

INTERVIEW OF STEPHEN D. SANDER

by Howard P. Willens

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- Willens: Stephen D. Sander is currently with the Interior's Office of Insular Affairs and has an extended background in matters affecting Micronesia going back several decades. Steve, thank you very much for agreeing to participate in this project. As we've discussed off the record, I understand that many of these events I'm interested in took place a long time ago and you may not have had any personal involvement in them. Feel free, of course, to tell me exactly what you don't know as we reach the subjects, as well as what you do know. Could you begin by giving me a little personal and educational background.
- Sander: I grew up in Bellingham, Washington, attended the University of Washington, and Hastings College of Law. I then went into the Peace Corps. I was stationed on the island of Rota.
- Willens: When did you graduate from law school?
- Sander: In 1967.
- Willens: Did you go immediately then into the Peace Corps?
- Sander: Into the Peace Corps.
- Willens: What prompted you to do that?
- Sander: Well, the Peace Corps was new while I was in college, and I had some friends that had gone into it, and I thought that it would be a very good experience.
- Willens: As I recall, the Peace Corps actually instituted its first program in Micronesia in 1966, so you must have been one of the very early classes.
- Sander: Yes, I think we were number six, but they were in rapid succession in Micronesia. There was a saturation in Micronesia at that time with Peace Corps volunteers.
- Willens: Did you go out there with the view of providing legal services to the inhabitants of the district to which you were signed?
- Sander: I was willing to do whatever the Peace Corps wanted us to do. There were a number of lawyers in our group, and we were to help with legal matters in the Trust Territory. I was assigned to the municipal government in Rota.
- Willens: Was there a Mariana Islands office that administered the Peace Corps program within the Northern Marianas?
- Sander: That's correct. It was in Saipan.
- Willens: How many of you were assigned to Rota?
- Sander: Let's see. At the time I was there, there were a total of seven of us there.
- Willens: Seven on the island of Rota.
- Sander: Seven on the island of Rota itself. Most were teachers.
- Willens: How many Peace Corps volunteers were on Saipan at the time?
- Sander: I'm not sure. Maybe 40, I'm not sure.

- Willens: Were there any other lawyers assigned to Rota at the time you were?
- Sander: No, there were not. There were one or two assigned to Saipan.
- Willens: How long did you serve then in the Peace Corps on Rota?
- Sander: Almost two years.
- Willens: Was that the normal length of term?
- Sander: Yes.
- Willens: And then you returned to the United States?
- Sander: Yes.
- Willens: There has been a lot of controversy in the materials that I've seen about the role of the Peace Corps in Micronesia. Could you give me the benefit of your judgment as to how the Peace Corps program operated in Rota and the Northern Marianas while you were there? What's your assessment of its contribution to the community?
- Sander: Well, I think there was a positive contribution. A number of the Peace Corps volunteers on Rota were assigned to the school as teachers, and they were teaching English as a second language.
- Willens: Were they basically teaching at the grammar school level?
- Sander: Up through grade 8, I believe.
- Willens: As I recall, there was no high school on Rota at the time.
- Sander: No, there was not. It gave Micronesian children exposure to Americans, and there was a very positive effect on the speaking of English by the children. In fact, I think the person who is very high up in education in Saipan at this time has a doctorate, and she was one of the children who was being taught on Rota.
- Willens: Who could that be? Rita Inos?
- Sander: I think it's Rita Hocog Inos, yes.
- Willens: It must be the same Rita Inos who's now running for Lt. Governor on a ticket with former Governor Larry Guerrero.
- Sander: Yes, it is.
- Willens: She's a very outstanding lady. It's your recollection that she was one of the children who was in school at the time you were there.
- Sander: Very much so. Not just in school but associating much of her time with the Peace Corps volunteers. She was with us all the time.
- Willens: Well, she was then an official of the local education establishment at the time?
- Sander: No, no, she was a child, but she always wanted to be around the Peace Corps people.
- Willens: Isn't that interesting. So approximately how old was she?
- Sander: I think she was probably 7th or 8th grade. There was another contract teacher who I believe took her with them when they returned to the States so that she could have a state-side education.
- Willens: One of the interesting issues of the early 1960s in Micronesia was whether the Micronesian children should be taught by American-trained teachers or whether they should be taught by Micronesian teachers who would be trained to teach by Americans or other foreigners.

Did you find any resistance in the community to American-trained teachers entering the community to teach English?

Sander: I didn't find any kind of resistance like that.

Willens: Did you find a lot of enthusiasm for the increased fluency?

Sander: Everybody was well accepted, and I don't think that there was resentment. But I was not closely associated with the school, so I may not have seen some things.

Willens: What were your own duties?

Sander: My own duties were to work with the municipal government. We did resolutions to Saipan, Rota municipal public laws. I taught some law to the judge, prosecutor, and public defender which was pretty much non-functioning.

Willens: Were any of them lawyers?

Sander: No, they were not. They were all lay persons. And at one point, I was interested in the United Nations at the time, and I taught a model United Nations for the 9th grade which was very successful and interesting.

Willens: Do you remember the names of any of the people who were involved in the Municipal Council during your time on Rota?

Sander: Mayor Atalig—boy, the names are slipping out, it's so long ago. Prudencio Manglona was the DistAd representative there. He was not part of the municipal government.

Willens: He was one of the first Micronesians appointed to the position of District Administrator, as I recall.

Sander: That's correct.

Willens: As you came to know, Rota had been administered as a separate district in prior years rather than administered along with Saipan and Tinian and other islands as part of the Marianas District. Did you feel at the time that there was a strong sense on Rota that they were not being treated fairly or appropriately by the decision-makers based on Saipan?

Sander: Oh, I think there was always talk of that. It may have been because the population center was in Saipan and Rota was an island some distance away from Saipan. So they were always battling for their rights and their influence, and also to be making their own decisions with regard to Rota. They felt that Rota was their fiefdom.

Willens: What was your assessment at the time as to the legitimacy of their complaints?

Sander: I cannot remember specifics at the moment, but I think they had some complaints, legitimate complaints. But they had a representative in the Congress of Micronesia who was very vocal and could make the case very well.

Willens: Was that Benjamin Manglona?

Sander: Benjamin Manglona.

Willens: Was he at the time one of the rising young leaders in Rota?

Sander: Oh, yes. I wouldn't say rising. He already was a leader. He and Prudencio were the leaders in Rota.

Willens: Was there at the time some political rivalry between the Manglona family on one hand and the Hocog family on another?

Sander: I can't really remember Hocog. But there was a very strident rivalry between the two parties on the island. When elections were being held, I tried to stay out of sight, because you didn't want to be involved with one or the other because the opposing side then would accuse you of favoring one over the other.

Willens: Were you successful in generally staying neutral on political issues?

Sander: Yes.

Willens: And did the other Peace Corps volunteers sort of follow the same wise course of action?

Sander: I think everyone did, although you did know what was going on because the loudspeakers broadcast it over the whole island.

Willens: They still do. There is some evidence in the material that Peace Corps volunteers, not necessarily those on Rota or in the Marianas, were seen as advocates for independence as a future political status for Micronesia. Did you become aware of any discussion with respect to future political status while you were stationed on Rota?

Sander: Could you restate the question?

Willens: Did you become aware of the debate within the community about future political status while you were assigned to Rota?

Sander: Yes, we were aware of future political status. I do not feel that any of my colleagues nor I were advocating independence. I think we kind of had a hands-off approach to future political status, but we were well aware of the very definite sentiment coming from the people on Rota that they wanted to be American. They really resented going to Guam and having to go through Customs, and having fellow Chamorros on Guam being U.S. citizens and people from Rota not being able to get jobs. They just liked the idea of being American. And I don't think any of us ever tried to dissuade them from that.

Willens: Are you able to elaborate on the motivation in that direction? Was it, for example, significantly economic in terms of future opportunities for Americans? Was it idealistic to some extent in terms of what America stood for? How do you react to those kinds of concerns.

Sander: I think it could have been both—ideals and economic concerns. I think they probably saw economic prosperity on Guam. However, in talking with people, I think most people just talked in terms of, you know, we want a close relationship with America. Conversations could have been alternatively on economics and on being an American. I don't think, in my conversations with them, that they were saying, "I want to be an American because I can make more money." But that could have been an undercurrent.

Willens: You were in Rota during a period when the possibility of assimilation with Guam was still a status objective that was urged by some. Did you have any sense on Rota that people were interested in a formal relationship with Guam, or were they interested more in some separate, individualized relationship with the United States?

Sander: My memory is somewhat hazy here. As I remember, in about 1968, I think there was a vote on Guam on assimilation. Correct me if I'm wrong, but I think Guam said that they did not want the Northern Marianas to be a part of Guam. Is that correct?

Willens: That's essentially correct. There was a vote in the Marianas first which did reflect a positive view toward . . .

Sander: Right.

- Willens: . . . assimilation with Guam, because the Popular Party was urging that and it sort of had the majority at that point. In 1969, the Guamanians voted, and it might have been before you left and, as you recall correctly, they turned it down.
- Sander: Right.
- Willens: Do you have any recollection of how the people responded to that?
- Sander: No. I don't. I think it was just my belief that while the Northern Marianas people would have gone with Guam, as reflected in what you say was their first vote, the fact that they were rebuffed caused them to take pause and then maybe decided to go with the United States on their own.
- Willens: Did the officials that managed the Peace Corps program have any stated policies with respect to what role you should or should not play on political status issues?
- Sander: I do not remember any, but if there had been, I would think that it would have been neutral.
- Willens: Were you and your colleagues on Rota left pretty much on your own with respect to fulfilling your responsibilities, or were you supervised more closely by Peace Corps officials?
- Sander: I think we were somewhat on our own. The teachers had a more structured primary job in that they had to go to school at a certain time. There were a couple of others. One was doing some sanitation work, and I was doing municipal. The municipal office was open certain hours of the day, nearly the whole day, and I was there. So essentially I was working for the Mayor and the secretary there.
- Willens: Were you the only Peace Corps volunteer working in that capacity for the Mayor and the Municipal Council?
- Sander: That's correct.
- Willens: Did you have the option of reenlisting in the Peace Corps, or was it the practice then to serve just one term?
- Sander: I guess everybody had the possibility of reenlisting for one term, but I think usually it was to go to a different country. But I came back.
- Willens: I saw a paper in the materials authored by Tom Whittington recommending through Peace Corps channels that there be some specialized program for legal training, I think, of people who were coming to Micronesia to facilitate understanding by Micronesians of legal principles and so forth. Do you recall having any particular involvement or interest in the general problems associated with specialized legal training?
- Sander: When did he write this paper?
- Willens: I think it was about 1968. I'm not too sure what precipitated it, and I don't think anything resulted from it. I think it was specialized training of the lawyers who were going to come out there, so that they could speak the local dialect and have a better understanding of local customs, and therefore do a better job in helping people manage their own affairs.
- Sander: Well, that was the whole idea of having a few Peace Corps lawyers. We did have (I believe) ten weeks of training in Truk, and language instructors from the Marianas were sent to Truk for that period of time. So we did have some familiarity with the language. I would not say that I was at all fluent, but I could make myself understood. When we went to

the Marianas, quite often, in fact most often, people spoke English and wanted to speak English.

Willens: What is your recollection of the visit by Congressman Meeds and others to the Northern Marianas in early 1968? Did you meet with members of the delegation?

Sander: Yes. The delegation stopped on Rota for several hours, and I can't remember exactly who they were, but Congressman Foley and Congresswoman Mink and maybe another one came to the village of Song Song on Rota and spoke with the people. They had a question and answer period, and I'm sure they got an earful of people saying we want to be Americans. Congressman Meeds took a tour of the island during that time, and maybe another Congressman might have, too. Since Congressman Meeds was my Congressman from home, I found out that he would be at the airport, and I got a ride out the airport and met him there.

Willens: When he flew into Rota.

Sander: When he flew into Rota, yes.

Willens: That was your first encounter with Congressman Meeds?

Sander: Yes, it was.

Willens: He brought back from that visit a very strong sense that there was widespread interest in Micronesia to become affiliated with the United States but that support for that objective was beginning to fade because of the evident lack of any interest that was articulated by the United States. Did you share at the time that assessment? I guess based on what you've said, that was consistent with what you seen on Rota.

Sander: Yes, it's consistent with what I saw. Well, no, no. I think he probably had a broader perspective than I because he had just been on a two-week trip through all of Micronesia and could see what was happening in the other districts and then also in the Marianas. I think that in the Marianas the sentiment in favor of the United States was always very strong and not waning. If sentiment was waning in other districts it caused the sentiment in the Marianas to be stronger in favor of the United States and to disassociate themselves from the rest of Micronesia.

Willens: That's one of the interesting historical questions is whether the Northern Marianas people basically wanted to be separated from the remainder of the Trust Territory irrespective of what political status objective they favored. Did you have the sense that the people you met in the Northern Marianas wanted to shape their own future status and do so independently of the other districts?

Sander: I think so. I think the people in the Marianas always felt a little uncomfortable about being a part of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands and being together with people from the other districts. I think they felt themselves to be a little more advanced in their development and therefore felt that they should not be part of Micronesia. They felt more akin to Guam.

Willens: Were you aware during the 1968-69 timeframe of the work of the Future Status Commission of the Congress of Micronesia?

Sander: Just somewhat aware of it. I knew there was a Future Status Commission and it was out of the Congress of Micronesia.

Willens: They issued an interim report in 1968 and then a final report in the summer of 1969. Were you still stationed in Rota in the summer of 1969?

- Sander: No, not in the summer of 1969. But in 1968, I may have been attending the Congress of Micronesia. I believe I was.
- Willens: Had you heard of this consideration of a future political status called “free association” while you were out in the Trust Territory?
- Sander: I do not recollect it at this moment. I may have heard of it, but it would have been in passing. I think that it was more likely that I did not hear of it, because I was not tied closely to the Status Commission. It was just the idea that they were going to deal with future political status. And the reason I say that is when I came back and started working for Congressman Meeds, he was interested in Micronesia and he wanted to do something on future political status. I cannot remember at this point the issue of free association arising. We were more into the idea of an organic act, and we might have discussed free association more if I had been more aware of it.
- Willens: Secretary Hickel visited the Northern Marianas in early May 1969. He was authorized by the various Executive Branch departments to publicly state that the United States was interested in exploring some future political status with Micronesia and invited Micronesian representatives to come to Washington later that year to discuss it. Were you in Rota at the time that Secretary Hickel visited?
- Sander: No, I was not.
- Willens: You had left by that time?
- Sander: I had left by that time.
- Willens: How did you happen to become employed by Congressman Meeds’ office?
- Sander: I returned to the United States and I came back to Washington to talk with the Peace Corps about what more I thought could be done in Micronesia. In the course of those conversations it was recommended that I go see my Congressman and, since I had met him, I thought that was a good idea. I made an appointment, he took me to lunch, and he offered me a job.
- Willens: A very successful lunch.
- Sander: Yes, it was.
- Willens: Were your recommendations to the Peace Corps people directed at what the Peace Corps might do in Micronesia or what the United States should be doing in Micronesia?
- Sander: More what the Peace Corps could be doing.
- Willens: What were the specific recommendation if you can remember?
- Sander: I cannot remember at the moment.
- Willens: What were your general duties in working for Congressman Meeds?
- Sander: I worked as a legislative assistant for the Congressman, and among my duties was Micronesia.
- Willens: At the time, Chairman Aspinall was Chairman of the full Committee, as I recall.
- Sander: That’s correct.
- Willens: Could you describe based on your recollection the kind of influence that the Chairman of the full Committee had on deliberations within the Committee with respect to Micronesia?

- Sander: Not just with respect to Micronesia but with respect to everything, to put it mildly, he was very persuasive. He had great control.
- Willens: Was that sort of symptomatic of the control exercised by other chairmen as well before what's been termed a revolution in the early 1970's?
- Sander: That's correct.
- Willens: Did he have any particular interest or expertise in Micronesia?
- Sander: He had interest in Micronesia. I don't believe that he ever traveled out there, but he had a subject interest in Micronesia because it was under the jurisdiction of the Committee. He was a very conscientious person, so if an issue needed tending, he wanted to do something.
- Willens: Was Mr. Taylor staff director of the Committee at the time that you arrived?
- Sander: I can't remember.
- Willens: I'm not sure, either. He may have died a few years earlier, but I understand that he did have considerable substantive expertise in the Trust Territory. What is your recollection of the role played out over the next few years of Congressman Burton?
- Sander: Could we step back to Aspinall for a little bit?
- Willens: Sure.
- Sander: When I started working for Congressman Meeds in March or April of 1969, he was interested in doing something on Micronesia so he had me working on future political status. And I worked with the legislative counsel for the Committee, who was an Aspinall appointee, in developing some draft future political status legislation.
- Willens: Who was the legal assistant?
- Sander: All of a sudden I cannot remember, but he was the legislative counsel.
- Willens: For the full Committee.
- Sander: For the full Committee, right. And so while what came out of Committee was Mr. Meeds' bill, it would have some of the Aspinall Committee influence just because I was dealing with the legal counsel.
- Willens: Did you become aware when you turned to the political status issue as a Congressional staffer that the Administration had asked the Congress in the previous two years to pass a bill authorizing creation of a presidential commission to examine future status alternatives for Micronesia?
- Sander: I do not recollect that.
- Willens: Did you ever hear of why Chairman Aspinall and others concluded that they did not want to approve such an approach?
- Sander: No, I cannot remember. What I do remember is that Mr. Meeds was drafting his bill, and that after we were into the drafting a little bit, October 1969 came along and there were future political status discussions, the first ones in Washington. And so we quickly finalized the bill and introduced it just prior to those discussions in the hope of influencing—not just influencing, but giving those involved in the discussions a document to consider.
- Willens: Did you personally have any contacts with the Department of the Interior personnel who were spearheading the Executive Branch effort with respect to these negotiations?

- Sander: The only contact that we had with them was to deliver the printed bill to them when they were beginning these status discussions.
- Willens: To whom did you deliver it?
- Sander: I'm not entirely sure, but it may have been Fred Radewagen.
- Willens: In the summer of 1969, Chairman Aspinall insisted rather strongly that the Interior Department draft an organic act for the Trust Territory, and such an act was drafted and submitted to Chairman Aspinall with a letter full of caveats about the proposed legislation and the fact that it had not been cleared by the other agencies within the Executive Branch. Do you remember seeing and working with that draft?
- Sander: No, I do not.
- Willens: So your drafting effort, as you recall, was totally independent of whatever Chairman Aspinall was receiving directly from the Interior Department?
- Sander: I believe so. I do remember Chairman Aspinall complimenting Lloyd Meeds for his homework and the fact that he knew what he was talking about when he was discussing issues regarding Micronesia in the Committee.
- Willens: As I review the materials, it looks as though Congressman Meeds' approach, however, was significantly different from Chairman Aspinall's preferred approach, namely, the adoption of an organic act that would essentially impose on the Trust Territory a status comparable to Guam's. Did you perceive that there were important substantive differences between the two approaches?
- Sander: There may have been. I cannot remember the specific provisions anymore, so it's hard for me to comment.
- Willens: The most significant difference was that Congressman Meeds' proposal would have authorized a constitutional convention for the Micronesians, which he knew was a very important objective that they wanted to achieve in negotiations. The organic act approach would not have permitted such a constitutional convention. I gather from what you say then that you were not aware that within the Executive Branch there was some considerable respect for what Congressman Meeds was doing and some consideration given to making that part of the U.S. position in 1969.
- Sander: We were not aware of that.
- Willens: And you were not aware of any contacts that Congressman Meeds had with Harrison Loesch or Secretary Hickel or others involved in the negotiations?
- Sander: No, I was not. Did he?
- Willens: Very little, actually. He does not recall being aware that his proposal was weighed so heavily within the Executive Branch. It was ultimately adopted more or less as a fallback position, which was a fairly important strategic judgment that the people made at the time.
- Sander: Well, that's quite interesting. That pleases me after all these years.
- Willens: There is some virtue in this historical effort after all. After you labored on proposed legislation, was it your sense that it would in fact win the support of Chairman Aspinall and the Committee? Did you think in fact that legislation was likely to emerge?
- Sander: Well, I think we were hopeful. We were also hopeful that the Micronesians would embrace this approach, and then we felt that we could go on and deal with the Committee. Mr.

Aspinall was very headstrong, and so there was no way of telling how it would turn out, but I think Lloyd Meeds was very hopeful that something could happen.

Willens: But as you recall now, you and Congressman Meeds hoped there would be some expression of interest from the Micronesian side that might enable you to use that effectively within the Committee.

Sander: Right.

Willens: Do you recall whether you or he had any input from Micronesian representatives either before, during or after that first round of negotiations in 1969?

Sander: There is none that I can remember, because I believe at that point they were talking free association after that. I'm not positive. Is that correct?

Willens: That's very close to being correct. Did you ever hear of any assessment of the first round of negotiations? Did you hear what happened?

Sander: No.

Willens: Did you know whether the United States had offered a constitutional convention or not?

Sander: I cannot remember now.

Willens: Did you attend the briefing sessions that the Committee would often conduct in executive session where they listened to representatives of State, Interior and Defense address these issues?

Sander: I did not.

Willens: Were those typically recorded and preserved in transcript form?

Sander: If they were executive sessions, it would be only the members and maybe staff of the Committee who would be allowed, I believe. I do not have any knowledge of whether they were recorded.

Willens: Was that generally the definition of executive session then? For members only and perhaps Committee staff but not individual staffs of members of the Committee?

Sander: That's correct.

Willens: When did you first hear if you can recall that the Micronesians were embracing something called free association?

Sander: I cannot recollect.

Willens: I gather that you've reviewed some of these documents, and that most of these 1969 documents are entirely new to you, pertaining to meetings and decisions of which you were not aware.

Sander: That's correct.

Willens: With the possible exception of the statement Congressman Meeds made on the floor of the House when he introduced the bill on September 30, 1969.

Sander: Right. I was familiar with that, and I may have written it.

Willens: And that was the bill on which you collaborated with staff counsel to the full Committee.

Sander: That's correct.

- Willens: So at least to that extent, it had input from Chairman Aspinall's staff and some influence from that source.
- Sander: That's correct. I wouldn't attribute too much—I wouldn't say that Aspinall was contributing to that. We were taking Lloyd Meeds' and my ideas to the counsel, and he was making sure that it was put in proper form and where possible being made as acceptable as possible.
- Willens: Was it your sense that if that legislative approach had been adopted by Congress and was acceptable to the Micronesians that the first step was going to be to have some kind of a constitutional convention and that only after a constitution had emerged from that convention would there have been consideration by the Congress of an organic act? Was that the way it was supposed to work?
- Sander: It's such a long time that it's hard for me to remember.
- Willens: Okay. I don't want to press you on that. That's generally the impression I have from the description of the bill, and I think I have a draft of the bill, but I haven't looked at it recently.
- Sander: If I looked at it, I could figure it out.
- Willens: It did seem to reflect Congressman Meeds' judgment and yours that giving the Micronesians a constitutional convention was a very important first step to take.
- Sander: Yes, at least some kind of expression of their sentiment.
- Willens: Not just expression of sentiment but some effort to give them meaningful self-government under a constitution of their own development.
- Sander: Absolutely.
- Willens: Is that fair?
- Sander: That's fair.
- Willens: It's interesting just to digress for a minute that the thought of a convention in advance of determining status is reminiscent of what evolved in Guam through the 1970s where (not to overstate the point) every time you put the Guamanians together to do a constitutional convention, they started worrying about what relationship they were going to have with the federal government. Which perhaps inevitably turned it into a question of status, so it's always been an interesting dilemma in this area as to which ought to come first.
- Sander: Right.
- Willens: But as I hear you, there came a time, probably sometime in 1970, that you became aware that the Micronesians were articulating their sense of what free association meant. What did you understand it to be in terms of differences from a territorial status?
- Sander: I think that our consideration was that we had our proposal which we thought was fairly good bringing the Micronesians more closely to the United States and that they were wanting this free association status which was a step away. And at that point, I think we were on to other issues and we were not dealing that much with the Micronesian status. It was pretty much an Executive Branch endeavor at that point, and I had other duties in Congressman Meeds' office that took precedence at that point. If there had been something more related to our bill along those lines, I'm sure we would have pursued it, but while it was not an outright rejection of it, it may have appeared to be a stepping away, so we did not pursue it at that point.

- Willens: No, I can understand that. The way the Executive Branch negotiations went, there really wasn't much for Congress to do at the time. Chairman Aspinall adhered to the very end to his view that the United States should not feel obligated by the United Nations or in any other way to give the Micronesians anything more than territorial status. Was that a view shared by other members of the Committee? Can you recall for me the other members of the Committee that you think took a particular interest in Micronesia?
- Sander: Well, I do know that Patsy Mink and Tom Foley were interested, but I was not involved in discussions with the members.
- Willens: In 1971, the Micronesian Claims Act was voted on by the House and passed the House. I assume it also was enacted by the Senate, is that correct? That became law, did it not?
- Sander: Yes, it did.
- Willens: I have the Congressional Record here from that debate, and Chairman Aspinall is put under some considerable pressure by fellow Congressmen as to the amount of money that had been spent on Micronesia. He's very fair and effective in explaining that the United States had an obligation under the Trusteeship Agreement to help administer the Micronesians. He's put under pressure particularly by Mr. Hays who suggests, "I say we have spent enough money in the Micronesia area if you come right down to it and at the price it is costing us it would be better to sink the place than to spend any more money." Was that a view that Mr. Hays had expressed in other settings?
- Sander: I was not aware of that.
- Willens: Were there people on the Committee, if you're aware of some, who were of the view that the United States simply ought to keep the Trust Territory as it was if the people did not want to accept a status comparable to Guam's?
- Sander: I do not have any first-hand knowledge of it, but just knowing the outlook of Patsy Mink and Tom Foley and Lloyd Meeds, I don't know if they would have been that dogmatic about it.
- Willens: Oh, I think quite the contrary. They weren't. Congressman Saylor seems to have taken a different view from time to time. Did you have any occasion to hear him state his views with respect to the Trust Territory?
- Sander: No, I did not.
- Willens: What do you recall as being your next involvement in any respect with the Micronesian situation?
- Sander: When I came to the Department of the Interior in 1973.
- Willens: When was that? 1973?
- Sander: 1973.
- Willens: Approximately when in the year?
- Sander: October 1973.
- Willens: And between 1970 and 1973, you do not have much of a recollection of any involvement or awareness of the Micronesian negotiations situation?
- Sander: That's correct.
- Willens: So just to trigger a few points, then. Were you aware of the appointment of Ambassador

Williams in early 1971 to be the President's personal representative with respect to these negotiations?

Sander: I may have been, but it's probably overshadowed by memories of him when I came to Interior and the issues occurring then.

Willens: In 1971, as evidenced by some of the materials that I made available to you, the question of Marianas separatism seems to have prompted Congressman Meeds and others to solicit legal opinions as to whether the Marianas could secede from the Trust Territory. Does that issue trigger any recollection as to what might have prompted these requests for legal opinions?

Sander: No, it doesn't. I'm sorry.

Willens: Do you have any recollection of when you first became aware that the Marianas had requested separate negotiations with the United States and that the United States had agreed?

Sander: No, I don't recollect anything on that. My recollections on separate negotiations stem from after October 1973. When I was here at Interior we were dealing very closely with the Office of Micronesian Status Negotiations and their primary focus was the Northern Mariana Islands.

Willens: So you came into the Department at a time when the Office of Micronesian Status Negotiations was I guess preparing for what I guess would be termed the third round of Marianas negotiations in November or December in 1973.

Sander: Right.

Willens: I've seen a reference somewhere that the Office of Micronesian Status Negotiations, although located here at Interior, was not funded by Interior, and it's been suggested there was some statutory bar to funding of that office by this Department. Do you know whether that's a fact or not?

Sander: I don't know of any statutory bar. I think it was just agreed that that office would be housed here at Interior but I believe it was more under the Departments of State and Defense. Interior contributed possibly personnel and opinions.

Willens: Could be that because it was housed here, it may have been thought that the funding then ought to come from other agencies since Interior was making its contribution in kind, so to speak.

Sander: That's right. We were.

Willens: Before we leave the Congress, I would like to hear from you if you have any recollection as to the process and personalities involved in I guess about 1971 when the new Congress began. There was in the Interior Committee (I gather) a radical change in the procedures and the leadership. Do you have any recollection as to what's been termed a major revolution in terms of limiting the power of the Chairman of the Committee and enhancing the power of the subcommittee chairs, for example?

Sander: What year was that?

Willens: It would have been in early 1971, and although I think Chairman Aspinall may have continued his chair of the full Committee until he was defeated in 1972, I think Phil Burton became Chairman of the subcommittee I think in the outset of that Congress in 1971. And in a recent biography of Phil Burton, I've seen reference to the fact that the

revolution within the Committee that he and Tom Foley and others put together was sort of reflective of what they were trying to do in the House of Representatives as a whole.

Sander: You are jogging my memory a little bit, and it does seem that that happened, but I do not have anything really to say about it, except that there was a shift to the subcommittees at about that time.

Willens: Do you recall that Subcommittee Chairman Burton then was able to hire his own staff people to assist with the Subcommittee work?

Sander: It was probably true, but I do not. I remember that it was especially true with the successor to Aspinall that the Subcommittees had all the power.

Willens: Who was his successor?

Sander: I forget his name. He was from Florida, an elderly gentleman.

Willens: Not Pepper?

Sander: No.

Willens: Two people who were closely associated with Congressman Burton are deceased—Adrian Winkel and Pat Krause. Did you work with either of them?

Sander: Both of them.

Willens: Could you give me the benefit of your recollection as to their interest in the Trust Territory and any contribution they might have made.

Sander: Both were very interested in the Trust Territory and very sincere in that interest. Adrian preceded Pat in the position. Both were very concerned about the Trust Territory—helping the Trust Territory, helping the people. Pat I think maybe was a little more personal about her desire to help. She was very worried about the victims of the nuclear testing. Adrian went on to become High Commissioner.

Willens: Your recollection is that he moved to be High Commissioner and she succeeded him in the position that he had held.

Sander: That's correct. Then she continued to hold that position after Congressman Burton was succeeded by Seiberling.

Willens: By whom?

Sander: Seiberling.

Willens: Seiberling. After Congressman Burton died?

Sander: Yes.

Willens: Congressman Burton, based on my encounters back then and based on what I've read about him, seemed to have had this generalized desire to help the disadvantaged. And he is reported to sort have lumped the Micronesians into this group of people who needed his assistance. How would you evaluate his interest in the Micronesians and his commitment to assisting them?

Sander: I think you summarize it quite well. He was very interested in issues for persons who were somewhat disadvantaged, and I believe that he felt that the Micronesians were possibly at a disadvantage vis a vis the large and sophisticated United States. That aside, he was a politician who was very much interested in the exercise of power aside from the issues. And while you could find one politician using the procedure in the Congress to his advantage and you might find liberal politicians on the other side berating the use of

that power, quite often you would not find Phil Burton berating that use. He once told me that it depends on whose ox is being gored, because he will then turn around and use that same procedure himself to get to achieve his goal. So he was the master tactician and strategist in the Congress and known for that at that time and he used it to the Micronesians' benefit. In fact, at one point there was a territories bill that was taken to the floor of the House. It was reported from committee, taken to the floor of the House, voted on and passed by the House and written before it went in the Congressional Record, is my understanding. It was written after it was voted on.

Willens: What did the members have in front of them then when they voted?

Sander: I don't know.

Willens: We don't know if that was before the Covenant or after the Covenant.

Sander: Before, I believe.

Willens: Well, that is an interesting point, because the recent biography that I've dipped into does suggest that in the period while you were on the Hill and up through 1976, he was growing toward the peak of his power because many people expected him to be the next majority leader, which he lost by a single vote I gather in 1976.

Sander: That's correct.

Willens: So I assume that in 1973, 1974 and 1975, people were looking at him as a very powerful politician.

Sander: Absolutely.

Willens: So it does not surprise you that when the Covenant ultimately came before the House, it was approved by the full Committee without dissent and went to the House of Representatives and was enacted very quickly.

Sander: That's correct.

Willens: Is it correct that the Covenant was actually considered by the House late in one evening? I've seen something in the literature suggesting that it came up for a vote at midnight, but I wasn't around at the time. Do you have any recollection exactly of the circumstances under which the Covenant was put to a vote in the House?

Sander: I do not. I was here at Interior at the time. My primary task was not dealing with status issues, but I do remember that we were anticipating that it would come up very soon, and in those days we didn't have CSPAN, and so we didn't know when things were actually happening, but it could have been late at night. That was a tactic of his, to do things late at night when there weren't very many people around, and oftentimes late in the session when people were ready to go home and so the votes would be there just to get out.

Willens: Let's go back then to 1973 when you moved from the Hill to work here at Interior. Had you decided at that point in your life to make a long-term commitment to public service?

Sander: Absolutely not. It was going to be very short term.

Willens: My partner who was honored at lunch today said he came to Washington in 1960 for a one-year term and has stayed for 36.

Sander: Right. When I took the job at Interior, there were a number of issues that needed attention for the Territories, like maybe a definitive number of six or something like that. We put

together a bill, and I thought well, that will take care of the Territories, and I was ready to have gone, but we're still dealing with Territorial issues.

Willens: Did you have some specific assignments when you came to the Department in 1973?

Sander: Yes. I was dealing with Congressional Affairs and drafting legislation and statements of positions dealing with Territorial issues. There was another gentleman here in our office who dealt specifically with status matters.

Willens: Who was that?

Sander: James Berg.

Willens: Do you know where Jim is now?

Sander: I understand he's in Brussels, possibly working for International Paper.

Willens: I heard that too, a couple of years ago. Your information is perhaps more recent than mine.

Willens: Was funding a continued problem with the Trust Territory in the early 1970s when you came over to Interior?

Sander: Oh, we were always very much concerned with funding. Funding in the early 1969 or—I can't remember the exact years—started like at \$6 million. We got it up to \$100 million a year. So we were very concerned with funding, believed that Micronesia had been underfunded for a long period of time and that there was much to be done. So we were continually asking for more funding and getting it.

Willens: By the time you reached Interior in 1973, you had had some five years or so of experience in one capacity or another with Micronesia. Did you have any firm assessment at the time as to how well the TTPI Administration had governed the Territory over the years?

Sander: The Trust Territory government was under continual criticism from almost every quarter. But I would say that it was a difficult job. The book was being written as you were proceeding because no one in the United States had dealt with a Trust Territory before.

Willens: What do you mean by that?

Sander: Well, what I mean is that we hadn't had a long history of Trust Territories.

Willens: But a lot of the people who were in the TTPI government had come from the Territorial Affairs Department and had worked in Alaska and Hawaii.

Sander: I was not aware of that personnel situation. I know that there was criticism.

Willens: But I think you're absolutely right. It was a very easy group to criticize, whether you were Micronesian, a Peace Corps volunteer, a Congressman or someone back here.

Sander: That's right. You had all these people who were on the outside and not having to make these decisions who were doing the criticism. Like you could have the Congress criticizing Peace Corps volunteers who were pretty much free agents and they could see problems on their individual islands that were not being solved immediately when there was a request, and so there would be criticism there. The Congress of Micronesia was started in 1965, and that was certainly a forum for criticism, as it should be and was probably intended. But I would say that although the Trust Territory government probably could have done a better job with more money and more people, the United States probably did not do too bad a job. Because we did not end up like Belgium in the Belgian Congo with all kinds of riots and civil wars.

- Willens: And those were issues that were of some concern to Congressman Meeds and to others, as I recall. Who did you work for here at the Interior Department when you came over in 1973? Was that when Stanley Carpenter was here?
- Sander: Stanley Carpenter.
- Willens: And was Fred Radewagen here?
- Sander: Fred Radewagen was his deputy.
- Willens: Did they stay here through the conclusion of the Nixon/Ford Administrations?
- Sander: No. I cannot quite remember, but I think they stayed up until Ford, because then I think Mr. Zeder came into the Ford Administration.
- Willens: I see. Did any of these people that you've just mentioned take an active role in the status negotiations or did they find themselves more or less isolated from that work by Ambassador Williams and the Office of Micronesian Studies?
- Sander: You're talking about Carpenter and Radewagen?
- Willens: Carpenter and Radewagen.
- Sander: I think they took an active role. Interior, Defense, State and other agencies were involved. State, Interior and Defense were the primary agencies, and when issues arose, Interior had its input.
- Willens: Did you go to any of the meetings of the inter-agency task force or group that would consider the progress of the negotiations and what changes, if any, to recommend in Ambassador Williams' instructions?
- Sander: I can't remember then. Probably not. I only went to two or three during my tenure here.
- Willens: What do you remember about them, if anything?
- Sander: I do not even remember the subject matter, but it would have been probably after the Northern Marianas Covenant was agreed to.
- Willens: I don't know whether you had the opportunity to review some of the materials that I provided you with respect to the Congressional interest in the Covenant as it was being negotiated. There are several memoranda written by me and others in my office about meetings with Congressmen or their staff, and one long report from Saipan written by Jim White, who was Executive Director of the Marianas Political Status Commission, about a meeting in Saipan with members of Congress at which you may have been present.
- Sander: Was this the Burton trip?
- Willens: This was the Burton trip.
- Sander: I was present.
- Willens: What is your recollection of how you got involved in that trip, since I understand at that time you were with Interior?
- Sander: I was with Interior, and it was the custom at that time when Congressional delegations traveled that they would contact the Executive Branch agency in charge and a person was usually sent to accompany the delegation on the trip, and I was that person.
- Willens: Do you have any recollection that perhaps had been refreshed by some of the documents as to what Congressman Burton and others told the members of the Marianas Political

Status Commission? Do you remember anything about the meeting in terms of the personalities involved?

Sander: There may have been several meetings, and I may not have been at all of them. I remember one in particular where he was very concerned about taxation.

Willens: Yes. That continued to be of interest to him.

Sander: The entire time. He was worried about the Marianas becoming a tax haven for Americans who were trying to avoid taxation.

Willens: He met, as I understand it, with certain of the Guam political leadership, either Legislative or Executive Branch or both, I forget which. Were you present at his meetings in Guam?

Sander: I do not recollect that.

Willens: More generally, one of the issues that occupied the concern of several Executive Branch officials was the impact that the Marianas negotiations was going to have on Guam. And there's some suggestion in the material that representations may have been made to the Guamanian political leaders that whatever emerged from the Marianas negotiations would ultimately be attainable by them as well. Do you recall any debate within the Executive Branch as to how to deal with the Guamanian concern that the Northern Marianas was getting a better deal than they had?

Sander: I do not recall any specifics. I do know that that was an issue.

Willens: Has it continued to be an issue?

Sander: It is an issue because the people in Guam are seeking a commonwealth status right now. I should not necessarily say the people of Guam, the leaders of Guam are seeking commonwealth status. And when you say commonwealth status, commonwealth is as it's defined, and they may be defining it much more broadly than the Northern Marianas commonwealth status. And that's possibly part of their problem in that there has been no resolution on Guam commonwealth because they are seeking much more than the Northern Marianas have.

Willens: One of the other issues that came up on Saipan when Congressman Burton and others, including yourself, were visiting, was that he urged the Marianas leaders not to press for special provisions that would differentiate them from Guam, and he urged strongly that there be as few of such differences as possible. Do you have any recollection of that kind of discussion?

Sander: I could see him doing that, because I think his hope in the future was that Guam and the Northern Marianas could be brought together.

Willens: Based on your experience and at the time, did you think that was a viable and attainable objective?

Sander: I do not know that I had an opinion at the time as to whether it was absolutely realistic. I think probably most people in the American government thought that it made sense. These are two small islands, groups of islands, or one island and a group of islands, in a relatively small area, and that it would make sense to administer it all under one government. So I think Americans tended to think that that would be a good idea. So maybe it was more a hope than a reality.

Willens: The report that I got of this meeting from my colleague out there was on the whole fairly positive, although it identified the issues that were of concern to Congressmen Burton and Foley in particular. Another document which is not in this volume that I've given

- you reports from the U.S. side what Congressman Burton told Ambassador Williams that he had accomplished in this meeting. And one thing he told Ambassador Williams was that he had told the Marianas leaders, my client, not to let the lawyers “screw it all up” by asking for too many special prerogatives. This was, of course, music to the ears of the U.S. negotiators. Do you recall any discussion at all as to the role of counsel in these negotiations and whether that was a plus or a minus?
- Sander: No, I do not recall the role of counsel. I do not (in the meeting that I’m thinking of) remember counsel as being an outstanding feature of the meeting.
- Willens: I think that’s probably good. Did you have a sense back then that the inter-agency group was an effective mechanism for dealing with the Office of Micronesian Status Negotiations and the entire subject matter?
- Sander: Well, it was a mechanism for bringing input from varying agencies. As to whether or not the inter-agency group held sway over the Office of Micronesian Status Negotiations, I’m not sure how effective it was. From an Interior point of view, it may have been that there was so much knowledge of the negotiations in the Office of Micronesian Status Negotiations that they were able to prevail on most issues even though Interior may have had another view that Interior thought was a better view.
- Willens: Did you ever hear of any particular input made to the process by Dr. Kissinger?
- Sander: No.
- Willens: What was your assessment from your vantage point.
- Sander: Well, I guess on Kissinger, I think there was some famous statement about Micronesia being small.
- Willens: I’m not sure that’s fairly attributed to Dr. Kissinger.
- Sander: It may not be.
- Willens: I’ve seen that reference, too, but in the historical work that I’ve done, I’ve now seen that statement attributed to someone ten years earlier.
- Sander: Good. Whatever I heard was strictly hearsay.
- Willens: I’ll have to ask Dr. Kissinger when I interview him. What was your assessment of Ambassador Williams and the way in which he conducted the negotiations?
- Sander: He was very forceful and driven. He wanted to see these negotiations on the Northern Marianas concluded under his watch. And he was very purposeful.
- Willens: How did his staff function under his leadership? They seemed on the whole to be quite productive.
- Sander: I believe so.
- Willens: Who succeeded him? Was that Ambassador Maynard and then Rosenblatt?
- Sander: I do not remember Maynard, but Ambassador Rosenblatt was . . .
- Willens: After the Covenant went to the House and was passed with ease, it encountered more opposition in the Senate. Did you participate in any of the discussions or the lobbying efforts on the Senate side with respect to the Covenant?
- Sander: No, I did not.

- Willens: Did you have any sense at the time as to what was prompting the sort of unexpected opposition from Senators as diverse as Senator Kennedy, Senator Robert Byrd and Senator Pell?
- Sander: No. At that time, I was really dealing with other issues. I wasn't dealing with the Covenant. I knew that it was being considered, but I have no recollection of the intricacies of the debate.
- Willens: Were you involved in the public lands issue and the question of formulating a U.S. policy for the return of public lands to Micronesia?
- Sander: I may have been somewhat involved. That was mostly done in the Office of Micronesian Status Negotiations. However, there was some kind of Secretarial Order on it, and I may have been involved in that, but I have very little recollection of it.
- Willens: Did you remain in this office when Ruth Van Cleve returned as Director of the Office in the Carter Administration?
- Sander: I left in the Ford Administration in 1976 and went to the Virgin Islands for two years.
- Willens: I see.
- Sander: And in the middle of that, in 1977 Ruth came back, and so I was on an Inter-Governmental Personnel Act transfer, so technically she was my boss even though I was down there. And then I came back in 1978.
- Willens: What did you do in the Virgin Islands?
- Sander: I worked for the government of the Virgin Islands on federal programs.
- Willens: So you were working directly for the Governor?
- Sander: Yes.
- Willens: And sort of helping him supervise the administration of federal programs down there?
- Sander: Yes.
- Willens: That must have been a chore.
- Sander: Yes. I'm not sure we ever did get a hold on this.
- Willens: When you returned, did you have any connection with the Micronesian negotiations in the late 1970s and early 1980s?
- Sander: No, I really didn't.
- Willens: Did you have any responsibilities with the new Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands? There was a Constitutional Convention in 1976, and it was approved by either inaction or a formal statement by the Executive Branch. Then there was an election and the constitutional government began in January of 1978. Did you have any dealings with the commonwealth then over that period of time?
- Sander: I really didn't. Was Jim Berg still in our office at that time?
- Willens: Jim Berg could have been in your office.
- Sander: He transferred to OMSN.
- Willens: Yes, I always thought he was sort of on the staff of OMSN. But then he ultimately went to the State Department after some of the freely associated state Compacts were enacted.
- Sander: Right. That was in 1986.

- Willens: Was it as late as that?
- Sander: In 1986, they became effective, and I can't remember whether he went there before or after that. Many provisions were made applicable before.
- Willens: And so many were made applicable only when the Trusteeship Agreement was terminated and so forth and so on.
- Sander: Right.
- Willens: A lot has transpired with respect to the Trust Territory since you first went out there in 1967. And you've worked a good deal on insular affairs since. Do you have any overall assessment you can offer with respect to the Covenant as perhaps the only sort of negotiated document that tries to spell out the legal, political and economic relationship between an insular area and the federal government. Do you think that that has withstood the test of time, or are there important problems there that you think need addressing?
- Sander: Well, I think the Covenant relationship has benefited the Northern Mariana Islands economically. They started out with very small budgets for their government, like \$5 million. They're up over \$200 million annually now in a very short period of time, in 20 years. And there was support under the Covenant coming from the United States to the Northern Mariana Islands in the early years. And it's continuing now, but it has shifted to capital infrastructure from operations. They fully support their own operations at a much higher level. And all funding is vastly curtailed from the federal government. So what that shows is that their tax base has grown dramatically, and that is an understatement. Their economy is booming, and so they are able to be self-supportive. I think you can contrast the freely-associated states of the Federated States of Micronesia, the Marshalls, it's not fair to bring Palau in at this time. But at least the other two where they are in free association with the United States, they do not have all of the advantages that the Covenant has. They do not have American citizenship, the American flag, and that may all contribute to the economic success of the Northern Mariana Islands. The idea that the American flag brings stability in many eyes, and so investors feel that they can invest with a minimum amount of risk. And so to that extent, I think there is a great deal of success in the Northern Mariana Islands.
- Willens: What do you think have been the principal shortcomings of the relationship either on the federal side or on the Commonwealth side?
- Sander: Well, on the Commonwealth side, the one that we are most concerned with now is immigration into the Commonwealth by third country nationals, really second country nationals. I think that the United States did not believe that the immigration would be the extent to which it is. You know, nearly 60 percent of the population in the Northern Mariana Islands are now other than United States citizens. And United States citizens include predominantly Chamorros who lived in the Northern Marianas, Carolinians, and a few persons from the United States. The remainder are imported labor to work in the economic miracle. The part of the economy and the imported labor that receives the greatest criticism is the garment industry. That persons are brought in quite often from the Peoples Republic of China to work in the garment industry. "Made in USA labels" are sewn into the garments and brought into the United States. And there's a very big question as to whether or not this imported labor is contributing to the Commonwealth more than their cost. In fact, a study was done at one point that showed that for every \$1,000 of benefit that an immigrant brought to the Commonwealth, it was costing the Commonwealth \$1,100.

- Willens: Caused by additional demands on infrastructure and things of that sort?
- Sander: Infrastructure, everything, yes. And so that is a questionable area that we're still dealing with. It has caused friction with Guam on these issues and also with the textile producers in the United States.
- Willens: One of the complaints that one hears a fair amount is that there really is not very much continuity or institutional memory with respect between the federal government on the one hand and insular areas on the other. You're someone who's been involved in this over a period of a couple of decades. Do you feel that there's been sort of a consistent policy taken over the years toward the insular areas or in particular to the Northern Marianas, or has it changed over times in ways that you think are necessary?
- Sander: I think that the United States policy toward the Commonwealth has been consistent. In the relationship, the Northern Marianas leaders over the last decade or so have emphasized self-government as opposed to the Northern Mariana Islands being a part of the American political family in seeking advantage in a number of areas. But through the entire relationship, the United States has interpreted the self-government and the Covenant relationship in a consistent manner, I believe.
- Willens: Okay, Steve, I think that sort of brings us to an end. Is there anything you'd like to say that you haven't said with respect to the general subject matter?
- Sander: No, I think that your questioning brought out a lot that I hadn't thought about for a while.
- Willens: Well, I appreciate your time and effort.