

INTERVIEW OF FELIPE A. SALAS

by Howard P. Willens

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- Willens: Felipe A. Salas has a distinguished background in politics in the Northern Marianas. He has served as a member of the District Legislature and he was a member of the Marianas Political Status Commission. He has agreed to be interviewed with respect to our project. Thank you very much for being available, Mr. Salas. Could we begin by telling me when and where you were born.
- Salas: I was born on September 13, 1927. I've almost reached 70 years.
- Willens: Were you born here on Saipan?
- Salas: Yes, that's right.
- Willens: What were your parents' names?
- Salas: My father was Jose F. Salas. That means Fahusta Salas.
- Willens: And your mother's name?
- Salas: Maria Agulto formerly, but then of course after marriage, it went to Salas. Maria Salas.
- Willens: Did your father have a position in the Japanese Administration?
- Salas: He was only doing farming. During the occupation when the ships come in, I think he was stevedoring or something like that. But from time to time, not continuously, only maybe once every month or every two months, like that.
- Willens: Did he have any recollection of the German years?
- Salas: According to what they said, my mother and father were educated during the German time, not really Japanese time, but German time. They speak German.
- Willens: Did they learn Japanese?
- Salas: Very broken Japanese. They could not really speak fluent Japanese.
- Willens: Where was the family land located?
- Salas: We stay in Garapan. Then we had a farm near Tanapag village. That's my father's aunt's land. So she let us use the land.
- Willens: What do you remember about your education under the Japanese system?
- Salas: Well, under the Japanese system I think many people did not like it. For example, of course they forced us to speak Japanese, when we entered the school. So anybody, any of our classmates or some students, who used Chamorro or Carolinian, was reported to our teacher, and the teacher was really strict, you know. They said don't use native language, but Japanese. The reason they did that was so we could learn more Japanese faster, because he was teaching using Japanese, so maybe that's the way then.
- Willens: Were there Japanese children of your age in the class, or was it composed entirely of Chamorros and Carolinians?
- Salas: No, during Japanese time there was a Japanese school for Japanese kids. Natives were not allowed to enter that school. We had segregation. We had another school we called Kohako. That means native of the island. So unless you were half-caste of Japanese, you

could not attend the Japanese school. Of course, we were also in a Japanese school, but there were no Japanese kids there, only Carolinian or Chamorro.

Willens: But the teachers were all Japanese?

Salas: Only one teacher was not Japanese. I think we call him an apprentice teacher, maybe to help in case Japanese teacher wants to know something from the student and we cannot communicate because of the language problem.

Willens: The apprentice teacher would be a local person?

Salas: Oh, yes.

Willens: How many years did you attend school under the Japanese system?

Salas: Besides private school, because I was attending the private school, that means night school, but besides that, I had five years of Japanese education.

Willens: That was the standard limit for local people, wasn't it?

Salas: That's right. From first grade up through fifth grade.

Willens: How old were you when you completed the fifth grade approximately?

Salas: Approximately 12 or almost 13 years.

Willens: Was that fairly typical?

Salas: What do you mean?

Willens: Were most people that age in the fifth grade—12 or 13?

Salas: I think so. My brother also went to a carpenters school in Palau, then came back and then worked here. I don't know what we call that. It's kind of forcing, you know, you have to go.

Willens: Forced labor? Was he paid for doing the job?

Salas: Oh, yes, that's what I think. You have to go, like it or not. At that time I think World War II had started. So everything was like a military command or order or something like that.

Willens: You mentioned going to a private school. What was that?

Salas: That was night school.

Willens: Who ran that?

Salas: There was a Japanese who also established night class, but I had to pay and go there. That helped me, getting more knowledge as to Japanese.

Willens: Did the private school take you beyond the fifth grade?

Salas: You could go, you know, as long as you're of course paying. But then I think just before World War II the teacher and his family went back to Japan, so there was no longer a night school.

Willens: What is your recollection of what happened when the invasion started here in Saipan? Did the Japanese tell you to leave Garapan?

Salas: No. I think we were chased by the Japanese government at that time, to go to the farm.

Willens: You were told to go to the farm?

Salas: And stay there. Because the Japanese military was going to use that area, the Garapan area.

- So we just went to the house, and we took all the good material to the farm, so we could build a new house there.
- Willens: Did you have to build a new house on the farm in order to have space for all of you?
- Salas: Oh, yes. My mother and I used to go, because my father was working somewhere. So my mother and I used to haul the materials to the farm.
- Willens: Did you stay on the farm during the invasion, or did you go into the hills?
- Salas: We stayed on the farm. Then just before the invasion, we walked to deeper mountains so we could hide in the caves. Because I think the Americans once in a while dropped a bomb. It wasn't safe to stay at the farm.
- Willens: Were you together with other local families in the mountains?
- Salas: Yes.
- Willens: Do you remember any of their names?
- Salas: Most of them passed away; I think they passed away. First we went with Andres Castro and his wife. That's what I recall. We stayed there a couple of days, then we moved to another cave.
- Willens: At what point did you know it was safe to come out?
- Salas: Well, you have to just guess whether it's proper or not, but you don't know. You don't have any communication system, and so on. So as soon as you don't hear any bombs or something like that, especially during night time, we had to start going to another cave. In fact, during the stay at the farm, we had to also be careful because it was not only the U.S. troops, but also the Japanese soldiers, they might think that we were doing some kind of spying or something like that, suspicious to them.
- Willens: What happened when the Americans came to your location? Did they call out local people? How did they let you know it was safe to come out?
- Salas: Well, I was in the cave. My mother is not far away from my cave. But my cave was small, together with my father. And there was another group of natives also, in several places, not too far away from us. Then what I heard was the whistle. And then I heard a different kind of intonation. And then one of our people went out, with I think a white cloth, like a flag, and said peace or something like that. So I saw the American soldier wave to the cave, using Japanese words, "If you are inside, please come out and put up your hands." He repeated it several times I think. They were using Japanese, maybe those American soldiers learned Japanese before. They said, "If you don't come out, then I will blast you with a hand grenade." The soldiers said, "Just come out and put up your hands."
- Willens: Everyone came out.
- Salas: Well, some [Japanese] soldiers were with us taking my father's bag, you know. Just look like, tried to be like a native.
- Willens: Was he caught?
- Salas: Yes. When we went out, there were a lot of natives, mostly Chamorro because the Carolinians were in the other caves. We were not together with the Carolinians. They also had their own caves, I guess. But we Chamorro, you know, we had about 70 or 80 Chamorros. When we went out, I think the American soldier told us to sit somewhere, because they were still shooting down the Japanese soldiers. So I still remember one of our

Chamorros kept saying [word for peace], you know. They were afraid. Then that was the word I first heard.

Willens: Did one of the local people identify the Japanese soldier who was pretending to be a local?

Salas: Yes. Then another group took us to somewhere in Oleai. I don't know how they arranged that, because we stayed in Oleai about I think one week. And then they took us to Susupe. So up to that, the soldier was still with us, but when we came to Susupe, I think one of the Americans, maybe the intelligence officer, said, "You go there."

Willens: They segregated him out as a Japanese soldier?

Salas: Yes.

Willens: What is your recollection about Susupe? What kind of experience was that?

Salas: Well, Susupe was the camp, we called it Camp Susupe. Of course they put barbed wire around, and there was a gate, MPs were there and so on. But at night, there were soldiers around. They dug their holes. Maybe they were watching if anybody went out from the camp.

Willens: Did you have a job at Camp Susupe?

Salas: Yes. Our job was defense. Some groups just collected ammunition. Some were looking for any food supplies, because I think a lot of food was left over by the Japanese and so on. The Americans were using that for our rations for food.

Willens: Did you continue your education while you were at the camp?

Salas: No, I don't think so. There was a class in one building in Susupe, but I think only for sailors.

Willens: Only what?

Salas: Sailor. But anyway, I tried to memorize some of the American words or spellings.

Willens: After you were released from Camp Susupe, did the family go back to Garapan?

Salas: No. They moved us to Chalan Kanoa. Koreans were separate also. But we moved to Chalan Kanoa, and the Japanese group just remained in the camp. Because we have only one camp, they divided it by barbed wire into half. One was Japanese citizens, and the other one was natives.

Willens: Did you ever continue your education in the 1950s under the Naval Administration?

Salas: American education, yes. We had the opportunity to attend a night class, because I was grown already, I was about 15 or 16 years old. One of the sailors used to come and teach us. Those sailors had to obtain permits to go into the camp, because nobody was allowed to go in. Because thinking about that may make trouble or something like that. So before they went in, they had to get a permit indicating the purpose of going into the camp. At that time, I think really the U.S. respected our people.

Willens: Did your family live in Chalan Kanoa for some time?

Salas: Oh, yes, together.

Willens: How many years did you stay there?

Salas: We stayed there for a long time, many months, you know. And in fact, for so many

- months in the Chamorro camp in Chalan Kanoa, inside the barbed wire, then one time July 4 they cut the barbed wire, indicating that no longer we were in that camp.
- Willens: During the 1950s, did you have any employment here on Saipan? What kind of work did you do?
- Salas: I used to work at the motorpool. My job there was to go and get CA jeep number one and number two—to check the grease, oil, water, and so on. And I liked that job, because I used to drive, and I like to drive.
- Willens: Were you aware of what was going on at the Naval Technical Training Unit?
- Salas: In those days, I don't think so.
- Willens: Did there come a time when you learned what the CIA was doing on that facility?
- Salas: I'm not really aware. Maybe some of our people who were working at the NTTU. I heard rumors, people talking that a lot of Americans who used to be military were there.
- Willens: When did you first get involved in politics?
- Salas: Way back, it's been a long time. Let me see.
- Willens: Let me help you a little bit. I have some files here that indicate you were in the Saipan Municipal Council, it was called the Congress of Saipan, in 1962. And then you ran for the District Legislature in 1963. Had you been in politics in the 1950s at all, or was the Saipan Congress the first office you ran for?
- Salas: No, I was also elected as a Municipal Council before the District Legislature.
- Willens: Right.
- Salas: I think served for about one year, and then we had what we called a legislative some kind of convention, something like that. Then that's the start of our District Legislature. So at that time, according to the law, you could not serve in two public offices. You had to decide what you want. If you win, then, you may resign, because you cannot go there without knowing that you're going to win.
- Willens: So what did you do?
- Salas: I resigned from the Municipal Council, and I went to the District Legislature.
- Willens: Were you affiliated with the Popular Party at that time?
- Salas: Oh, yes.
- Willens: Who founded the Popular Party? Who were the people on the island who you recall establishing that party?
- Salas: I don't know exactly, but what I heard was Mr. Cruz.
- Willens: Jose Cruz?
- Salas: Yes. He's the one with several of his friends.
- Willens: Was the Popular Party formed after the Progressive or Territorial Party was organized?
- Salas: I think after the Popular Party [was formed], the Provisional Party or something like that [was formed] on the other side.
- Willens: The Progressive Party.
- Salas: Progressive Party.

- Willens: It became the Territorial Party.
- Salas: Yes. After Progressive.
- Willens: Which came first, if you remember?
- Salas: The Progressive came first.
- Willens: What led you to affiliate with the Popular Party rather than the Territorial Party?
- Salas: Well, they called it the Popular Party because it is for the common people, poor people. All those poor people are abundant, you know? More than rich people. We never lost an election because they believe that we are right, and they have followed us.
- Willens: How about the political status issue and the question of reunification with Guam rather than a direct relationship with the United States? Was that a factor in your thinking?
- Salas: Well, I think from the beginning that the Popular Party had the idea to reintegrate with Guam, reunification with Guam. As a member of the Legislature, I think we continuously were trying to do that. Ben Santos was the president at that time, and he was the one appointing committees. In those days, I think I was the chairman of the Political Committee.
- Willens: Of the District Legislature?
- Salas: That's right. We continued fighting to unify with Guam.
- Willens: Had you been in Guam frequently?
- Salas: In those days?
- Willens: Yes. In the 1950s and the early 1960s.
- Salas: Not frequently, but my mother was born in Guam.
- Willens: I see. So your mother was a U.S. citizen?
- Salas: Maybe. I don't know here, but my mother could not obtain land here, homestead, like that.
- Willens: Here?
- Salas: In Saipan. My father, yes. But my mother could not, because of her political status. She was born in Guam, and she had no birth certificate here, but in Guam.
- Willens: What was it about Guam that attracted members of the Popular Party?
- Salas: Well, in Guam in those days, mostly about 95 percent of their Chamorros are related to our Chamorros. The Carolinians were different [and did not support reunification with Guam] because they're not Chamorro.
- Willens: Did you have any Carolinian members of the Popular Party, or were they all affiliated with the Territorial Party?
- Salas: I think in those days only one or two Carolinian people affiliated with the Popular Party. I think this was the Hilo family. But other than that, I think they go against Popular Party. They go against our idea as to reunification with Guam.
- Willens: Some people with whom we've talked emphasize the fact that Guam was more economically developed and people here thought that they could achieve that same standard more rapidly if they reintegrated. Is that a view that you agreed with?

- Salas: Well, at that time, you know when the politics is in your blood it's kind of hard, you know. Especially our old generation. When we are voting for the Municipal Council or District Legislature, the right side box is a member of the Popular Party, and the left side is Territorial Party candidates. For so many years, we continued that, until there's a case, I think Eddie fought to change that.
- Willens: Could people see what box you were putting your ballot into?
- Salas: No. That's a secret. But he actually told me there's no secret, because when our old generation votes, they'll speak up.
- Willens: I see.
- Salas: Everybody votes by the side of the ballot, Popular Party is on one side, you know, and you can tell.
- Willens: In 1965, there was an election for the first Congress of Micronesia. Did you ever consider running for the Congress of Micronesia?
- Salas: In those days, I don't think so, because I was the president pro tem in the Legislature.
- Willens: That was the number two position, wasn't it?
- Salas: Well, if Ben [Santos] was not there, you know, I would preside.
- Willens: I've heard from some members of the District Legislature that they opposed having a Congress of Micronesia. They did not want to be a part of any kind of a larger political entity. What was your view?
- Salas: Well, in those days, the way I looked at it, the CNMI had more financial capability, and the other districts did not. I think you can tell. Truk and Ponape did not. Also some Chamorros were concerned about the Carolinians. Maybe that's also included in their mind, the same as the Carolinians here, and they were not really happy.
- Willens: Had you been to any of the other districts?
- Salas: Oh, yes.
- Willens: Which ones had you gone to?
- Salas: I went to Palau, Yap, Marshalls, and recently about two or three years ago I went to Ponape. I think that's all.
- Willens: Looking back into the 1960s, did you have any sense at the time that all six districts might remain together as a single political entity in the future?
- Salas: In those days, I didn't.
- Willens: In 1969, there was a plebiscite in Guam and in Saipan about reunification, and the Guamanians voted it down. Why do you think that happened?
- Salas: After that, maybe two or three months, I went to Guam. I heard some of the relatives talking about politics. They said that Guam had more financial capability, and if they had to contribute also to the Northern Marianas, it would be hard for the Guamanians. That was the main reason that they thought it was not appropriate to unify these two. Now I know Saipan also, many of them thought that if we are going to be united with Guam, then there should be equal representation. Other than that, we'll never get anything that we want to get, because of the number of voters.
- Willens: Did the Popular Party change its position about reunification after that vote?

- Salas: After that, I think somehow the Popular Party became the Democratic Party.
- Willens: In 1969 also, the Congress of Micronesia had a Future Political Status Commission that issued a report. Dr. Palacios was on the Commission. The report recommended a relationship with the United States called free association or, as a fall-back, independence. Did you ever talk about status issues with Dr. Palacios before you both served on the Marianas Political Status Commission?
- Salas: Oh, yes. He was my second cousin.
- Willens: Do you recall discussing his views on political status with him?
- Salas: Well, yes. His house is a little farther than my house, so whenever he went to his house, quite often he stopped by the road . . .
- Willens: At your house?
- Salas: No, but just sitting in the jeep, his car, and then I will go there and we'd talk. Of course in those days, even though we'd talk about something that is not related to politics, people look at me, you know, some of them saying that oh, Mr. Salas is probably on the other side. Because at that time I think Dr. Palacios is on the other side already.
- Willens: He started out with the Popular Party.
- Salas: Yes, but then later . . .
- Willens: He changed.
- Salas: That's why people, the old generation people, were very suspicious.
- Willens: When somebody changes parties?
- Salas: No, when you are talking to other people from the other party. Just like Joeten, you know, when you say good morning Joeten and you smile at each other, somebody will report you.
- Willens: Did you have any political dealings with Joe Cruz?
- Salas: Yes.
- Willens: What was your assessment of him as a politician?
- Salas: Well, he is a good speaker, especially during the campaigns. He knows how to get support. People are really happy [when he speaks], clap their hands.
- Willens: He was a crowd pleaser?
- Salas: Oh, yes.
- Willens: How about Senator Borja? He was, I guess, in the Territorial Party in the late 1960s.
- Salas: Yes. Like Joeten, Mr. Borja was in the Territorial Party.
- Willens: Ed Pangelinan and Herman Q. Guerrero were serving as members of the Congress of Micronesia and were on the Status Committee that the Congress of Micronesia created. They were trying to get the United States to agree to separate negotiations. Did they report to you from time to time in the District Legislature what was going on?
- Salas: I don't recall.
- Willens: What is your first recollection of hearing that the United States had agreed to separate negotiations?
- Salas: I don't recall who, but that's known among the members of the Popular Party.

- Willens: Ambassador Williams came here in April 1972 before the Marianas Political Status Commission was created. Did you meet him at that time?
- Salas: I think so.
- Willens: What was your general impression of Ambassador Williams as you got to know him over the next several years?
- Salas: Well, we understood that Ambassador Williams came here as a representative of the President.
- Willens: When the Legislature created the Marianas Political Status Commission, did you want to be a member?
- Salas: Yes.
- Willens: Why was that?
- Salas: That was the beginning when we had the first negotiations with the United States.
- Willens: Was there very much debate about what kind of people ought to be on the Commission or how large it ought to be?
- Salas: No. The only thing I can recall is that the Rota delegation was concerned about the money that was going to be shared among Tinian and Rota and Saipan, and that's what they cared about.
- Willens: This was during the negotiations?
- Salas: That's right.
- Willens: Did you expect the negotiations to go on for more than two years?
- Salas: I had no idea at that time.
- Willens: Did you feel that the United States delegation was better prepared to do the negotiations than members of the Commission were?
- Salas: Well, to tell you the truth, Howard, education-wise the U.S. side was more ahead of us. The other thing was also they were more familiar like Ambassador Williams and others that the kind of technique they were going to use for these negotiations.
- Willens: The technique that they were going to use.
- Salas: Yes. They have more—what do you call it—they have more caliber. And also the language that we were using is the same as they know. Many times or sometimes it's kind of hard to express [things in English]. I felt when I express something to them, perhaps it was not understood. And another thing, everything in writing, it's done in English, not in Chamorro or Carolinian.
- Willens: After the second round of negotiations in May 1973, three members of the Commission gave an interview that was published in the *Marianas Variety*. The three were Felix Rebauliman, Joeten and Dr. Palacios, and they all complained that the negotiations were going too fast, that the United States was better prepared, and they just generally were expressing dissatisfaction. Did you have any conversations with any of those three as to why did that?
- Salas: No, I don't think so.
- Willens: Were all three of them members of the Territorial Party?
- Salas: Who?

- Willens: Felix Rebauliman, Dr. Palacios and Joeten?
- Salas: Oh, yes.
- Willens: You think politics may have motivated that?
- Salas: Maybe, I don't know.
- Willens: Shortly thereafter, Joeten resigned from the Commission. In his resignation letter, he said that he was resigning for two reasons. First, he didn't have enough time. Second, he said that his views would be misconstrued as trying to defend his business interests. Do you recall any discussion in the community as to whether Joeten should stay on the Commission?
- Salas: I don't recall.
- Willens: What is your recollection of first hearing about the United States land needs on Tinian?
- Salas: If I'm not mistaken, to the best of my recollection, the U.S. wanted three-fourths of Tinian's land.
- Willens: Did you feel that their requests were too large?
- Salas: I don't know. It depends on what they're going to apply to that place, what kind of thing that they're going to put on that three-fourths of Tinian land.
- Willens: Was it your impression at the time that the United States was definitely going to build a base there on Tinian that would provide jobs and other benefits?
- Salas: I heard it was just for the site of that training unit. That's what I heard. But some people said maybe that is not true.
- Willens: Did you think it would be better for the Marianas if the United States went ahead and built a big base over there? Would that have been a good thing for the Marianas?
- Salas: Well, one disadvantage to me is that if they were going to create a war with other nations, of course if we had a base on Tinian, for example Russia or anyone, any nation, they'd hit the Marianas because there was a base here.
- Willens: Did you attend any of the meetings over on Tinian where Ambassador Williams and the military people made a presentation and answered questions of the local people?
- Salas: I don't recall that.
- Willens: What was your view as to the purchase vs. lease issue? Remember the United States wanted to buy the land, and the Commission consistently said no, we're not going to sell it to you, but we'll lease it? Was that important to you?
- Salas: Oh, yes.
- Willens: What other issues about the negotiations come back to you now as being of particular interest to you—local government, financial support, U.S. citizenship—what aspects of those negotiations were important to you?
- Salas: Control of foreign investment. I don't know how you call this in America, this foreign affairs?
- Willens: Opening up economic development.
- Salas: Yes, but it should be controlled.
- Willens: But controlled by whom?

- Salas: By the local people.
- Willens: Do you think the local government has that power now under the Covenant?
- Salas: I do not know, because when we need money, you know, it feels like we do not have control. Because when we need money to do something, then we have to beg the United States. I think the Congress can do something, you know, but what do you call that
- Willens: There's a multi-year funding
- Salas: Yes, that's right.
- Willens: But for the most part, that seems to be phased out now. Did you think that the level of financial support that the United States was willing to give was adequate?
- Salas: I do not know.
- Willens: Were there any members of the U.S. delegation who you got to know on a personal level?
- Salas: It's hard for me to answer that.
- Willens: How do you think the 15 members of the Commission got along as a group? Do you recall having any arguments within the Commission about particular issues?
- Salas: Well, there was always an argument, same as the Congress when they argue. Not always argue because of politics, but argue because somebody put out some question and the other members think that should be done this way and so on. But it doesn't mean that the argument should be prolonged or whatever until they find a good solution. I like that.
- Willens: Did you think it was important to try to get all the members of the Commission if possible to support the Covenant? Did you want to see all the members vote in favor of the Covenant?
- Salas: At that time, when I was on the Commission.
- Willens: You hoped to see that at the time?
- Salas: Well, that's our way.
- Willens: There was an election in 1974, and that's the election at which Oscar Rasa and Pete A. Tenorio beat Eddie Pangelinan and Herman Q. Guerrero. I think that's when you went off the Commission, isn't that correct?
- Salas: Yes.
- Willens: Did you take a judicial clerk position at the time?
- Salas: Yes, as clerk of courts.
- Willens: Had you done that kind of work before while you were in the District Legislature?
- Salas: I think I started working at the court as a clerk of courts in 1963, if I'm not mistaken. At the same time also, in the same year, the District Legislature was created.
- Willens: So you had both jobs, because the District Legislature job was not a full-time job.
- Salas: Oh, yes, part-time.
- Willens: It was part-time. So your other work was as a court clerk.
- Salas: Yes.

- Willens: One of the questions that's been raised is whether the voters, by rejecting Ed Pangelinan and Herman Q. Guerrero, were trying to send a message to the Commission that the negotiations were going too fast. Do you think political status was an issue in that election?
- Salas: I don't recall.
- Willens: Had you had any experience with Oscar Rasa before that election? Did you know him?
- Salas: Not until I worked at the District Legislature. I knew him, but it only by the name and so on.
- Willens: Was there a women's group affiliated with the Popular Party, a Ladies Association or a Women's Association?
- Salas: Yes, I recall that, but I do not know how strong. They have to file bylaws and so on through the clerk of courts in order to form a women's association.
- Willens: Did you ever meet Congressman Burton or other members of Congress during the negotiations?
- Salas: I think so.
- Willens: Do you have any recollection of Congressman Burton's attitude?
- Salas: Well, he spoke loud. He spoke vocally. He spoke like leadership. Up to that extent, that's all.
- Willens: Did you participate at all in the campaign about the Covenant before the plebiscite in June of 1975?
- Salas: What year was that?
- Willens: That was 1975, and so you were working for the court at the time.
- Salas: I think I was appointed as a judge at that time. Because if I was appointed for the bench, I don't think I could do that.
- Willens: Some of the opposition to the Covenant came from those who said that they were for commonwealth, but they thought that the Covenant should be renegotiated. Do you think the people believed that was an effective argument?
- Salas: I have no idea.
- Willens: Did you expect the kind of support for the Covenant that it actually got?
- Salas: Oh, when they voted for it? It wasn't really a surprise.
- Willens: You expected that kind of support?
- Salas: Maybe a little bit less.
- Willens: When did you get involved then in Commonwealth politics? You didn't run for any office in 1977, did you?
- Salas: I was still working as a clerk of courts.
- Willens: And when did your job with the judiciary end?
- Salas: After [being] the clerk of courts, I became the probation officer. Then I went on the bench.
- Willens: Then did you stay there until you retired?

- Salas: I worked for the Legislature after I resigned.
- Willens: Who were the people in the Legislature with whom you worked? Was that when Oscar Rasa was Speaker?
- Salas: In the House, of course, I worked for the Speaker, Speaker Rasa. Then after the Democratic Party lost, then I moved to Senate. Because I knew the attitude toward members of the Democratic Party who worked for the House. One time someone came over and said well, Mr. Salas, of course I have another room, you know. They were showing me another office somewhere. Another desk to work on. So I was just thinking to myself probably they are playing ping pong, plus they are here and so on. So then I went to the Senate. At that time I think the former Governor, Pete P. Tenorio, and I think Mr. Guerrero, were in the Senate. I went there and asked for a job. So I hauled all my things over to the Senate House.
- Willens: But they were of a different political party than you were? They hired you even though you were a member of the Democratic Party?
- Salas: Yes, they knew that I was a Democratic Party member, but they knew what happened to me also. So maybe that's one way also to get more members. And of course to tell the truth, at that time we didn't have retirement. We didn't have it at that time. So my kids, they are in school abroad, and I have to support them, so it's kind of hard for me, you know.
- Willens: How many children do you have?
- Salas: I have eight, but seven are living.
- Willens: Did they all go to the mainland for education?
- Salas: One was educated and graduated in Guam, two [had] only two years college in Guam, one educated at the University of Hawaii, and the other son also graduated from that school. And then one graduated from Marquette University in Milwaukee.
- Willens: Well, in concluding the interview, Mr. Salas, what is your general view looking back now on the Commonwealth? Are you pleased with the way it has developed?
- Salas: Well, I'd like to say that a strong building is not built up in one day. I'd like to say that. That means that the constructor is starting to build a big hotel, store or whatever, and finish it within one month, that is still okay. But if you think it over, it makes me afraid, because I think it's a little bit fast, too fast to develop ourselves. If you are not prepared, I don't think it's that good.
- Willens: Are you concerned that the Commonwealth was not prepared for the fast economic development of the kind that you had here?
- Salas: I think it has been too fast. As you can see now, in Saipan construction moves quickly. If you go back to the mainland, then come back next year, you might not see the buildings you saw when you were here, because something else is built already. You don't know what really happened, whether that's public land or private land; you don't know what is Japanese or Korean.
- Willens: One of the last-minute changes in the Covenant was to require that there be a bicameral legislature and that Rota and Tinian have equal representation with Saipan in the Senate. How do you think that's worked out?

Salas: Well, it's well understood that lower house goes by population, and upper house is for equal representation. To me, it's not bad. It depends on who is sitting up there. Because we like to get everything for ourselves, you know, whether fair or not.

Willens: Is there anything else you'd like to say?

Salas: Well, I would like to mention that this kind of interview is difficult, you know, because it's been so long since the things you are asking about happened. Also, my health is not really proper.

Willens: Well, you've been very helpful. When you didn't remember anything, you've said you don't remember, which is just the way to do it. I appreciate the fact that it's a long time ago, and that's why the more people we interview and the more materials we look at, the more we can find out what's fact and what's not. So I thank you very much.