already on the island of Saipan working for the Trust Territory Attorney General's office.

Nabors: Yes.

Willens: And you did not need an entry permit for that purpose

Nabors: Right.

Willens: But even though you were going to the District Legislature, you would need an entry permit?

Nabors: I did not remain on Trust Territory payroll.

Willens: I see.

Nabors: I was terminated. Then I opened the law office in Chalan Kanoa.

Willens: Approximately what time was this, Bill?

Nabors: This was about December 1963.

Willens: All right.

Nabors: At that time I was not working for the District Legislature.

Willens: I see.

Nabors: The District Legislature that time met twice a year, February and August. The following February of 1964 I got a job offer to come to the Legislature to assist them in writing their bills and resolutions. But, I didn't have an entry permit. And I was given notice that I should vacate government housing and depart the Trust Territory or they would physically remove me. So luckily Dick Taitano, Richard Taitano, who had been the Director at the Office of Territories, was then the Deputy High Commissioner. And the High Commissioner went to Washington, D.C. in February for budget hearings. While he was gone, Richard Taitano gave me a six month entry permit, renewable every six month whereas other Americans like Hamilton or retired Navy people who had married locally have five year entry permits. So every six months I trooped up the headquarters and filed for an entry permit and was given six months. So the District Legislature hired me in August, 1964 as a Legislative Counsel.

- Willens: Did you maintain a private practice at the same time?
- Nabors: At the same time, yes.
- Willens: Were there any other lawyers engaged in private practice at that time?
- Nabors: No.
- Willens: Was there much of a demand for your services as a private lawyer?
- Nabors: I worked 15 hours a day. There was a lot of work at the District Legislature. They hired me for a \$150.00 a month in August, 1964. But the demand for legal services was phenomenal. I was the only private practice in attorney in the entire Trust Territory.
- Willens: Really.
- Siemer: Was there a Public Defender Office at that time?
- Nabors: There was a Public Defender Office. And much of my litigation was against him on the civil side. But he also handled the criminal matters. The law book salesman out of Honolulu, he tells some of the lawyers up in Saipan now, "Why I used to come over here and knock on doors. I only have to go Bill Nabors' office. There wasn't anyone else." But now of course they have a lot.
- Willens: How long did you stay in private practice?
- Nabors: I remained in private practice until 1980.
- Willens: So did you practice throughout the career that you had working for the District Legislature?
- Nabors: Yes, because it only met twice a year. And after I began working for the District Legislature, the first job that I had was to write a resolution to the United Nations urging that the people be paid for the war damages that they suffered during World War II. And I wondered, what is this? World War II ended how many years ago? That's how I got involved in the war claims aspect of that era.
- Willens: Let me just stay for a moment Bill with the Trust Territory Administration at that time. It was about this time that some of the security requirements with respect to the island of Saipan had been eliminated. I think in 1962 or 1963.
- Nabors: Guam, not Saipan.
- Willens: You do not remember the lifting of some these security requirements on Saipan.
- Nabors: No, no.
- Willens: Was there any economic development that was visible at that time that you initially came to Saipan in 1963?
- Nabors: The only economic development that I saw was the advent of Joeten Enterprises. The Navy, Naval Technical Training Unit, had an auto parts depot for jeeps principally. Toilet tissue, paper towels, and the like they got Joeten, and they gave him that inventory to start serving the local community.
- Willens: When the Navy vacated the premises, they gave the inventory to Joeten.
- Nabors: Right. Now at that time Howard, the local people could not buy any alcoholic beverages except at the Tapa Topic Club at headquarters on Capitol Hill. And soon after I came in 1963 I was chosen as President of the Social Club that we had. It was the only place for employees to go on weekends and (or weekdays) and have dinner.

- Willens: Is that the building that is now occupied by the Marianas Public Land Corporation, Land Division.
- Nabors: Yes, MPLC, the Land Division. Now when I took over presidency of that club in about February of 1964 they were indebted to Joeten Enterprises in a total about \$27,000. So what I did, I extinguished that debt within four months. And the way I did that is each weekend Saturday and Sunday I would load my jeep, together with some wives in the U.S. compound, and we would go down to Micro Beach and we would sell hot dogs, hamburgers, soft drinks, ice cream and the like. And in four months I paid Joeten off completely. So I guess I was a threat in many respects to the all establishments who would sit there and do nothing. All military people who were just getting their salary and considered that any progress in a local community was justified. When I built my house in Garapan in 1966, I got electrical power. But my neighbors who had requested it for many years, native people, Carolinians and Chamorros, had no power. And they were delighted that I moved into the area because that was an opportunity for them to borrow power from my power pole to get electricity.
- Willens: To what do you attribute this view of Trust Territory Administration at that time regarding development?
- Nabors: They were colonialists who did not consider the local people their equals and did not want them to progress. And I felt that it came from Washington, that this situation out there should persist.
- Willens: What is interesting about that Bill, during that time in fact President Kennedy had decided in April of 1962 that the old theories of administration should be abandoned and there should be a massive effort to increase funding to build new educational facilities. But there some doubt in the records as to whether the Trust Territory Administration ever understood that there was a change in federal policy with respect to the Trust Territory. Do you have any reaction to that?
- Nabors: Yes, of course. When Mr. Solomon came out at the request of President Kennedy, his reports were immediately classified. And we were not permitted to even read them. The Trust Territory Administration, Mr. Whiting, found Washington was telling them to ignore President Kennedy's desire for progressive development of the people.
- Willens: But during the years that you were referring to now that 1963, 1964, 1965 there were increases in funding and there was a so-called crash program to build schools. Do you have any sense at that time this was an effective change of policy?
- Nabors: I thought it was an effective recognition of the needs of the area. But when the school monies came down, Bob Shoecraft was off-island. At that time we only had two flights a week. And we, the Trust Territory government officials, had priority for the seats. If I need to go to Yap or Palau, I could bump anyone, even a Palauan who wanted to return home. We had that priority. Bob was called to Palau and had to go down there and I was acting Attorney General. And I went to this meeting, an economic development board meeting. And we had built schools and Dr. Forelli had convinced the government to allow the local people to build the furniture. They had given a loan of \$12,000 to this entrepreneur in Palau. And he proceeded to blow the money. And there was no school furniture for school opening. And I voiced the opinion that why were we so stupid as to send \$12,000 to Palau for school furniture instead of getting out of our chairs and going down there helping him get the machinery he needs, the lumber he needs, the orders and set up the assembly line and help him produce that furniture. And I chastised the economic development man in charge, Taggerd was his name, who is an old retired Navy guy, for doing that. And I never

was asked to attend another meeting from that point on. But speaking of the schools there was a gentleman here, not an engineer, Mr. Tom Hardy. Tom Hardy wrote up a big thick report to President Johnson about the school construction. The people in Public Works were either incompetent or didn't have the training to build secure structures. And it was his position that with the type of construction being done with that money that President Kennedy was able to get, during the typhoons people would take refuge in the schools and they would all be killed. The construction was substandard.

Willens: Did you think he was qualified to express those views.

Nabors: Yes.

Willens: Did you personally observe any of the development yourself?

Nabors: Yes.

Willens: I saw reports that some of the buildings were built in such a way that they often were without any facilities?

Nabors: Absolutely and we still have remnants right here on Tinian of those buildings.

Willens: Is that right?

Nabors: Yes.

Willens: Why don't you then continue with your points. There was a director of education named Dr. Gibson.

Nabors: Yes.

Willens: He was here in the early 1960's and he eventually left his position as I understand it because of a disagreement with some of the changes in policy. One of the issues was whether you should bring in stateside trained teachers to educate the Micronesians or should you have the Micronesians themselves educating their own people. It seems that there had been some differences as to whether the Trust Territory Administration should assume the financial responsibility of paying salaries that will attract stateside people here. Do you have recollection of where the teachers came from and whether there was any dispute about that?

Nabors: I know that most of the dependent wives, my wife at that time was hired as a teacher. I am not privy to the philosophical differences that arose with Dr. Gibson. Dr. Forelli was his deputy. There may have been some differences. I am not aware of them.

Willens: But it is your general observation of the Trust Territory Administration during the 1960's that they continued to be resistant to any of the forces of change that you feel would benefit the people of the Northern Marianas.

Nabors: Actually there were a large number of indigenous teachers of which one was Ben Santos before he went to the Legislature full-time. Most of the teachers were indigenous people. I think that this was an extension of that philosophy of not exposing them to the outside world so rapidly. And if you'll notice that Kaleb Udui was the only Micronesian that ever went to law school from the Trust Territory days. There were teachers, doctors, dentists, but very rarely that they selected anyone to go to law school because the lawyer has infinite capacity to deal with any matter, but a doctor can only talk about medicine. A teacher can only talk about education, but a lawyer would have the ability to penetrate many different areas. And I thought it was a concerted effort to keep the people substandard.

- Willens: As I recalled the High Commissioner who was in office at that time, when you first began working, was High Commissioner Goding.
- Nabors: Right.
- Willens: And I think he was succeeded by . . .
- Nabors: Ed Johnston.
- Willens: Mr. Johnston came later.
- Nabors: Yes, he did.
- Willens: What was your assessment of High Commissioner Goding?
- Nabors: I thought that Goding was surrounded by incompetence. His staff was totally incompetent. And I thought that he was being manipulated by his staff. By that I mean they were keeping information from him. Preparing speeches for him of which he had no personal knowledge. He was not a hands-on administrator. He depended on his staff to his detriment.
- Willens: But you mentioned Mr. Taitano, who was director of the Office of Territories back in the Department of Interior then became a Deputy High Commissioner in the Trust Territory. Did he have any impact on Trust Territory policy?
- Nabors: In a very, very limited degree. Dick and I in later years formed an association which I will tell you about later. But Dick was not trusted by the High Commissioner's staff. And after he gave me my entry permit while the High Commissioner was off-island, they were very distrustful. Dick Taitano told me about an incident about which he was suspicious. He took an ashtray at around 4:00 o'clock and put it in his trash can leaving some of the ashes on top of papers. And then he came back later and they were at the bottom of the trash can indicating that somebody on the High Commissioner's staff had been going through his rubbish trying to find out what he was doing. Dick was a financial whiz and the one thing that he was able to get implemented was that if anyone certified the expenditure of funds without a determination that those funds were available, it would be grounds for termination. No one was ever terminated though. The financial man Danny Akamoto and I forget his boss, but he came to a meeting once—one of the meetings that I was allowed to attend—and the question came out as to what was the balance that the Trust Territory had. He went into his pocket and held out an envelope and there was written on the back of the envelope the running balance of the Trust Territory bank account if you will. So that gives you an indication of the quality of the people that we had here at that time running the Trust Territory government.
- Willens: What was your assessment of High Commissioner Johnston?
- Nabors: Ed Johnston in my opinion was very capable, more of a hands-on administrator than Goding. But I thought he was more in the loop of deception from Washington. He was more of a Washington man who would willingly do the bidding of higher ups no matter what the bidding was. Little or no principles.
- Willens: Mr. Taitano was succeeded by Ruth Van Cleve who served in many administrations at the Department of Interior. Did you have any contact with her over the years?
- Nabors: Yes. Ruth was my boss. Well, she wasn't. I shared an office with her assistant. Ruth and her husband Harry, we had many social gatherings. We were Unitarians at that time and Ruth was a very excellent lawyer—a real good administrator, one of the finest administrators in the Department of Interior in my opinion. A very, very capable person.

- Willens: Did you have any recollection going back to the 1960's of what her views were toward political status issue.
- Nabors: Oh, yes, and when I was working with the Trust Territory government, she made a trip to Saipan and we had her over for breakfast during that visit. And I tried to fill her in as best I could on what to expect and what was going on, the good questions to ask the High Commissioner and his staff. She was very aware of the shortcomings of the Administration, and tried within the bureaucracy to correct many of those shortcomings.
- Willens: Do you think you can recall whether she had some successes of that in respect.
- Nabors: To a very limited degree. There was a yes, yes, yes, in front of you and the minute you leave—she was too far away to keep her fingers of what was going on.
- Willens: There seems to have been this legal uncertainty in Washington as to whether the Trust Territory should be treated as a sovereign country. That is to say, not subject to direction from Washington. Did you have a sense over the years that the line of command between Washington and Trust Territory was attenuated?
- Nabors: Going back to Mr. Goding, High Commissioner Goding, we thought that he was so incompetent that we asked for his removal. When I say we, I mean the Legislature. And I prepared all of the resolutions that went forward in that era. Mr. Goding defied Secretary Udall. At the time the Trust Territory telex apparatus was downtown near the Mayor's office in Chalan Kanoa. Secretary Udall sent him a telex demanding that he resign and leave the Trust Territory or that he would be removed. And, of course, when that came in on the teletype we got copies and disseminated that to all of us in Chalan Kanoa before he got the original because we were just positively elated. Washington had finally stood up and took cognizance of what these Americans were doing to damage and tarnish the image of America. And my view was I didn't want my kids to have to come back and fight for Saipan, that we had already fought for in one war. But from the way those people were going, that was going to happen. I was convinced.
- Willens: Goding as I understand ended up negotiating for many, many months as to conditions of his termination. What is your understanding of what happened after this telex which he received?
- Nabors: After that telex came in, we were living it up till he was gone.
- Willens: Going back to Marianas District Legislature, as I understand you stayed and worked for the District Legislature.
- Nabors: In August of 1964.
- Willens: And did you stay in that position until 1978.
- Nabors: Yes.
- Willens: And then what happened in 1978.
- Nabors: In 1978, when the new Commonwealth Legislature was elected, the Republicans won and I was made minority counsel in the Legislature. That was the last time that I actively worked for them.
- Willens: But you got to know them very well—the leadership in the Marianas District Legislature in the 1960's and the early 1970's.
- Nabors: I knew their every pulse. And I knew their every feeling. They would come in and we would start meeting at 9 o'clock. And they came in: "Bill I need a resolution such and

such,” or “I need a bill for such and such.” Howard, I stayed up to midnight writing those measures. I got my secretary up at 6 o’clock in the morning. And by the time we convened at 9 o’clock, everything was ready adoption. I had to do a little work polishing later, but I was able to keep that Legislature current.

Willens: Were you the only person?

Nabors: I was the only legal counsel. I had a couple of secretaries and early on we used to use the mimeograph. You are too young to remember the Verifax. When you type up these things and then you put them in a solution and you wait and it finally develops. We had mimeographs those years, but no faxes, or fancy stuff.

Willens: Now, can you give us the benefit of your recollection of the leadership individually in terms of Ben Santos, Dan Muna, Herman T. Guerrero and Felipe Salas and others who were active in the legislatures those years.

Nabors: Yes, and I think that, Howard, the best way to describe it is that they felt what I felt. I was able to articulate their feelings intelligibly. And prepare resolutions and decide who should get copies, and do the preparation points. We would schedule a trip to Washington, D.C. and I would schedule a press conference when we got from Saipan to Guam. Joe Murphy was one of our allies if you will and he would write things and the Navy, of course, would fax that PDN article the next day ahead of us to Washington, D.C. so they knew we were coming, they knew why we were coming, and its the squeaky wheel that gets the grease. For years, we went and we got no audience or anything. So then we got smart. Rogers C.B. Morton from Maryland, I don’t know if you remember him. We went to see him and we said: “Congressman, we are having difficulty seeing the President.” He said, “Well, we think the Interior Department is the agency in charge of the area. They should be the ones to arrange that meeting. So you go tell them that you want to see the President and if they cannot arrange the meeting, or will not arrange it, I will.” Oh boy, we went and told Interior what the Congressman said. Then they said: “Oh, okay, you wait in a hotel. We will be calling you between this hour and this hour.” And we got an audience with the President. Everyone except Bill Nabors.

Willens: Why was it?

Nabors: Well, I am a trouble maker, I’m an outsider. So Ben Santos, Olympio Borja, Dr. Palacios said: “If Bill Nabors, can’t go we won’t go.” And that happened.

Willens: What was the issue that took you to seek a meeting with the President?

Nabors: Actually, I don’t remember.

Willens: What was it war claims?

Nabors: I am sure that the war claims was a part of it but I’m not sure if that was the main event. It may have had to do with the political status. President Johnson was very, very sympathetic.

Willens: You recall having a meeting with President Johnson?

Nabors: Yes.

Willens: And those Marianas representatives?

Nabors: Yes.

Willens: With President Johnson?

Nabors: Yes.

- Willens: I have seen no record of that.
- Siemer: What year was it?
- Nabors: It must have been 1967.
- Siemer: What season of the year was it?
- Nabors: We mostly went in spring time. Ruth Van Cleve was in the Interior Department at that time and it is she to whom we communicated the statement from Congressman Rogers C.B. Morton. That if you can, do it; if not then he will. So Interior had the opportunity and she did.
- Willens: During that period of time the Marianas leadership did and repeatedly enact resolutions and express their views to every possible audience about their support for separate relationship with the United States.
- Nabors: Yes.
- Willens: In 1966, the Congress of Micronesia passed the resolution asking the United States to appoint a commission to address status issues. But, United States never did that.
- Nabors: No.
- Willens: There was ultimately in 1967 a proposal that went up to Congress but that died. The Marianas were regularly told by U.N. visiting missions that they should give up their idea of a self-governing separate entity.
- Nabors: Yes.
- Willens: Do you recall any of the meetings with the various visiting missions that came from the United Nations in 1964, 1967, 1970 or 1973?
- Nabors: Each time when they came, we presented resolutions, and they, of course, graciously accepted. But their report always noted the fact that the U.N. considered the Trust Territory a single unit and opposed any fragmentation, etc.
- Willens: And that happened to have been the view of the State Department and the Interior Department throughout the 1960's?
- Nabors: Yes.
- Willens: Did you think it was possible that you were going to bring about some change in the Interior Department position on that issue?
- Nabors: Yes. Those leaders Ben Santos, Dan Muna, those guys were of one heart and I convinced them that their perseverance was going to pay off. This is what the people want. You're going to have to fight for it and keep fighting for it. Don't be discouraged. I wrote one resolution that comes to mind that we wanted the State Department to administer our area rather than Interior. Interior had administrative responsibility for the Indians since 1848, as a matter of fact that was a big reason why they were formed, and we felt that we didn't want to end up like the Indians a hundred years from now. We urged that they were incapable, or insensitive to the progressive development of the Trust Territory, particularly Saipan. We wanted the State Department to administer the islands not Interior.
- Willens: What acknowledgment did you get on that?
- Nabors: I don't recall that we ever got an acknowledged receipt of that resolution. And we, of course, sent copies to the United Nations, but no substantive response was made to my knowledge.

Willens: The Marianas District Legislature was dominated throughout that period of time by the Popular Party and the Popular Party espoused reintegration with Guam.

Nabors: Yes.

Willens: When is your sense of the motive for that position?

Nabors: They thought it would be easier than taking a more direct route to gain citizenship. I wrote resolutions along the line that the treaty technically made a mistake when it said Guam, comma Mariana Islands. They should have said Guam and the Mariana Islands which included the people here, same language, same religion, cousins in both areas. I felt that the desire to reintegrate was to reunify the families. The U.S. would be more sympathetic to their plight. Whereas the Territorial Party wanted the direct connections with the United States in their own right. And this was headed by mostly businessmen who wanted the franchises on various products directly to the Northern Mariana Islands rather than paying Ken Jones or others who had the franchises for Guam.

Willens: Bill, we were asking and you were elaborating about the differences between the two political parties in the 1960's on the issue of political status.

Nabors: I thought that the Territorial Party's desire for direct annexation was an attempt to perpetuate the status quo because of, at that time, the almost impossibility of that ever happening. And they opposed the Popular Party's annexation with Guam because they, the business structure in Saipan, would be relocated to a subservient position to the businesses in Guam. So I felt that their insistence on direct annexation was to prolong any change of the status quo to give them the opportunity to build up their financial resources.

Willens: Did you think that their fears of being overtaken by more powerful business competitors were well-founded.

Nabors: Yes, absolutely.

Willens: I understand that the Carolinian community for the most part supported the Territorial Party.

Nabors: That's correct.

Willens: Who worked with the Carolinians there?

Nabors: The Territorial Party accommodated the business community. They operated and controlled the shipping, and that was the main employment of the Carolinian community, stevedoring and copra production on the Northern Islands. Olympio Borja and Joeten [Jose Tenorio] gave open accounts in their stores to the Carolinian population. So every time they harvested their coconuts, they just would have to pay practically everything to the merchants for having gotten food previously. The [Carolinian] leaders were manipulated by Joeten. The land office was under Mr. Sablan, Elias Sablan. They were protected by the business community, and they gave large chunks of land to those businesses. There were some new relationships like Manny Villagomez. He is part Carolinian. So there were some relationships, but the way I viewed this is that for years they have taken care of the Carolinian community by employment and credit. And the Carolinians owed close affinity to those Territorial Party leaders.

Siemer: What contact did you have with those businessmen through your law practice?

Nabors: Early on I was house counsel for Joeten. I was legal counsel for Saipan Shipping Company that was controlled by Joeten and the Micronesian Construction Company that was controlled by Joeten. They retained me until the Trust Territory government started a

bus service on Saipan. They gave a contract to Saipan Shipping Company who bought buses to haul the school children from Chalan Kanoa to the various schools. The problem arose when they decided that they would back haul. They would require the workers who would go from Chalan Kanoa to Lower Base to ride the buses that away and then pick up the kids to bring them school the other way. At that time the government “lowboy” came to the round house every morning to take the workers to Lower Base of the Trust Territory government employment. So they stopped that free service because Joeten wanted them to ride the bus his bus. He already had a contract for the school kids, so his costs were covered. But he wanted that extra revenue. So what we did, we formed the Saipan Improvement Association. And we rented the trucks from the Municipality of Saipan to haul the workers to Lower Base for free. And they took us to court. And we won. Not the biggest court case Saipan had ever seen, but we had articles and by-laws of this Improvement Association and they would rent the trucks at the Municipality at a minimum cost and they would haul the people to work. You have to understand the background. The people of Saipan literally hated Joeten, and wanted to see him down. The Chamorros are like crabs in a barrel. If one tries to get to the top, they’ll pull him down. But the hatred with Joeten goes much deeper than that. In 1948, the U.S. military formed the Saipan Importers-Exporters Corporation. The work was to cut up war material. They got \$0.50 a day to go out and work. Blood money they called it. They bought stock in Saipan Importers-Exporters. But Joeten and those people running Saipan Importers-Exporters started a little store in the village. And how would they stock their stores? They got credit that they never paid from Saipan Importers-Exporters. One of the first job that I had as a lawyer was to liquidate the Saipan Importers-Exporters receivership.

Siemer: Was that a stock company?

Nabors: Yes. And there were people who got \$20, \$30, and they got up and said “You take that check and use it for toilet paper, I don’t want it.” And they never forgave Joeten for that. Because they thought that he was the main creditor who never paid and resulted in their losing their investment in Saipan Importers-Exporters by getting credit for his own store and never paying back.

Willens: Where did they come for help?

Nabors: I stirred up a lot of that. I was the only vehicle available to bring it to litigation.

Siemer: What kind of law practice did you have with respect to the claims?

Nabors: Land, divorces, assisting people in filling out applications for EDLF loans, for economic development. One of my first clients, he wanted to buy a tractor, and another guy wanted to order woodworking machinery from Chicago to do handicrafts.

Siemer: How much work was there in land claims back in the 1960’s?

Nabors: I could have stayed busy 10 days a week—and I was all alone. They had a few lawyers who came up from Guam occasionally. Paul Team, that name may have surface. He was a Filipino lawyer who practiced in Guam. And he would come up periodically, but for the most part nothing, nobody.

Siemer: What efforts did the District Legislators make in the reunification with Guam campaign? Was there active support on Guam? What kinds of activities were there?

Nabors: On Guam? We would be invited down to have dinner and talk and lunch and the like and discuss it. There was a strong group in the Legislature at that time for reintegration. And they were supporters. But when they got the opportunity to vote, they turned it down.

- Willens: Why do you think they turned it down in 1969?
- Nabors: I thought, that they thought, that the Saipan, Tinian and Rota would be a drain on their resources. But after they turned it down, Saipan turned around and supported it.
- Willens: Did the expression of Guamanian disinterest bring about any change in the Popular Party leadership's views as to how best to achieve their objectives with the United States?
- Nabors: Yes.
- Willens: What changes do you recall?
- Nabors: Ben Santos, he fought and was able to get it passed even after Guam had rejected it. But as a result of that, they came to realize that it was not going to happen. That if Guam rejected it, it would never happen. Early on, the leadership in Guam was supportive and if there had been a plebiscite earlier, it would have passed. But the leadership and things were changing at that point. The leaders in the Northern Mariana Islands came to realize that they better abandon their desire to reintegrate with Guam. And more or less, took up the calls of the Territorial Party's direct annexation. Not openly, not actively, but they came to realize that they would be defeated in that [reintegration] effort.
- Willens: In the late 1960's, the Congress of Micronesia issued a report of its future status commission. Dr. Palacios was a member of the future status commission that the Congress established. They produced a report in 1968 and then they filed report in 1969 that recommended a future political status known as free association or, in the alternative, independence for Micronesia. What is your recollection of the reaction here in the Marianas to that commission report?
- Nabors: That report represented the downfall of Dr. Palacios. As I think back, Ben Santos who was on the Council of Micronesia in the early 1960's, steered clear. He was wise enough to realize that would be political suicide.
- Willens: What would be?
- Nabors: Formation of the Congress of Micronesia. Or having anything to do with a unity among the islands. But Dr. Palacios, when the commission report came out that was a kiss of death for him politically.
- Willens: Was he a member of the Territorial Party at that time?
- Nabors: At that time. He was a member of the Popular Party before that. And at that point he had to switch because he had no more support from the Popular Party.
- Willens: Let me go back to point you made. There were many future political leaders in the Northern Marianas who served at some point in the Congress of Micronesia.
- Nabors: Yes.
- Willens: Like former Lieutenant Governor Benjamin Manglona.
- Nabors: Yes.
- Willens: Joe Cruz, Herman Q. Guerrero.
- Nabors: Yes.
- Willens: Ed Pangelinan, and so forth. Are you suggesting that service in the Congress of Micronesia brought about the decline in Dr. Palacios political fortune or you are referring specifically to the report of the future status commission.

- Nabors: Specifically to the report. The Marianas leaders sought to live with the Congress of Micronesia early on. And they actively campaigned for a seat. Then it became abundantly clear that they were a minority and that they better get out. And that was just prior to burning of the Congress of Micronesia. Someone set up a fire in order to get rid of it. The Marianas were asking for a lunch program, buses, variety in the curriculum as the other islands were asking for classrooms, the fundamental of education. And the Marianas, because of the Navy presence early on, had progressed so they wanted to build on that. They felt that they were being held back. Their progress was being inhibited.
- Willens: At about the time the future status commission issued its report, Secretary Hickel in May 1969 came out to Saipan. He gave a speech announcing publicly for the first time that the United States went to open up discussions as to the future relationship with all of Micronesia. He also announced that action programs would begin and various specific federal programs would be available. Do you have any recollection of Secretary Hickel's visit and the announcement of this U.S. policy?
- Nabors: I have recollection of his visit, but not his announcement.
- Willens: As a result of the announcement, there was a delegation that the Congress of Micronesia sent back to Washington in the fall of 1969 to open up the Micronesian status negotiations. I think Dr. Palacios and Ben Manglona were part of that team. And then there was subsequently the commonwealth proposal that the United States offered. What is your recollection of those early efforts of the United States to work out some common relationship with all the Micronesia?
- Nabors: I recall that the leaders thought that they should try and make it work or see if it would work. And therefore, cautiously supported it. But I think it became very clear early on that it would be unfair. At one session of the Congress of Micronesia they had the appropriation of above 90% for the other islands and only 10% for Saipan. Saipan was contributing substantially to the budget, to the treasury. So my recollection is that they thought they had no choice but to give it a trial. But their heart was not in it.
- Siemer: Secretary Hickel has the reputation of being a persuasive politician. How was he received out here?
- Nabors: He was courteously received and cautiously listened to. But not taken very seriously. The people of Chief Milo down in Truk told a story about these little white birds that fly and they come and they go away. Somebody says well Chief you should grab one of those birds and wring his neck instead of having it outside and come out and give you a lot of platitudes and sweet talk and nothing ever happens. So they listened politely but were not taking it very seriously.
- Willens: When the United States presented this commonwealth proposal, the Micronesian delegation, and subsequently the Congress of Micronesia, rejected it out of hand and they began to articulate the so-called four principles that outlined a political status very different from the Marianas leadership. Why? As a result, in the election in 1970 all of the members of the Territorial Party who ran were defeated. And Oly Borja, who did not have to run for reelection, realized that maybe he should begin thinking about changing his political affiliation. Was the rejection of the commonwealth proposal a big issue in the election for the Congress of Micronesia in 1970?
- Nabors: Vaguely.
- Willens: What is your sense of the political implications of status. Is it true that Popular Party seemed to be on the ascendancy because of their position on status?

- Nabors: No, I don't think so. I don't. The Territorial Party had some young people who returned from being trained. The Popular Party was still dominated by the old, uneducated, fire and brimstone type advocacy. And I think, Howard, that era of their influence had begun to wane and the people were looking for new directions.
- Willens: Who were the new younger leaders that you're thinking about?
- Nabors: Eddie Pangelinan, Judge [Ramon] Villagomez, Jesse Borja, those guys, Joe Dela Cruz and those guys who were working for legal services program. And they had come in to bring a new thinking. Early on if you got up in a campaign and screamed and yelled, people would listen. But that had started to change. I guess some of the old people started dying out, and the younger people were looking for something different.
- Willens: What is your recollection today about the Micronesian Legal Services program and its contribution to the community?
- Nabors: Well at that time I thought they were taking my revenue from me. Because here I have a law office and am charging minimal fees, but they were doing it for free. I thought that many of the people to whom they were giving services who could afford better hired their own lawyer. Some of the big philosophical issues I thought were extra work. They have the resources, they have the time and they would talk to a person. I would say "Why don't you go to Legal Services?" "Oh, I went there, but they said that their work load is too great. They can't take me." So I got their rejects, if you will. I thought that the program and the predecessor of the Peace Corps—I thought it brought enlightenment to the area they brought a new dimension to the public defenders service if you will. And I really didn't mind losing revenue, because I had as much work as I could handle. Anyway, I did not have the time to give in depth research to any particular case. I had to just give a broad swift review and try to do the best that I could. I did not have individuals whom I could bounce ideas off and get other perspectives or angles. I had to shoot from the hip.
- Siemer: By this time, were other lawyers working on Saipan full time?
- Nabors: Some of the Peace Corps lawyers, Mike White for instance, had started to build a practice in Saipan at that time. He worked for Kaleb Udui in the Congress of Micronesia after he finished his Peace Corps service and after that they had started to set up practices yes.
- Willens: You did mention the Peace Corps. As you are probably well aware, the Peace Corps prompted considerable controversy back in Washington especially when the young volunteers would start expressing the aspirations and hopes of the people and direct those comments against the Trust Territory Administration. Did you have any recollection of the Peace Corps playing an active role in the Northern Marianas?
- Nabors: Absolutely. I even had one volunteer who assisted me in a couple of sessions of the Legislature. And they had substantial impact in developing policy. They stayed with a family. They learned the language, and they had a significant impact
- Willens: Did you have any personal awareness at the time that the Trust Territory Administration was troubled by some of these activities?
- Nabors: Oh I did, absolutely.
- Willens: Any specific recollection?
- Nabors: Other than the fact that the Trust Territory government officials, whenever Peace Corps people, men of the upper management of the Peace Corps come out here, they would make known their dissatisfaction. And when there were photographs of Peace Corps volunteers getting out of the airplane in zories, or coming from the other districts with

- a betel nut bag hanging, they would point out that this was detrimental to the image of Americans which they were trying to establish out here. They voiced whenever they could their opposition that the Peace Corps not being under their thumb is not acceptable.
- Willens: I've seen some indication that they—the people of the Northern Marianas—felt that they did not require the assistance of the Peace Corps around here in early 1970's.
- Nabors: No, I don't think so. I think just the opposite. True, the needs were not as great as other areas in Micronesia. But the needs were still apparent and everyone that I knew encouraged and appreciated their presence. They added a new dimension to their aspirations.
- Willens: You mentioned some of the issues that confronted the Congress of Micronesia including the question of revenue sharing. Were there other indications that the Marianas leadership was coming to the conclusion that they could never function as part of a United Micronesia?
- Nabors: Whenever the Congress of Micronesia assembled on Saipan, the Carolinian community, with whom they have a great deal of affinity, would receive them and their families. Some of the relatives were from the other islands of Micronesia and were settling in Saipan. The Territorial Party and Carolinian groups would get those Congress of Micronesia representatives and host them in elaborate functions. The Popular Party remained aloof, but they were aware of this. And I believe that they thought that they better hurry in their efforts before something would happen to make it more considerably more difficult.
- Willens: What kinds of things were the leadership concerned about that might make achieving their objectives more difficult?
- Nabors: Well, they wanted the Congress of Micronesia out. And this Tanapag area hosting them and making close contact would make that more difficult. I was in on some meetings where this concern was expressed—that they better accelerate their desire to get out of Micronesia. Get out of the political umbrella of Micronesia and go on their own. Otherwise, they would not be able to progress (as they would put it) as speedily as they wanted. But I think in the background they were afraid of the connections that were being formed with the local Carolinian community and the Congress of Micronesia.
- Willens: It was still the U.S. position in the early 1970's that the political status should include all of Micronesia. Did you and the political leadership in the Marianas think that if you pressed hard enough and long enough that eventually the United States would change its position?
- Nabors: Absolutely.
- Willens: What was the basis for that optimism?
- Nabors: We took the position that the people never voted to become part of Micronesia. That was a strong decision that the people did not have to live with. It's not a free expression of their desires. And we felt that if we persisted in bringing this notion to light, it would have to happen sooner or later. No one could force a group of people to remain under an umbrella that they did not want to be under. So I as an adviser, I took the very strong position that you must continue to fight for what you believe in. And unless they are going to put troops in Saipan to make you stay, then it would never happen. And many of the leaders felt that and believed that very strongly.
- Willens: Ed Pangelinan and Herman Guerrero served as the Marianas representatives on the Joint Committee on Future Political Status that was established by the Congress of Micronesia in 1971. And Ed Pangelinan and Herman Guerrero remained part of that Committee

even though their interests as Marianas representatives were quite different from the other members of the committee. Did you and members of the leadership meet with Ed and Herman to discuss what was going on in the Joint Committee from time to time?

Nabors: We felt that nothing could be gained by not participating, but I'm not aware of any periodic meetings during that time.

Willens: There came a time in the third round of Micronesian negotiations which took place in the fall of 1971 in Maui, I believe where Ed Pangelinan and Herman Guerrero had a private meeting with Ambassador Hummel. The meeting is memorable because it took place in a graveyard and Ambassador Hummel wrote a memo for the record about this.

Nabors: At the graveyard.

Willens: The memo recounts: "I was sitting on a tomb stone." There was a desire obviously to be in an out of the way place for this private meeting. And the question that Ed and Herman put to the United States representative was, "Will you agree to separate negotiations if we make a formal request?" And for many months they got very ambiguous responses. Do you have any recollection of this effort to secure some guarantee from the United States that a request for separate negotiations would be favorably regarded.

Nabors: As that approached, I was in on discussions and yes, the leadership wanted guarantees. It didn't want to bring it up and be rejected. But I do not recall any discussions with Ambassador Hummel concerning that issue.

Willens: Were guarantees obtained?

Nabors: Yes.

Willens: What do you know about that?

Nabors: Eddie Pangelinan reported that Ambassador Williams would be representing the United States government would be responsive to a request for separate negotiations. And at that point the leadership endorsed it to move forward.

Siemer: What was the Trust Territory government doing during all these discussions about negotiations and the status that was coming?

Nabors: I don't know. I would assume that they would be requested for input. I have no knowledge of what officially they were doing regarding it. I think that they took the position that this was something way above them. And if asked, they would respond. But I don't think that they were actively involved voluntarily.

Willens: The request for separate negotiations was made in April of 1972 and was accepted by the United States. A few months earlier in the Congress of Micronesia, Ed Pangelinan and Herman Guerrero had presented the minority report to a proposed report from the Joint Committee on Future Status. The minority report stated the Marianas position, and it was very eloquent and forceful. Subsequently, it was the basis for the Marianas position that was presented to Ambassador Williams. Did you play a role in drafting this material?

Nabors: No.

Siemer: Who did? Do you know?

Nabors: I don't know. Ed Pangelinan was heading up that effort, with Ben Santos or Ed and Herman, but I did not play any direct role.

Willens: So far as you know it was done by the leaders themselves.

Nabors: Yes, you're right.

- Willens: Was there any other outside adviser other than you to whom they were looking for counsel?
- Nabors: It seems there might have been another American lawyer. I don't know. We had a lot of meetings with this guy who used to be the U.S. representative to the United Nations.
- Willens: You think it was John Dorrance?
- Nabors: Yes
- Willens: John Dorrance was a Foreign Service Officer.
- Nabors: Right.
- Willens: He was assigned here as a liaison and talk to people regularly and then file reports back to Washington.
- Nabors: Right.
- Willens: Did you have sessions with his from time to time?
- Nabors: Did I?
- Willens: Yes. Did you meet with Dorrance?
- Nabors: Yes, we met from time to time.
- Willens: What was your assessment of his views regarding U.S. policy here in the Northern Marianas?
- Nabors: His effort was to form, to advocate if you will, the U.S. policy.
- Willens: Based on your contact with him, did you regard him as an accurate reporter?
- Nabors: I think so.
- Willens: He died during the last two years, so we have not had a chance to interview him, but he did file regular reports which we have seen and which provide a unique perspective of what was going on.
- Nabors: There was another fellow, a black man. I think he was a U.S. delegate to U.N.
- Willens: You're not thinking of Don McHenry, are you?
- Nabors: Yes, I am. That is he. He spent a good deal of time out here in that era, during that time frame.
- Siemer: What did you think of him?
- Nabors: I thought that his mission was to try and solidify the position of the U.S. He would suggest positions that should be taken to the local leaders. But I thought that he was a bureaucrat.
- Willens: I see. Did you play a role in drafting the legislation that created the Marianas Political Status Commission.
- Nabors: Yes.
- Willens: What considerations went into the number of members and the composition of the Commission?
- Nabors: We tried to have it broadly based and representative of the total community as far as possible to avoid any criticism that it was only Popular Party or only mayors or the like.

- Willens: Was it your sense at the time that the Popular Party had the dominant political position and would dominate the work of the Commission?
- Nabors: We thought that it would go forward along the philosophy of the Popular Party. But we wanted to make sure that there were enough other political entities involved that it would not appear that the Popular Party would claim all of the victory.
- Willens: That was an effort to give it to an element of bipartisan support.
- Nabors: Yes.
- Willens: How did you feel when Joeten was designated by the business community to serve on a commission?
- Nabors: Fine, we thought that was a plus.
- Willens: Did you?
- Nabors: Yes.
- Willens: He was aided through this years by someone name Joe Screen.
- Nabors: Yes.
- Willens: What is your assessment of Joe Screen's influence on Joeten?
- Nabors: Substantial. Joe Screen was a very intelligent person. Very articulate, and very influential when he had Joeten do his bidding.
- Willens: Many of the Micronesians with whom I have raised the name express some very strong anti-feelings with respect to Mr. Screen, I guess primarily because of his service as his assistant administrator in the Trust Territory government. He was very outspoken individual.
- Nabors: When he came to Trust Territory from Samoa, there was a lot of criticism about the lack of progress that he had made in American Samoa. But for the most part, his service in the Trust Territory was progressive. He was of the new school and all the people who hang on to old ways he passed them by and went forward—a very, very capable man financially. And we thought too smart for Joeten's good. We thought Joeten Enterprises will wake up one day and find themselves in bankruptcy as a result of Joe Screen's manipulation, but it didn't turn out that way. And he helped Joeten a great deal.
- Willens: Once the Marianas Political Status Commission got underway, what was your contact with their work on the Commission?
- Nabors: Almost nothing. Our role in the legislature was to support, like financial support. And Jim White was hired early on. But our role was to monitor, assist and observe. I had no direct involvement.
- Willens: Did the leadership of the Commission keep the Legislature informed as to the negotiations?
- Nabors: Every time they needed money.
- Willens: Well that was actually one issue came out in the summer of 1973 when the Commission was requesting funds from the Legislature and they decided to attached to the report to the Legislature the position papers that had been exchanged at the May, 1973 round. And when the United States found out that it was going to happen, they expressed strongest resistance in making the papers public. But it was too late and the papers were made public to District Legislature and generated series of very complimentary articles for the most

- part. But the Legislature had limited funds as I understand. What was your understanding about the financial needs of the Commission?
- Nabors: We were so dedicated to this political cause that we accommodated every need of the Commission financially. We had to cut back on other programs. But we felt so strongly that this thing was wanted immediately by the people that we did not spare any cost. We gave them whatever we could and as much as they requested.
- Willens: Did you become familiar with the work of the economic consultant of Jim Leonard and his colleague?
- Nabors: No.
- Willens: Had you met Jim Leonard when he was part of the Nathan study in the middle of 1960s?
- Nabors: Yes.
- Willens: Did you have any basis for making a judgment about the quality of the work?
- Nabors: Of that I saw, I thought it was a grand scheme to that wasn't going to work. I recall they wanted to have all of the Yap Trading Company, the Palau Trading Company, the Marshall Islands Trading Company, all put in one basket and then this big corporation was going to go and do wonders. I did not think it was going to work.
- Willens: From a lawyer's perspective, did you form any judgment about the work of the legal consultants to the MPLC?
- Nabors: I wanted desperately to observe the work of the Political Status Commission. And I asked Ed Pangelinan and Ben Santos if that was possible. Ed Pangelinan came back and said that Ambassador Williams doesn't like lawyers. So your request is denied. So I felt that Ambassador Williams had his little group of lawyers from Washington, D.C. do a number on the people of the Northern Marianas. How wrong I was. But we did receive an indication that your law firm represented the Ford Motor Company in South America or somewhere.
- Willens: We do represent the Ford Motor Company.
- Nabors: And, therefore, you needed the State Department good will, and that possibly would compromise the wishes the people of Marianas in order to keep that lucrative arrangement with Ford Motor Company. As time went on, I only had one serious concern and that regarded land alienation. Dan Muna talked a great deal about that issue. Of course, I wasn't involved in the meetings. In the evenings, we would meet and discuss it. And he would bring forth the idea that all the Hawaiians, the Eskimos and the Indians were in parallel situation. I thought that the Marianas was basically different from those entities that you were citing. And I guess he would go back the next day and raise issues on the floor. As time went on, I became a believer in the work that was being done.
- Siemer: Let's go if we could to the legislation for the First Constitutional Convention and the various and difficult political questions for your Legislature. What do you recall about the discussions and debates with respect to that legislation?
- Nabors: We thought that OTSP and Willens and Company were out to do major surgery on our political base. And we, therefore, resisted those efforts and we were very suspicious. And we thought at that time with good cause. They asked my opinion on various matters and I recommended that they be resisted. Eddie Pangelinan was sort of walking a tight rope and some of the leaders became distrustful of Eddie. But as we went on, we came to realize

that it was something that we were going to have to live with. We still were distrustful of OTSP—Pedro Tenorio and company. They were mostly, we thought, taking positions that they had not earned a right to. And that caused a great deal of consternation on our part.

Siemer: Shortly after the plebiscite with respect to the Covenant, Legislator Dan Muna introduced a bill to authorize a constitutional convention and there was a good deal of discussion about that bill and then Frank Ada vetoed it on a theory that it wasn't quite timely yet. The Legislature went right back to work and passed another bill. The process of separation was going on at that time and Erwin Canham arrived back in the islands. The Legislature then passed another bill which Erwin Canham vetoed. Then the Legislature passed another bill and he vetoed it again. What do you called that process?

Nabors: It got to a point where it is a power play. And Resident Commissioner Canham and his advisers monitored what the Legislature was doing. The people didn't want to be dictated to and they thought Frank Ada was a puppet. And it was sort of at logger heads after that point.

Siemer: One of the issues that you were concerned with as counsel was the question of whether a delegation from Saipan could fairly be elected on an at-large basis as opposed to a district basis. Some of the published reports indicated concern that no Carolinian would be elected if the election was island-wide. What do your recall about that issue and what advice did you give with respect to that?

Nabors: I have forgotten most of that stuff. There were concerns about the representation. I don't recall exactly what discussion took place. But they wanted to be representative of the entire community.

Siemer: There was a bill passed by the Legislature that provided election at-large of all Saipan delegates. And Erwin Canham vetoed that on the basis that it could not guarantee Carolinian representation. And you as counsel apparently worked out a compromise under which Canham could appoint delegates to the constitutional convention if no Carolinians were elected and that finally broke the deadlock. What occasion did you have to talk to Canham if any about his concerns with respect to this, and how it worked out?

Nabors: Long distance. We had no face-to-face. We hated the guy. So we never confronted him. But we got his concerns transmitted and the . . .

Siemer: Do you remember an occasion when he came to address the Legislature?

Nabors: Yes.

Siemer: What was your reaction that time?

Nabors: We thought that we're being invaded and we have an enemy in the camp, of course. But I think the sense of the leadership was that we needed so desperately to have this vehicle and move it along. They were willing to do anything to get it passed. Ben Santos I believe had face-to-face meetings with Mr. Canham. Ben convinced the leadership that we should accommodate him.

Siemer: Why was the sixty days limit on the constitutional convention put in the legislation.

Nabors: I don't know.

Siemer: One of the questions that you were confronted with seemed to be a problem of the one man, one vote requirement because that would restrict representatives for Tinian. How did you explain that requirement to your colleagues in the legislature?

- Nabors: I guess Joe Cruz was the big factor in that. He was very persuasive. Of course, the Mayor also was involved early on, and then later he got out. But Joe Cruz and Bernard Hofschneider were willing to stay the boycott and convinced them. I don't know what took place behind the scenes but Joe Cruz was very, very influential in that area.
- Siemer: It looked from the results like you did the best you could to get it toward one man-one vote so that Canham and others would not have additional groups to criticize the bill, but that you couldn't get all the way there because the ultimate formula was 25 for Saipan, 8 for Rota and 5 for Tinian, which over-represented Rota and Tinian enormously. Was there any feeling on your part at that time with respect to possible challenges in court to the formulation?
- Nabors: No.
- Siemer: Once the constitutional convention got under way, what was the role of the District Legislature, if any, with respect to the work that the Con-Con was doing?
- Nabors: Observers only. And I imagine there was consultation in the evenings with the leadership.
- Siemer: How about your own role, did you attend any sessions of the First Constitutional Convention.
- Nabors: Yes, I came to the opening and a couple of sessions
- Siemer: Were you consulted by any of the delegates with respect to some of the issues?
- Nabors: No.
- Siemer: What was your view about the public mood at the time of the Constitutional Convention?
- Nabors: Up beat.
- Siemer: So you projected that the Constitution would pass by the majority required?
- Nabors: Yes.
- Siemer: What about the public education campaign after the Con-Con. Did you participate in that at all?
- Nabors: No.
- Siemer: Do you recall anything about how it was organized?
- Nabors: We gave the money to Eddie Pangelinan and his group and they went out to the villages and took care of it.
- Siemer: How effective was it?
- Nabors: I thought it was very effective. They, of course, enunciated the positives and the people supported it.
- Siemer: What did you perceive with respect to opposition?
- Nabors: Minimal. Minimal, if any.
- Siemer: What was the view of the Carolinian community at that time in your observation?
- Nabors: I thought that they were supportive. No serious opposition. I think that the attitude was that the ball is rolling down the hill, and get out of the way of it.

Willens: Just a few more questions, Bill. During the Marianas Political Status Commission, early on the United States made public its proposal to acquire the entire island of Tinian.

Nabors: Yes.

Willens: And then they would lease back one-third of the island to the civilian community and this was pictured in a headline story of the *Pacific Daily News*. It came as a shock to many of the citizens and I think political leaders in the Northern Marianas. What was your reaction at that time to this request by the United States?

Nabors: I thought it was an offer, you know, a trial balloon. There was no way that they can expect the people to move out of Tinian. Ambassador Williams had a meeting over here and led the people to believe that they would have great benefits. As a matter of fact, on May 15, 1975 he said that if the military needs could not be accommodated on Tinian, there would be no commonwealth. And we even had the occasion to point out to the people in Saipan that you have your passports—U.S. passports and your food stamps and all federal programs because if Tinian had not given up any land to the military there would not have been a commonwealth.

Willens: There was a question of how much land to make available to the United States and that was one of the two or three critical issues in the negotiations. So you recall that message loud and clear that if there was not accommodation of the U.S. request there would be no commonwealth. There was a public hearing over here at which the Ambassador and his staff presented their proposal and answered questions. Do you remember attending any of their meetings over here?

Nabors: Only one—only one meeting did I attend. And that was the meeting where they proposed to move all the people and build them concrete houses because they have to be away from the dock area. If they are loading bombs, there has got to be no civilian inhabitants in that area. And that was the only meeting I attended.

Willens: What is your recollection of the public sentiment at that meeting?

Nabors: There was a lot of opposition to that idea.

Willens: That's interesting. Some of the published reports said the elderly people present at the meeting were attracted by the benefits of the new houses and assorted other benefits. They also reported that some of the younger, more college-educated people from Tinian were strongly opposed.

Nabors: Well, you've got to realize that at that time, we only had the very old and the very young. We had very few residents in between, because there was nothing on Tinian. No jobs to hold them, so they go away. They go to Guam and stay. So they would generally be favorable to that suggestion.

Willens: As you recall, the United States decided they did not need to relocate San Jose village.

Nabors: They were looking at the northern end as the possible dock area.

Willens: For munitions purposes?

Nabors: Yes.

Willens: What is your assessment now, from the standpoint of the Tinian leadership and population, as to the recent lease back accommodations with the United States. Have those been beneficial?

Nabors: Oh indeed. Absolutely. The leadership is delighted to have back that land.

- Willens: Another issue that came up regularly during the negotiation was the nature of the political status and what the Commonwealth would need here in terms of self-government. Some of these issues got fairly complicated among the lawyers. Were you ever consulted by members of the Commission about these questions and the extent to which federal authority could be limited in the Northern Marianas?
- Nabors: No.
- Willens: Another area, of course, was the extent of financial support that the United States would provide and ultimately a formula was agreed to whereby the United States would pay \$13.5 million or \$14 million, I guess a year for multi-year period with protection against inflation built into the Covenant. What was your assessment at that time as to the adequacy of those financial terms?
- Nabors: I expressed my opposition to the adequacy of that funding level. There was a gentleman who was our financial officer over in Saipan. And we went over those figures and he too was of the opinion that it would not be adequate. We tried to communicate this to those individuals who were responsible for making that decision, but we didn't get to first base. They wouldn't listen. And I don't know if they felt that the U.S. negotiators would not increase it or what. So we had no success at all.
- Willens: Just before the negotiations came to conclusion, there was an election in November of 1974 at which time both Ed Pangelinan and Herman Guerrero were defeated for re-election to the Congress of Micronesia and Oscar Rasa and Pete A. Tenorio were elected. This was viewed by some as an expression of the view that the political status question was being addressed too rapidly by the Popular Party leadership. Do you have any recollection of that particular election and what significance it had for the status negotiations?
- Nabors: Oscar Rasa had just returned from school. A very articulate young man and very influential. I remember that election and I believe that there was an expression, that things were being that the Popular Party philosophy would have been followed without question. And they did want new thinking in the process. We had several discussions about that. Eddie Pangelinan was very vocal, but he was a Popular Party member. And we thought the people wanted fresh thinking in the process.
- Willens: Was the political leadership concerned that this election meant that the negotiation would not be able to be successful concluded.
- Nabors: Oh no.
- Willens: There were efforts made within the Popular Party to keep Ed Pangelinan on the Commission and in his position as chairman. Ultimately Sen. Borja agreed to withdraw from the Commission and that Ed Pangelinan take his position. Do you remember any discussions with Mr. Borja on that issue?
- Nabors: Not with Senator Borja directly but I remember discussion on that proposal. And, in fact, that Eddie being an educated lawyer, an American trained lawyer, this service was very useful.
- Willens: After the negotiations resumed, there was a last minute demand by the representatives from Tinian and Rota that the Covenant guarantee a bicameral legislature in which the three populated islands would be equally represented. Did you have any reaction at that time as a long term resident of Saipan to the power that was going to be given to Rota and Tinian?

- Nabors: Howard, early on as counsel for the District Legislature over the years I saw what Saipan did to Tinian and Rota. They would appropriate monies that they needed for Saipan and if any was left over they would then divide it up between Tinian and Rota. And that was partly on the theory that Tinian and Rota did not contribute substantially to the Commonwealth budget, the budget of the District government, and therefore, was not entitled to as much as Saipan. At the time when that issue rose, I thought it would be disproportionate. A bicameral arrangement would give Tinian and Rota more power than they should have on a population basis. But I realize the equity of the argument and have now come to believe that it was a great thing for the Commonwealth.
- Willens: The day before the Covenant was going to be signed, Congress of Micronesia representative Joe Mafnas filed a lawsuit to enjoin the Commission and the Marianas District Legislature from signing and approving the Covenant. Did you have any recollection as to the background of that lawsuit?
- Nabors: No, I don't. But I know that we were furious. We were absolutely livid, but I don't know. We thought that it was a Territorial Party effort.
- Willens: You thought it may have been the Territorial Party that prompted the idea?
- Nabors: Yes. Joeten and company.
- Willens: There were others who thought that was the Congress of Micronesia effort.
- Nabors: I heard that, but I never considered it seriously.
- Willens: Did you attend the courtroom proceedings the following morning?
- Nabors: No.
- Willens: After the Covenant was signed it was then presented to the District Legislature and I recall spending some time before the District Legislature accompanied by the leadership of the Commission to explain the Covenant. Former Governor Larry Guerrero was presiding officer of the Marianas District Legislature at that time.
- Nabors: Yes, he was.
- Willens: Do you have any recollection as to that process and whether the Legislature felt it really had the opportunity to pass on the Covenant?
- Nabors: Yes, Larry—former Governor Larry Guerrero—and I talked at length about this before the session. And he had some concerns that he wanted raised. I had some concerns that I wanted raised. Joe Cabrera, the other Republican in the District Legislature had some concerns that he wanted to raise. But everyone knew there was momentum here. That you could raise concerns but nothing, nothing could stop it. So I talked to Larry and Joe and tried to address some of their concerns as best as I could. But this was not the time or place to raise any serious opposition to this matter.
- Willens: So you were talking about some of the concerns that were felt by members of the Marianas District Legislature when the Covenant was prepared for approval.
- Nabors: I thought, I got this feeling that they wanted to mount some opposition and they were looking for things to question, to raise, that might give impetus to that desire. But I talked to them individually before the meeting and basically they began to believe that they just better not try to undo a deal at that stage.
- Willens: The negotiations were going on for two and a half years and it was more less the desire to

- talk with the leadership, but put it to the people for vote. Do you recall of any of those specifics concerns that Mr. Cabrera or Mr. Guerrero had?
- Nabors: No, I don't.
- Willens: Did you play any role in the public education campaign that preceded the vote in the Covenant?
- Nabors: No.
- Willens: There were only about four months provided between the signing of the Covenant and the vote and there was some criticism that the period was too limited within which to really inform the people as to this important step. What was your sense?
- Nabors: Hogwash. I thought it was adequate. The people who really wanted to know what's going on had been kept apprised of what was taking place during the negotiations. I think that was just a smoke screen.
- Willens: Did the Territorial Party mount an effective campaign in opposition?
- Nabors: No, [it was] token.
- Willens: What were the principal lines of opposition to the Covenant?
- Nabors: Gosh, I don't remember now.
- Willens: There were some who maintained that they thought they could negotiate a better deal. Do you have any recollection of that?
- Nabors: Yes, shotgun approach, but nothing substantive no. I heard that as I recall.
- Willens: Then there were others, of course, who thought that the people of the Marianas should be given an option to pick between commonwealth, free association, and independence.
- Nabors: That's true. It was a very small minority, very small minority. And that would basically be Oscar Rasa and his followers.
- Willens: And by this time Dr. Palacios had turned out to be a relatively strong supporter of the Covenant. Do you recall if you have any conversation with Dr. Palacios about the Covenant and how his views changed?
- Nabors: No, I don't—I don't think I had discussions with him.
- Willens: All right, any other thoughts or comments that you would like to make about the Covenant, First Constitutional Convention, and what has transpired.
- Nabors: Only that I am so grateful for having had the opportunity to live in such a turbulent era and I only regret that I didn't come sooner to Northern Mariana Islands. I think I have made a contribution and I hope that when I leave it, it's a better place than it was when I came.
- Willens: I'm sure of that. Thank you very much Bill.