

## INTERVIEW OF JAMES S. SIROK

by Howard P. Willens

March 8, 1995

- Willens: James S. Sirok served in the Attorney General's Office early on in the Commonwealth's recent history, and has practiced law in the private sector for the last ten or so years. Jim, I appreciate your time in making yourself available for this interview. Could we begin by your providing me with some background regarding your education?
- Sirok: I was born and raised in Indiana. Went to high school in Indiana. Graduated in 1964. Went into the service in 1967, in the Navy. I was stationed in various places in the United States, and the last two years in the Philippines. Got out in 1972. Went to college, two years at a junior college in California, College of the Sequoias in Visalia; and then on up to the University of California at Berkeley. I graduated in 1976 with a degree in electrical engineering and computer science.
- Willens: After you graduated from Berkeley, did you seek employment as an engineer?
- Sirok: No, I went right into law school at that time.
- Willens: Did you go to law school at Berkeley?
- Sirok: I went to law school at Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington. I graduated there in 1979, and made my way to Saipan in September of 1979.
- Willens: What brought opportunities in Saipan to your attention after graduation from law school?
- Sirok: I was in my third year when several individuals from the Marianas came in as first year students. One was of Filipino ancestry. I had taken Tagali (Tagalog) as a language at Berkeley—you had to take a language to graduate. So every time I got a chance to be able to converse in Tagali with somebody, especially up in Spokane, Washington, I took the opportunity to do that. So I recognized this particular individual as a Filipino and I began talking to him. That was Ray Yana, who is an attorney out here, also.
- Willens: How do you spell the last name?
- Sirok: Y - A - N - A. Raynaldo Yana. One of the individuals who was on our certificate of identity lawsuit, the Pangelinan lawsuit.
- Willens: And was he living in Saipan?
- Sirok: He was living on Saipan, and he was a schoolteacher. He was able to convert his status over to an individual eligible for a certificate of identity because of the length of his residence on Saipan in the Marianas. So he was one of those individuals, alien individuals, that had renounced their citizenship and then filed for certificates of identity, one of the few. As a result he was able to then go back to the United States and go to law school together with two other individuals, Ed Manibusan—he is Judge Manibusan now—and a guy named Vicente Seman, who is not employed here in the Commonwealth as an attorney. He's not practicing anywhere.
- Willens: What attracted the three Marianas students to Gonzaga as a place to study?
- Sirok: I think my understanding is that at that time Judge Herb Soll was very active in trying to get some local indigenous people into law school. Obviously there's a need for doctors

and lawyers and so forth. And so as part of a program he contacted Gonzaga and had some relationships with some of the deans there and was able to get these three individuals to come in on a program. I ran into them, began talking with Ray Yana, then met Ed Manibusan and Ben Seman. During the conversations we discussed Saipan. At that time, that was in 1978, the Commonwealth really came in to existence. They discussed the need for attorneys at that time out here. I did not have a job and did not write to anyone. I did write to Mike White to ask him whether there were any openings in his law office and he was kind enough to write back indicating there weren't, but he still encouraged me to come out. So, as adventurous as I was, I packed my bags and bought a one-way ticket and put everything in storage and jumped on a plane with no job—and didn't know anybody—and I came out here in September of 1979.

Willens: When did you find employment out here?

Sirok: I came in on a Wednesday afternoon. Checked into the old Royal Taga Hotel, in the annex there. Thursday morning I walked across the street to the Nauru Building to the Attorney General's Office and I said I wanted a job. They said: "You're hired," and I started working that Friday morning.

Willens: No requirement of a resume or detailed investigation?

Sirok: I had resumes with me that I'd brought, but at that time I had figured that I would live on the island a couple of years and go back to the States and start my profession. If I could find a job in the legal profession that would be fine, otherwise I was set to pump gas or stock shelves in a grocery or whatever. I did not know that at that time the minimum wage was 85 cents an hour, and the cost of living was very, very high. I mean just for a cracker box apartment it was \$300-\$350 bucks a month. So at 85 cents an hour, you know, it's very difficult. Then you had to buy food which was also expensive. So I was very lucky. I was in the right place at the right time. The Attorney General's Office was very low on staff at that time.

Willens: Who was the Attorney General at the outset of the Camacho Administration?

Sirok: There was no attorney general. They had submitted the name of Mike DiAngelo to the Legislature for approval. He sat, as I understand it, in the acting position for a period of time before I got here. They did not confirm the appointment.

Willens: Was he a local person?

Sirok: He was an American. They did not confirm the appointment, and so that threw him out. Rather come back into the Attorney General's Office, he decided to take a trip. He had been out here for a period of time, as I understand it. When I came into the island he was not here, he was on his trip. But an individual named Jim Sinding was the acting Attorney General. There was really no one but him handling the Civil Division, so I fell in and was able to help him in the Civil Division.

Willens: Just to reflect on the staffing of the office at the time, approximately how many lawyers were in the AG's office when you were first employed there?

Sirok: There were only three of us. There were other attorneys who were working as assistant attorney generals but they were working for other departments. There was an attorney named Ken Larson, who is teaching on Guam now, who was the attorney for DNR, Department of Natural Resources. And then Ken Govendo was on a special contract as the attorney for the Board of Elections, but he was identified under that particular contract as assistant attorney general (as I understand it) though he never sat in the office.

- Willens: So the other three of you were responsible for both the civil and the criminal side?
- Sirok: The criminal side was handled solely by an individual by the name of Glen Price. "Thatch" was his nickname because he had curly hair and it reminded people of thatched roofs—it was that color. He was the only one handling the criminal division. Jim Sinding was the civil side, but he was involved with a lot of disputes going on at that time between the Governor (this side of the street, the administrative side) and the legislative side. Jim Sinding had his hands full advising the Governor.
- Willens: So you went immediately into a full load of civil matters?
- Sirok: Of the civil matters. The very first case was a case involving an initiative to be placed on the ballot to take away gambling—to de-legalize, I guess you would say. The Legislature had passed a casino gambling law and there was a Casino Gambling Commission in place that had been taking applications for casino licenses.
- Willens: Was that a law that was enacted by the First Commonwealth Legislature?
- Sirok: Yes.
- Willens: It was not left over from the District Legislature before the Commonwealth became effective?
- Sirok: No. This came out of the First Legislature. A very controversial law. And the Church and several of the community leaders rallied against it, and had put together a petition to place an initiative on the ballot to basically invalidate that casino gambling law. They didn't actually say we want casino illegal but they basically wanted to repeal the casino gambling law. That was the focus.
- Willens: Did that essentially take place?
- Sirok: That took place. So there was litigation as far as the qualified number of voters to be able to put it on the ballot. That was my first litigation.
- Willens: How long did you remain employed by the AG's office?
- Sirok: I worked there until around January of 1983. I remember my son was born December of 1983 and it was right after he was born.
- Willens: December 1982 or December 1983?
- Sirok: December of 1982. So January of 1983. And I was lucky because I was on a year-to-year contract. I first came in under a three-month contract, so I came in from September to January on the three-month contract. And then they went to a year contract. So my contracts ran from basically January 1 until December 31. The Camacho Administration went out January 8, 1983.
- Willens: Did your departure have anything to do with the change in Administration?
- Sirok: It did.
- Willens: How so?
- Sirok: Actually he went out, excuse me, in 1982, January 8, 1982. But one of his last acts was he renewed my contract. When it came time for the new Administration, who had been in office for a year, to renew my contract, they simply didn't renew it because I was looked at as one of the Camacho boys at that time.
- Willens: Okay, let's go back then to your evaluation of the office of Attorney General and the first Administration in the period from 1979 after you arrived until you left the government

in January of 1983. Some of the people that I've talked to about this Administration—putting personalities aside for the moment—focus on whether the Marianas political leaders were in fact prepared for the responsibilities that were to be assumed by them under the Constitution beginning in January of 1978. Did you have any recollection of the extent to which the executive and the legislative branches seemed prepared to go forward and implement the responsibilities they were given under the Constitution?

Sirok: Let's start with the administrative branch because I sat in there. I think that as far as being prepared, I say, "No," in the sense that they had to bring in Americans to put in the key directorship posts, the directors of the various administrative agencies. I say they weren't prepared because there were simply no local indigenous people that even the Governor and his group felt were qualified to handle those particular posts. And so they went outside of the Commonwealth and brought in several Americans for the Department of Education, for Commerce and Labor, for various key posts.

Willens: But under the TTPI and separate administration that took place in the Northern Marianas a few years earlier local people had served in those positions, isn't that correct? Is it your recollection that there was general dissatisfaction with the quality or competence of the people that had filled those positions?

Sirok: No, I think not from my standpoint. I think that there probably were people out there that would have been qualified, but I think it was more of the politics of it. I think that you had a clear split between the Republicans and the Democrats. And I wasn't here prior to 1978 so I don't know how the politics played out during the TT Administration. But I know that some of those individuals who were in those in key posts during that period of time probably were lined up on the Republican side when the Democratic side was in charge of the Administration at that time. The Republican side controlled the Legislature and the Democrats had the governorship so they controlled the Administration.

Willens: Well, one aspect that interests me is that there had been in the 10 years before considerable criticism of the TTPI Administration and in particular its reliance on expatriate or stateside officials. Did you have any sense that some of the TTPI wanted to remain on the island and were available to assist in the new Administration?

Sirok: That's a difficult question from just now trying to think back. That draws a blank. I don't think I can answer that question. I do know that during the time that I was there, while I felt that it wasn't so much that they were in favor of having to bring in individuals to put into these key posts (which included the judgeships—all of the judges were Americans—also the Attorney General—though they had local attorneys on the island) it was more that for the time being that was what they were going to have to do. Until other individuals came along, I don't know, through some kind of a tutelage or as a result of being further educated abroad, or whatever. But at that particular time my opinion is that there was a feeling that there simply weren't qualified individuals available to take care of these key positions.

Willens: Did the Lieutenant Governor, Mr. Ada, play a significant role in the Administration?

Sirok: I think he did. That's my father-in-law now, you have to understand that. I'm not biased or prejudiced on this. I think he did. He was a very savvy administrator. He had been administering the TT and this district for a long, long period of time. And so, I think they relied heavily on his advice and his opinions, and I think they still do today, the Democrats and the Republicans to a certain extent.

Willens: I have interviewed him, and I've known him over the years. He has a very retentive memory

and some strongly held views. I have heard, although not from him, that the relationship with the Governor was not as close as it might have been, although that's a sentiment that most lieutenant governors probably have with respect to governors. Did you have any sense of disenchantment between the Governor and the Lieutenant Governor while you were serving in that Administration?

Sirok: I didn't. I didn't. It wasn't exposed to people who were in positions like myself. But I can understand that. Because here you had an administrator that had been in there for a long period of time and sort of knew, I guess you can say, the way to do it or had his ideas on how to do it. And now he's sitting there with a new administrator who was a hospital [administrator]. I mean his background, Dr. Camacho's, was with the health side of it, not so much real political administration side of it. And I think there probably could have been some frustrations that came out from an experienced administrator having to sit second chair to someone that didn't have that kind of experience.

Willens: Well, one thing you may not be familiar with, but let me ask the question anyway. During the 1976 and the 1977 period a set of plans were developed under the auspices of an office called the Office of Transitional Studies and Planning as I recall. Pete A. Tenorio was active in that office at the time. And it's my understanding that these various studies were designed to help the new Administration to get off to a reasoned and productive start. Do you have any personal knowledge whether any of these plans and organizational programs were adopted by the new Administration?

Sirok: I don't have any personal knowledge. I have heard about them. I don't know of any particular plan that came out of that study [that] was adopted but I know there were some—they would go back and review different plans. During that first part of the Administration there was an Office of Planning and Budget and I swear we had planners out here back to back to back to back. A large amount of federal money was spent on various plans that were developed for various issues and various subjects on the Commonwealth. I mean we had stacks and stacks of plans that were developed. So it does not surprise me. But I think that the problem that faced the administrators in the first Administration was not so much the fact that there was a lack of planning or there were plans to be followed, it was just the politics of it. I think that's where we talk about preparation. You had individuals on both sides—the administrative side and legislative side—that probably were, obviously were, prepared, able and capable to administer the Commonwealth government as we envisioned it through the Constitution and the Covenant. But the politics got in the way.

Willens: You mentioned the Legislature before but did not follow up on that because you spoke initially about the Executive Branch. Was the First Legislature dominated by the Republican Party?

Sirok: Yes.

Willens: Who were some of the active leaders of the First Legislature?

Sirok: You had Benjamin Manglona. Tenorio was over there.

Willens: Which Tenorio?

Sirok: What was it? Pete P. Then Lifoifo was involved. Mafnas was involved. Although he was in the Personnel Office, he was involved as a heavy duty individual in the Republican Party.

Willens: Is that the same . . .

Sirok: Jess Mafnas.

- Willens: Is that the same Mafnas who's now deputy speaker in the House of Representatives?
- Sirok: That's right. You had Oscar Rasa.
- Willens: Oscar Rasa. That one elected to the Legislature?
- Sirok: Right, right. So you have the individuals that are politically very bright in the sense of knowing how to work the system, the political system. And I think what happened is they dug their heels in on the Republican side. You probably had some bad feelings that came out of the political election. This was the first big political election like this and I think it really divided up families. Because politics out here, when you go to the polls, it's not so much issue-oriented as in the United States. It's family oriented because of jobs. There wasn't a private industry out there. People survived by having government jobs and so politics was a very crucial and important part of individuals' lives and people wanted to make sure they were on the right side of the fence, to be able to have a government job to be able to survive out here, especially if you were on Tinian or Rota. It made all the difference in the world. And then on the other side you have the negative fallout. If you had a Democrat that campaigned heavily and lost the election to Republicans, it's not only that Democrat and his family that are going to suffer, it's going to go down to the line to the aunts, and the uncles, and the cousins and people that are fully tied in with that family that aren't going to get the jobs. I think a lot of strong feelings came out of that election. A lot of sentiment that simply couldn't be, you know, passed away. There were feelings of probably trying to get revenge somehow or another, and just simply feelings of being unable to compromise. So there simply wasn't an idea of the Republicans and the Democrats trying to work together for a better government to develop. It was the Republicans trying to get what they could get for themselves and their families politically and do it this way. And the Democrats over here trying to do it this way, and without a feeling of compromise. And so you had a ton of executive wars, rather than legislation.
- Willens: Was that because the Republican Legislature was simply not responsive to the legislative proposals that came from the Executive Branch?
- Sirok: Right. Same way with Mike DiAngelo. There's nothing wrong with his appointment. He would have been, as I understand it, a great attorney general, well-qualified and able to do it. It was merely because he was an appointment from a Democratic Governor and the Republicans were not going to concede to the Democratic Governor on that side for anything. They wanted certain things from legislation, the Governor wasn't going to give them that. And so they decided, well if you're not going to give us this, we're not going to give you anything you want over here. And a lot of the early appointments suffered as a result of that attitude. The attorney general obviously was one of them and I think that's pretty well taken by everybody.
- Willens: Was there a dispute over budget or any more substantive issues that you can recall?
- Sirok: I'm not sure what it was. There were substantive issues, but when you look at it, the real meat of it, my feeling is that it was all politics. It wasn't the issues themselves. I mean those can always be worked out and ironed out in any political regime through compromise and negotiation. There was simply an attitude of no compromise and no negotiation during those early years, especially 1979, 1980, during that period of time. And then I think what happened is the wind started to change. We got another Legislature in that wasn't as predominantly Republican. The Second Legislature came in. And so the attitude changed a little bit. I mean there were still some problems that the Camacho Administration had with the other side, but in the last two years of the Camacho Administration he was able

to work a little more with the Legislature because you had some more Democrats that came in on that side.

Willens: To what would you attribute Camacho's failure to get reelected?

Sirok: I wouldn't put my finger on any one particular thing, I mean, because it's not issue oriented. Obviously there on the surface there was discussion: well, he didn't do a whole lot. He's fighting with the Legislature constantly. It wasn't as we have it now with the Governor and his dealings with the United States. I mean that wasn't even a consideration at that time. Our relationship with the United States was pretty good. They left us alone. You still had the Trust Territory Administration in place and so a lot of the workings were coming down through the TT High Commissioner into the Commonwealth.

Willens: Was that a problem?

Sirok: No. I don't think it was a problem and I think that's why it wasn't so much issue-oriented as far as why he wasn't reelected as much as it was the politics of it. And I think that you simply had good campaigning, good political strategy on the Republican side and the family voting and just the running of it put the Democrats out there. Not like this last election where you had Tenorio versus Guerrero when there was, you know, actually discussion in the community that people didn't like a lot of the things that Governor Guerrero did and it was time for a change. And they were looking at Tenorio to give them that change. That wasn't the way of thinking in that election that I saw.

Willens: What do you remember about the specific legal issues that came to the attention of the AG's office during your tenure there?

Sirok: Well, I think the big one was obviously was the certificate of identity. There was large undercurrent within the community—I will say prejudice even between the local indigenous Chamorros and the alien community. The alien community had started to increase. We had the labor laws: more labor workers were coming in to supplement the work force. And there was a need for those jobs.

Willens: Was there very much economic development, in the early years that you were here?

Sirok: There wasn't a lot of economic development, but I guess there was a lot of posturing. I mean people were starting to build up. You certainly had a large number of alien construction workers starting to come into the Commonwealth. You know construction companies were starting to form, get business licenses, bring in their workers. There were government projects that were going: you had the planning for the hospital; you had planning for the power plant, I think it's something like that. And so, while there wasn't actual construction activity, people were looking down the road and saying: "Well, okay, this is going to be coming up. Let me get a construction company in place; let me start working this." And the big construction companies that came in—Black Micro, the off-island companies that came in to do some developmental work—they didn't bring workers over so they had to bring in workers to supplement that work force.

Willens: And what was the reaction of the local community?

Sirok: Well, I think that for the initial years there wasn't a lot of reaction. I mean it was sort of a normal, "Let's bring in a maid," "Let's bring in a farmer," "Let's bring in the construction workers." But at the same time, it was: "Let's bring them in but they're not going to have any rights." And so when the alien community that had been there for a period of time started to assert their rights under the certificate of identity act, there became a real concern, a voting concern, because then local people started to say, "Well, look," as we let more of these people come in and give them rights, especially voting, our votes are

going to be diluted, our Chamorro votes are going to be diluted. And so that issue, which resulted in a lawsuit that went on for several years, was a very hot issue at that time. The second one was the reorganization of the Civil Service Commission. After it went on for a couple of years, people started to realize (as I indicated) that government jobs were prime votes. I mean, you won your election by promising government jobs.

Willens: Could you remind me what the reorganization of the Civil Service Commission involved?

Sirok: Mr. Mafnas was the Republican, he was probably even chairman of the Republican Party at that time, and he was very influential in the Republican Party. His position was that of the Personnel Officer. The Governor, who had probably won votes by promising jobs, started to put in applications to employ these people in the Personnel Office. And every time his people would come in, they would get turned down by Mr. Mafnas on the Republican side. And yet at the same time, people for jobs on the Republican side in the Legislature were getting hired. And so you had people as copy operators and xerox operators making large amounts of money at that time. And so there was a battle beginning between the Camacho Administration and Mr. Mafnas. One of the first jobs I had when I came into the office is I had to go in and expel Mr. Mafnas from his position. I actually had to go in with police officers, tell Mr. Mafnas and some of his other people to leave the office. He wasn't in at that time, but some of his people were there. We changed the locks on all the doors and basically put Luis Camacho—his [the Governor's] brother, or cousin or something, in as Personnel Officer. That was a position under the Constitution that could be filled by the Governor. That was a position under the Public Law 1-8 which set forth administrative agencies which the Governor, by executive order, could go ahead and put his own individual in as the Personnel Officer, figured that that officer was an administrative branch officer and the Civil Service Commission was part of the administrative branch. And so at that time, it was. And so, of course, Mr. Mafnas went to the Legislature. The Legislature passed a new law which really revamped the Civil Service Commission and gave it autonomy and put Mr. Mafnas back in. And so there was a lot of battling going back and forth on that because of jobs control. Jobs were votes.

Willens: Did the Governor veto that act then?

Sirok: The Governor could not veto it. I can't remember whether he vetoed it or not, but I know that it was legislated in such a way that he may have had some objection to it but if he did veto it, it went back through and it was passed by the Legislature. They overruled his veto and Mafnas ended going back in there. And what they did is they strengthened it in such a way that that Personnel Officer was no longer under the Governor's authority, didn't serve at the pleasure of the Governor. I know he had to be confirmed by the Legislature. This has been such a long time ago I can't remember the specifics. I haven't looked at this for a long period of time. I haven't had to deal with it, but I know that it was in such a way that he was in there as long as he wanted to be in there, and that's where it was. And so there was another issue as control of the job market, the government job market at that time.

Willens: Did it continue to be a problem?

Sirok: I think it continued. It's always been a problem, but not as much as it was at that particular time. And measures weren't taken as drastically as [at] that time, with police officers and so forth. But it seems like within the last couple years that things have ironed out. You don't hear as much controversy with the Personnel Office as you did in the past. And I'm sure there's still politics involved, but it doesn't seem to be as political as it was in the early years.



- Willens: The conflict between the Legislative and Executive Branches seem to have been endemic to the Commonwealth over its seventeen years of operation. Some people say that during the eight years of the Tenorio Administration (from 1981 to 1989) the combat between the two branches was significantly less. Do you have any recollection as to whether that is an accurate observation?
- Sirok: That is. The first year, which was my last year in the Attorney General's Office, if I remember, both the Administration and the Legislature were controlled by the Republican Party. And so I know at that time there's concern that there wasn't going to be any kind of check and balance because the control was so absolute at that time. I mean there was, as I remember, a clear majority, a strong, strong, strong majority of Republicans in the Legislature. And things were just going to be rammed through and this was going to be things that perhaps would not benefit the people, but simply the Republicans. But I think that when I look back at it, that was one of the pleasant (I'm trying to grasp the words on what I want to say) not qualifications but one of the things that Pete P. [Tenorio] had, one of the characteristics of his personality. He was able to work whether it was Republican or Democrat. I think, even if he had some Democrats over there, he had the attitude that he was able to work back and forth—compromise, negotiate and work on issues. And I think that he had a hornet's nest when he started with, and so he was placed in a difficult position. And then he came in and based on what he had to start and how he managed the affairs and the subsequent legislatures that were brought in which then took the Republican balance away and sort of evened it out a little bit. He was able to work very well with the other side of the street because of his personality, because he had that quality about him. And I think perhaps maybe some of that is that he looked back and he saw what happened during the Camacho Administration and he knew that things simply couldn't go on like that. It wasn't in the best interest of the Commonwealth.
- Willens: Some other observers suggested that the requirement of the bicameral legislature giving Rota and Tinian important roles in the upper of the two houses has been a real deterrent to the effective operation of the Commonwealth government. Do you have any observations as to whether that has been true?
- Sirok: During the early years, I will say up until four years or so ago, I don't think that. I'm sure they played an important part in the decision making process. I wasn't involved in that. You know a lot goes on in the back rooms. But it certainly has come to surface in the last two legislatures. As we can see, because of the coalitions that have been formed. Now, you know, they've realized that they can go around and make deals and continue to change the majority status and form these coalitions to get what they want that perhaps aren't in the best interest of the Commonwealth. And so you've seen, you know, two presidents of the Senate go out as a result of that. A lot of controversy, a lot of things that, to me, it seems like they're stepping more backwards than forwards. And you blame that on the ability of the small islands to be able to have the control that they have over there. Because in the Senate, Rota has three, Tinian has three, and so they're basically on equal footing with the senators from Saipan, and they can control that.
- Willens: Do you think that generally Rota and Tinian have been fairly treated under the Commonwealth with respect to infrastructure and public services?
- Sirok: I can't really comment on that. During the time I was in the Attorney General's Office, I don't think they were, to be frank. I think that everything was Saipan and very little was done with Rota and Tinian.

- Willens: Rota at the time because of Benjamin Manglona was dominated by the Republican Party.
- Sirok: Right.
- Willens: I forget whether Tinian historically has been aligned one way or another.
- Sirok: In fact, one of Benjamin's brothers, Prudencio, was the Mayor of Rota. He had been there for a long period of time. One of the other controversies that was an important controversy when I was in the Attorney General's Office was the power of these resident department heads. The Governor would appoint resident department heads from Tinian and Rota. And they would go in and try to be responsible running, for example, Public Works or whatever it is. And the mayor would just say: "No. This is my island, they've got to do what I tell them to do and I've got the control over this." And we had to go to court and litigate those particular issues.
- Willens: How was that resolved in the first Administration?
- Sirok: It was resolved against the Governor because of the fact that he had these individuals in an acting capacity, because you had to submit nominations for the department heads to the Legislature for confirmation. And he would never get confirmation. So we have these individuals on acting status for a long period of time. And so what the courts decided was, look it, you can't get around the confirmation process by putting them on an acting status. If they're over there doing the jobs and responsibilities that the law says and the law says they had to be confirmed by the Legislature, then they've got to be confirmed by the Legislature. And so the litigation sort of buckled under that kind of reasoning. And as a result, there were some compromises that were worked out between the Governor and the Mayor's office. I think also there was some legislation that was passed that gave the Mayor some more powers and there were some more inquiry into the Constitution and the Mayor's responsibility under the Constitution. And so by the time that that all got ironed out, I was out of AG's Office in the private sector and it was behind me and I haven't stayed up with it.
- Willens: Is it your recollection that there were no serious disputes with respect to the Covenant during the early years of the Commonwealth?
- Sirok: No. I know there were a couple of inquiries as to the ability of the United States to unilaterally make the U.S. immigration laws applicable. I think that was always a concern. There's always been a concern in the administrations when I was there and probably even now. And there was a concern as to the termination of the Covenant.
- Willens: What was going on?
- Sirok: There were no disputes or litigation when I was in the Attorney General's Office. The concerns were: the taxing side of it; immigration—whether the United States could make U.S. immigration laws applicable on their own unilaterally; the termination of the Covenant—when it is going to be terminated?
- Willens: Termination of the Covenant?
- Sirok: The Covenant. I mean not the Covenant, but termination of the Trusteeship. Excuse me.
- Willens: Because that affected U.S. citizenship?
- Sirok: Right. We had wanted termination for a long period of time but the Interior did not want to terminate it because they still had things going on down in Palau and the other areas. So

we had to sort of wait for all that to come together. There was some litigation concerning the right to a jury trial on misdemeanors. Well that's not particularly a Covenant issue, but it went into the Covenant because as that litigation went on and up into the 9th Circuit, the courts for the first time looked at the Covenant to see what kind of an entity we were out here. Because it was a rare entity—whether we were incorporated or unincorporated, whether we had certain rights as a result of being incorporated versus unincorporated, whether various U.S. constitutional provisions applied because of our status. And so that from the legal standpoint, I think, that was the time when the court first started to take a serious look at what kind of an entity we are and try to define us.

Willens: What is your general assessment of the way the 9th Circuit has interpreted the Covenant?

Sirok: As I think back, I can't put my fingers on any particular issues. But as I think back nothing really disturbs me. I can't think of anything that disturbs me as far as the way they ruled. What is the provision that makes certain federal laws, certain provisions of the Constitution and federal laws applicable?

Willens: Certainly Article V of the Covenant involves some specification of which federal laws were applicable and on what terms.

Sirok: Another issue was on the admiralty side, the foreign hull vessel issue.

Willens: The Jones Act coastwise laws were not applicable. That's continued to be a source of some dispute, I think, over the past decade. As you began to live here and eventually married into one of the local families, did you form any opinions of the extent to which the Marianas citizens were happy that they had gone their own separate way from the rest of Micronesia?

Sirok: From the rest of Micronesia, yes. My understanding is that that was the sentiment, you know.

Willens: Did you feel that was shared within the Carolinian community as well?

Sirok: I cannot answer that. I don't know.

Willens: There was at some point in the history of the Commonwealth concern over the fact that many Micronesians from the other former districts were emigrating into the Commonwealth and becoming, to some extent, a burden on the resources of the Commonwealth. Is that a phenomenon that you have observed over the past decade or so?

Sirok: I feel that sentiment coming out stronger now. I think it's even gotten more attention because Guam has picked up on that and has gotten a large amount of attention on that and has raised those concerns with the U.S. Congress. And so, I think that's just sort of fueled the concerns out here more.

Willens: Sticking to the legal side for a moment, was it your sense, Jim, that the way in which the judicial system was constructed under the Constitution and the Covenant provided a reasonably sound basis in the early years of the Commonwealth.

Sirok: I'm comfortable with that. I think that that was a good structure. And I'm glad that we were able to look to U.S. law to be able to form precedent and to provide opinions for the court to review to form their own legal basis for opinions out here. I think that we were basically required to do that. I mean, when we researched cases and so forth we looked at U.S. law rather than the law of Papua and New Guinea or the English common law or whatever. We used English common law as part of it but it's American common law, not

English common law. And so I think that was very good help because we had those cases there on issues. A lot of the issues that came up were issues that had come up in the early days of American history. Constitutional issues, things like that, and so those issues had been looked at, decided, and formulated within the context of American jurisprudence. It was a good benefit for us to be able to have that body of law out there to be able to use.

Willens: Do you think that the fact that the Commonwealth remained part of the United States and U.S. law applied were significant inducements to foreign investment here?

Sirok: Yes.

Willens: Did you in your private practice years have any dealings with clients who were interested in investing money or creating businesses here?

Sirok: Yes. And I think that played out along two lines. One was to bootstrap themselves into U.S. citizenship by having a presence in the Commonwealth and after a period of time, after staying here and doing business, maybe they were thinking down the road some way they were going to be able to bootstrap themselves into U.S. citizenship or being able to move on into the United States. And then just the other side of being able to do business in a stable government. Unfortunately, it hasn't played out that way. This place was touted as a U.S. commonwealth, part of the United States in the beginning. And you know, the United States rang a bell with a lot of people. And then obviously you could get special legislation, special interest groups, you know, you could influence the Legislature very easily and people realized that laws change all the time out here. And so, you know, the savvy people, whether it's good or bad or whatever, were able to know how the system worked and plugged themselves into that system so that if there was problem with a particular law with respect to their business, they went to the right people and got that law changed or had laws that were developed that would benefit their business. That's the bad side of it.

Willens: Did you think the corruption of public officials has been a serious problem in the Commonwealth.

Sirok: Oh, sure. Sure. And I don't know if, as you look back, there's anything that could have been done about it. It's not so much that, as just maybe the economics of it as the country is developing. I don't know, I'm not an economist. But definitely I think there was a lot of personal interests. A lot of people in there wanting to be a congressman or senator for their own personal gain and not so much to try to be a part of a collective unit to do something to develop the Commonwealth.

Willens: During the 1980s there was some very substantial economic development that I guess took place primarily under Governor Tenorio's Administration. Was it during this period of time that Article 12 restrictions on land alienation became a significant legal and economic issue?

Sirok: Well, in the mid 1980s, yes.

Willens: What is your basic assessment of the Article 12 litigation in terms of its raising important issues, in the first place and secondly in terms of its impact on investment in the local community?

Sirok: Well, let's go on your second issue first. I think it has had an impact. It's difficult to assess how large of an impact, simply because of the economics of Japan itself. You know all of the investment was coming in from Japan, the big land boom, most of it, not all of it, but most of it. The greatest majority of the developers were coming in from Japan. And so you had a real problem with the economics in Japan. You know banks are no longer giving

money. At that time banks were lending money based on stock portfolios for investment in the Commonwealth or anywhere else outside Japan. Money to buy real estate. They would come in, use that appraisal of the value of that real estate as security for more loans, and it was basically a false economy in that sense. And that just all fell apart. And the banking industry said: "I'm sorry, no more loans are going out." A lot of the big corporations that had those portfolios based on land appraisals and land values that were sort of superficial, artificial in nature, went down. It simply discouraged investment outside of Japan as well as whatever went on inside of Japan too. I think that when you put that together with the Article 12 problem and you sue some of the major Japanese developers, I mean, these are not small potatoes, these are individuals that are major developers in Japan and are able to get the funding to do this. And the word goes out within the business community in Japan that you're going to have problems over here. I think that obviously had an effect on it too. And so both of them worked together as a catalyst to just really stop everything out here.

Willens: Do you have a personal opinion of the court decisions, originally at least, that seem to suggest that a person of Northern Mariana ancestry could not appropriately buy land and grant long term leases if the funds for so doing had been supplied him or her by non-eligible purchasers.

Sirok: I felt that was a poor decision. I thought it was in error. I can understand the logic, but I think that the court simply, as the 9th Circuit has ruled, looked at it the wrong way. And so I was not in agreement with those decisions.

Willens: Is it your view that so long as the Northern Mariana ancestry person is someone who can make his or her own judgment as to how and when to buy or lease land that they should free to obtain funds from citizens of whatever ancestry or from a bank or from whatever source.

Sirok: Yes. I looked at it a little bit differently, too, you know. This issue was never raised. You have a provision in the Covenant that indicates that the restriction would be for 25 years. And to me it indicates that the restriction basically could be handled by some kind of legislation rather than constitutional provisions. It doesn't have to be done by constitutional provisions. The Covenant is supposed to be superior even to our Constitution. It's what gives us the right to create our own Constitution. And, you know, I had always thought that perhaps by going to the Constitution and putting that provision into the Constitution (which has some finality, some perpetual existence to it—I mean, it's going to be there until two-thirds of the people say it isn't there anymore) that you sort of went outside the scope of the Covenant. And went beyond what the framers of the Covenant really envisioned. I don't know if they meant that from henceforth forward, absolutely forever and ever and ever, no persons of non-Northern Marianas descent would be able to own land. I think that they set a time period specifically to allow it. That would indicate to me that that implies that it's only for a period of time. If we wanted it forever and ever, we would have said forever and ever, but it's only for a period of time and after that let it go the way it should go. By having it in the Constitution you sort of shut the door on that kind of thinking.

Willens: Well, I hope it doesn't work out that way. The original theory was that you wanted to prescribe this in the Covenant for 25 years and then let the people in the Commonwealth make their own independent judgment whether further land restrictions were appropriate or not. And I guess the First Constitutional Convention was fearful that if you did not factor it into the Constitution that there would be uncertainty if the implementation of that provision were up to legislatures. But it clearly is an issue now in the Constitution,

and it was addressed to some extent at the Second Constitutional Convention and is clearly on the agenda of several of the delegates to the Third Constitutional Convention.

Sirok: Excuse me—let me interrupt you. Can we go back to that a little more?

Willens: Yes, indeed.

Sirok: I'm not in favor of the restriction because I don't think it's being used the way it was intended to be used. The Article 12 litigation, I think, shows you that. That Article 12 litigation is there because there are individuals that say the purpose of this Constitutional restriction was to make sure that this property stays within the hands of indigenous people. But what has really happened is that it has gone outside the hands of indigenous people using the straw man aspect of it. I mean, legally on paper it's still there, but it isn't. So it hasn't done what it's intended to do, and it hasn't been used by the people to do what it's intended to do. And people got around it. The other thing is I see that it's very difficult—for the short period of time, no problem—20-25 years down the road. But I see, as time and life goes on, very severe problems with this on the domestic side, on the practical side of it. As it is now, you have problems. I see it maybe because I'm married to a person of Northern Marianas descent, yet I have no interest in any of the land. And I have concerns if I would spend a lot of money putting a house on a piece of property on the domestic side and something happens to the marriage. Where am I? The courts have ruled that I may have an equitable interest—sort of a right to contribution as they say in California—to recover some of the costs that I put into that structure. But am I ever going to get that back? If I put a structure up for \$300,000 am I going to get \$150,000 back for someone who's asking for child support or whatever it is? Probably not. And that person doesn't have to sell it? And I don't have any right to make that person sell it to get my money back because I don't have an interest in the underlying premises. So there's some marital disharmony, some, always something, thoughts in the back of the head: Well, am I going to be able—you know, do I want to put my money in something that I don't have in my hands? My children now certainly can own property because they're 50%. And their children, assuming, if they marry Chamorros can go on down the road. But what happens way down the road. I mean, all of a sudden you're telling these individuals. My children now are going to have to be careful who they marry for the sake of their children, so that their children can have land. We're now starting to tell people who they can marry, what ancestry they can marry, you know. Because, obviously, out here owning land is very important to the people. And so what you've done is you've said, "Okay, you can own this land but by doing so you can only marry Chamorros." If you don't marry Chamorros you be very, very careful. And all of a sudden there's a restriction. You know, I've got grandchildren that may be a quarter Chamorro, but who are they going to marry when they grow up? They've got to look around for some Chamorro—otherwise they're going to lose the property. The issue that Marian Aldan-Pierce brought up in her campaign for Con-Con representative.

Willens: The adopted child issue.

Sirok: The adopted child issue. I mean, here you've got a child that is not of Northern Marianas descent. That child, okay so he gets the property, but what happens when he or she marries? It's not holding that property because of definition that it's of Northern Marianas descent, as I understand it. It's holding it because of a special provision that says if you're adopted we're going to consider you able to hold the land. See what I'm saying?

Willens: Yes. I frankly don't know what the technical consequences are with respect to the adopted child.

- Sirok: Right. So that adopted Filipino child, American child, marries another Filipino or another American and their children have no Northern Marianas descent blood.
- Willens: You mention a very important and personal point that I think isn't discussed openly very much here. Your second point. People would dispute your first point, namely, that the long term leases are at odds with the original intention. As the leases went from 40 years to 55 years one gets the sense that there aren't really meaningful returns to the local people. But the response is that they remain as the fee simple title holders and at the conclusion of the lease they or their descendants are free to negotiate entirely new and beneficial leases if they want to. How realistic that is and how they turn out to be, I don't know, but that certainly is the theory: That retaining fee simple control would permit generations on down the line to continue to reap the benefits of the land ownership.
- Sirok: What I've seen on that, to date, is I've seen a lot of controversy within the families. I see brothers and sisters suing each other, children suing their parents, children suing their aunts and uncles. And I think that is a resulting effect of that particular restriction, too, because they can't sell this in fee simple. They retain this interest which is passed on to these heirs. You go down the road where the Nikko Hotel and the Diamond Hotel are and when those leases expire and they have to renegotiate, they've got to renegotiate with a clan of people. And you know, this is a very litigious society. It's happening now down the road when the families are spread out. I mean it's not so much brothers and sisters with each other. It's probably going to be several families together having to litigate and push and compete for interest in that property to make their ideas known. And all you need is one developer going to one brother, one sister saying, "I'm going to give you these big bucks." And so they're in there pushing and you've got another brother and sister that say, "Geez, I'd like to keep this property because it's beach property. I want to use it, you know, so the family has someplace to go on the weekends and such like that." And bang. And I've seen that within my wife's family. They have a prime piece of beach property down on the beach which was, until my wife's grandfather died, pretty well held together because he was alive and, you know, this daughter and this son and this daughter and this daughter had these particular sections. In fact he divided it out and surveyed it out and they got their little lots, but it was one group. People went down and enjoyed it. And he was able to control the disputes within the family as the patriarch. As soon as he died, here comes a developer to two or three of the brothers and sisters and says, "We want to get this property." And here's a couple of other brothers and sisters that are sitting in the middle of it that say, "No, we want this for family property for, you know, to go down there on the weekend for picnics, let the grandchildren and great-grandchildren swim in the beaches." And it just divided the family right in half. There was a lawsuit, and nobody's speaking to each other as a result of it.
- Willens: Is that from within your . . .
- Sirok: Within my family. Yes. Those are the negative effects of the Article 12 restriction that I personally don't like to see. The question then is do the benefits outweigh the negative aspects of it. Who knows? We'll know down the road somewhere.
- Willens: Well, that's right. I can't defend more than the record permits. There was this widespread concern that what had happened in Hawaii and Guam was not in the interest of the people and that there ought to be some reasoned effort to at least delay that process, if one reasonably could, and you're living with the consequences. The restriction will continue to be debated, as you say, over the next ten or fifteen years in particular. The deadline now after the expiration of the twenty-five year period is 2011. That's twenty-five years after 1986. Let me just touch on a few other problems or issues and solicit your opinion. One

of the focal points during the negotiations of the Covenant and in the early years was the desire of the local people to have improved health services and educational opportunities for their children. How would you evaluate the changes in health services and educational opportunities during the period you worked here?

Sirok: I think in the beginning they were atrocious. I think they've gotten better but they're still not up to the standard I would like to see them.

Willens: You're speaking about both of them?

Sirok: Both of them together. And I'm not even trying to compare to U.S. standards. I mean just the normal acceptable standard that you would like to have your children educated in or given medical services in. Let's go with the medical services. You know, we had the old hospital. That facility out there was a run down shack. But the problem as you can see—even though they've moved into a very nice facility—the problem isn't the lack of facilities, as it is funding to get equipment into that facility. That was a problem in the very beginning. You had a great, brand new hospital but you didn't have any equipment in there. And there wasn't any money for the equipment. They had to play games to get the money for the equipment because the federal funds and other monies that were to be used for that equipment had been reprogrammed and used for other purposes. So you've got a problem with the Administration on that. Then you simply didn't have the medical care that I felt should be out there. You had doctors that came in, this was in the old hospital. The new hospital has gotten better. But in the early days, you had young doctors that came out here. I don't know the name of the program, but the program where they would go to medical school, and then they had to provide so many years of government service. So you had them coming right out of medical school over here, not experienced in the normal kinds of problems that may occur in a tropical climate. At the same time you had old, what we call MO's, medical orderlies, that were out here and had been in charge for a long period of time. And so now you got young American haoles coming in trying to tell these older Chamorro MO's and island MO's what to do. So you had an internal, political conflict going on. And then there was the lack of knowledge for these young doctors that came in. And they would come in and at the same time you have to remember that the housing standards, the educational standards, the kind of things that would draw a professional family, like a physician and his wife that had children, to come here and stay. They weren't here. And I know several families, doctors that had come in and were here and the wife said, "I can't take this" and bang they were gone. They just simply weren't happy in this environment. Not only because of the working environment that they had to work in—with the lack of facilities, the lack of equipment, bumping heads with the MO's—but they didn't have the comfort that they worked all this time for to be a doctor. They didn't have the comfort out there. The living standards just weren't that great. And you couldn't go out and rent a nice place for a decent price at that time. There weren't any constructed at that time.

Willens: To divert from the point briefly. There have been some stateside citizens who have a considerable amount of money who have come here and settled for tax or other reasons. But you're talking about other categories of people who have to live normal lives.

Sirok: Right. So during those early years, the services you would get—the actual medical evaluations, the opinions—were very poor. On the civil side I handled a lot of medical malpractice cases from doctors that made mistakes that were just stupid, stupid mistakes. I don't know if that goes on in the United States all the time or not, but the ones I saw were just stupid, stupid mistakes. The kinds of things that aren't, you know, aren't even on the borderline. And so of course that gets out into the community. And there's this feeling



that, you know, you're not getting the good services. What has happened is that you have had doctors that have come out at the same time you've had the island developing. You've had people take the money from the development to build more homes to rent out. You've had the living standards get much better. Before you didn't have water, you didn't have power, the infrastructure was very poor. So as those standards got better there was more impetus for these doctors to perhaps stay here for longer periods of time which in turn—I'm sort of reasoning this out—provided some kind of a medical history. Some kind of a history for these doctors who had been out here. You see a patient that comes in with a certain tropical fungus, for example, to be able to know right off what it is. People that come in with some kinds of fish poisonings and sicknesses that are predominant out here; they know right off what it is and they can treat them for it. And so you start to get a little better service. Then they're starting to say, after being out here for a while and being in the community, they're being able to say something to people and people are listening to them within the Administration. They say we need this particular piece of equipment. And they have some voice because now they're not just newcomers in the community; they've been out here and this is their home. And so, little by little it's developed. What I see as the problem is we still have a basically transient community, for the most part, with the doctors and nurses up there. There are no, not a large number of, local nurses, for example. And, in fact, they've had to bring in a large number of Filipino nurses from the Philippines. So you get a different attitude and, of course, the prejudices are still there. The local people grew up there. They see the Filipino nurse and they've got a prejudice that the Filipino nurse is used to handling patients in a way you may handle them in the Philippines without certain courtesies and respects that you would expect to get over here. And so you still have that kind of a problem. I have not heard of the malpractice kinds of issues coming out of it. It's now more the administration side. Is there enough money? Is the money being used properly? And then the lack of concern. People out there that are working there—of course you're going to have this in every public service thing—but people that are government employees that simply don't show up for work, directors, and chiefs in different divisions up there. I'm including both medical and dental services, you know, that'd rather go out fishing or go out barbecuing and stuff instead of coming and taking care of patients and appointments being missed. But it has gotten much, much better than it was before. But it's still, in my opinion, not what you would get if you were in the States. Maybe it's because of the fact that there's such a medical malpractice scare in the States versus out here. I don't know. But I focus more on the bedside mannerisms type of care versus the actual suturing and cutting and prescribing medicine type of stuff.

Willens: Have you or a member of your family been seriously ill then in the time you've been here?

Sirok: Seriously, in the sense of having to spend a long period of time in a hospital (even, you know, a short period time), no. I mean, there have been illnesses that had to be treated and operations but . . .

Willens: Have you done that here?

Sirok: Here.

Willens: . . . or have you gone to Guam?

Sirok: Here. I've had my children treated in the States for various things. There are still problems with getting prompt attention. There are private clinics out here, but not like we have in the States. I mean, it's nice in the States to be able to have an appointment with a doctor, to be able to go to that doctor's office, and you may have to sit in his waiting room for

a period of time, but you're going to get in and out within a reasonable period of time. Rather than have to go up here to the hospital on a normal day—for an illness that occurred over the weekend and you don't want to go up on an emergency basis—and have to wait in there from nine o'clock in the morning to eleven or eleven-thirty before you get seen and taken care of. That's the kind of thing I'm talking about now.

Willens: How about the educational services?

Sirok: The schools were dismal and the facilities were terrible. Teachers complained because they didn't have the books and materials to be able to teach their students, and they're still doing it today. They may have upgraded the facilities to a certain extent. You're still using the same facilities. I can't think of anything new except perhaps maybe Tanapag down there where they've added on. They've added on a lot of facilities but you're still using the same facilities that were here at that time. No new schools have been built. No brand new classrooms in the sense of new technological classrooms. I go back to the States and I go through the schools and they have all these wonderful new technologies. I mean, here, if you get three or four computers in a room, it's a big deal. But you still have teachers—I just read in the newspaper a couple weeks ago—complaining because they don't have the books and the materials that they need to be able to teach the students. They're not getting the salaries. I think you have the same kind of development as you did in the medical side. You had young teachers that originally came out. You had teachers with wives and families that came out that weren't willing to stay here for a period of time and went back because the living conditions weren't that good. Especially, there were a lot of promises. I remember in the AG's office we had several disputes because the Board of Education, the administrator, would go back, promise teachers who would come out here that they would get housing, and they would get this, and they would get that. They come out here, they're in a hotel for a couple of weeks, and the house they're supposed to get into, which is controlled by the Personnel Office, they couldn't get into. Or when they got into it, they found that there wasn't anything there or the furniture was terrible or there wasn't any running water, there was no power on half the time. Some of the government houses weren't as good as they were represented to be.

Willens: Do you think the local community wants better teachers and would be willing to spend the money to hire mainland English-speaking teachers rather than depend as heavily, as I gather they do, on the Filipino teachers?

Sirok: Obviously there is. I think we heard the Chairman of the Board of Education, the Director of Education, echo those thoughts recently on TV. The problem is that there simply isn't any money to be able to do that from what I understand in the budget.

Willens: But you and I know that there's money available. It's a question of priorities.

Sirok: Right. Exactly.

Willens: And leadership and political decision-making.

Sirok: Exactly. Exactly. I think there has been terrible waste within the Department of Education. I don't know about recently within the last two years, but in the early days there was. There was a lot of money that went into that Department that was used—I don't know how it was used—but it wasn't used to develop and upgrade the facilities and the classrooms and the teachers. A lot of the educators were taking a lot of trips. You know, the normal kind of stuff you hear about in government spending, and a lot of money was diverted. I think there was money that was directed originally to education that was reprogrammed for other purposes at a later point in time.

Willens: There's a constant debate about whether education ought to be administered by an agency of the Executive Branch or by a separate board whose members are independently elected by the public. Do you have any views as to which of those two alternatives makes the most sense for the Commonwealth?

Sirok: I would like to see the administration of education be a government function, a public function. But if they can't do it right, then let's try to privatize it to a certain extent. Take a step back. You still have high schools today, you have kids that are, you know, this is a high humid climate, they go out for gym class, they run around the track. They can't go in and take a shower because there's no water, there's no adequate shower facilities in the school. I mean, those normal kinds of things. I remember as a kid in seventh grade, I can remember we had heavy duty, really up-to-date, modern shower facilities. It was like a tunnel, you know. You had faucets, and it went from cold to hot to cold back and you just had to walk through it. But we don't even have shower facilities with running water. Inadequate drinking water even. The food processing, I mean, there are complaints where the food's bad. People have gotten sick from eating the food because it's been, you know, it's out too long or it's spoiled, or contaminated or whatever it is. So, if it means privatizing that particular thing to get better services, that would be fine. I think the real problem though is not so much the government versus privatizing as it is the money aspect of it. But you privatize it and they know they're going to have development. If the government doesn't have the money to put into it, the private company that's running it isn't going to be able to get it from the government either. They're going to have to increase the tuition or somehow get the money. And once you start telling people, especially on the public sector, that they've got to pay a little more for tuition, a little more for books so they can have these services, you're going to get a lot of yelling and screaming because people are still in the attitude here—the hands out attitude—give me, give me, give me, give me. They still expect everything to be provided by the government for them.

Willens: Jim, in concluding, what is your overall assessment of the Commonwealth as it stands today?

Sirok: I think the Commonwealth is developing and growing and maturing. I really do. Though I may have painted a negative picture of what it was in the past, I still see us moving forward in a very good way. And I think that the leaders are maturing. You're getting a lot of the young individuals back, educated, coming back here, looking at this with some bright ideas. And with some ideas that they want to make this a better place to live in, not only for themselves but for their parents who have lived here and for their children that are coming up, and are looking more toward the interests of the community than their own private interest. And I think probably a great example is the events that occurred in the Legislature, in the House of Representatives last month when there was a push—Speaker Benavente—to throw the tax legislation through at such a rapid pace and some other issues. And led by Jesus Mafnas. And rather than, the old guard would have said, "Okay, this is how we're going to do it, and this is what's done and that's it," they worked out a deal with the Governor and his side of the branch and that's it, done and over with. You wouldn't have heard a lot of grumbling and squawking about it. But now you have the Bermudas, Terrageyo, Pete Reyes, individuals that are saying, "This is not right, this is not how it's supposed to be done. And it's not right to the extent that I will even resign from being the Speaker of this because it's simply not right." And it's not because I'm not getting anything, it's just simply not right. And you wouldn't have heard that ten years ago coming from the House. And that leads me to believe that our leaders are maturing,

people who are starting to vote for individuals that have some common sense and some sense of interest of the Commonwealth about them that are going to do something for the Commonwealth. So, it's maturing. Of course, you've got the rapid development, too, but just [consider] the leadership.

Willens: Thank you very much, Jim, for your help.