

INTERVIEW OF JOANNES R. TAIMANAO

by Howard P. Willens

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- Willens: Joannes R. Taimanao is a former member of the Marianas Political Status Commission. Joannes, it's good to see you after all these years. I wonder if you might help me begin this interview by giving me a little background information. Where were you born, and where did you grow up?
- Taimanao: I was born in Rota, and I grew up in Rota until I completed the sixth grade. That was my last year of school in Rota. I attended middle school in Saipan for one year. Following that, I attended parochial school in Guam, a Catholic school in Guam. From the seventh grade up to 1966, when I eventually transferred to a public school in Guam and graduated from that school in Guam. Prior to that, I was attending Father Duenas Memorial High School. I was required to attend Father Duenas because I was studying for the priesthood then.
- Willens: That was in the middle 1960s?
- Taimanao: Yes. I graduated from high school in 1966.
- Willens: Were your parents native Rotanese?
- Taimanao: My father is a native of Rota; my mother is from Saipan. She was born in Saipan, but before the war, they moved to Rota.
- Willens: Were they farming on Rota?
- Taimanao: Essentially yes. Well, they just moved to Rota to live there, so that's where my parents met.
- Willens: Was Guam the place that most of your friends went to school if they went beyond the sixth or ninth grade? Did they have to go to Guam or Saipan in order to complete a high school education?
- Taimanao: That's true. Guam was easy to go to during that time because the Trust Territory had what they called a sponsorship program, under which families in Guam could sponsor a student from Micronesia. You know the racial background, we Chamorros had easier acceptance in Guam. In my case, I attended school in Saipan because I had an uncle here. But after one year, I had a godfather in Guam who wanted to take me to school there.
- Willens: So you had no difficulty in finding a sponsor in Guam?
- Taimanao: No, no. My godfather was close to the family. After some discussion among themselves, we finally decided to go to Guam.
- Willens: After you completed those years in Guam, did you return to Rota?
- Taimanao: Yes. That was in 1966, and life was difficult in Guam because of the immigration situation. We were considered as I-20 students or aliens then. And it's very difficult to find work. One's parents must be in a good financial position to support an education beyond high school in Guam or elsewhere. Fortunately, after high school, I went back to Rota, and I found a job as a school teacher in 1966.
- Willens: How long did you remain as a school teacher?

- Taimanao: I was a school teacher for about three years. From there I took what you call off-campus College of Guam courses in Rota. Probably about a year after high school, I got married. I got married in 1967, so that made it even more difficult to go back to school. In 1969, there was an opening at the Rota administration office for an immigration and communications specialist. So I was able to transfer to that job. I remained there for a couple of years. Then in 1974, my wife was spearheading the Chamorro program, and she was required to move to Saipan. So in 1974 we moved to Saipan and we've stayed here since.
- Willens: When you came back to Rota in 1966, did you have any views as to what political status for the Northern Marianas seemed most attractive?
- Taimanao: Freshly out of high school, and deeply involved in the political party system in Rota, we at that time belonged to the Territorial Party, which is now the Republican. We were espousing annexation with Hawaii.
- Willens: Annexation with Hawaii?
- Taimanao: Hawaii at that time.
- Willens: And you were opposing the reintegration with Guam that the Popular Party was advocating?
- Taimanao: Yes, that's true.
- Willens: Why was it that reintegration with Guam, as it was called, was not favored by the Territorial Party in Rota, which was so close to Guam and had so many relationships with Guamanians?
- Taimanao: I gather that it had to do with the aspirations of the party. Regardless of what you feel, if you belong in that party you have to espouse its position. The mentality then was that one didn't have much liberty to express his own political mind. You just have to go with them or get out, and that's how I looked at this situation. At that time I wasn't too keen of reintegration with Guam because, while it's true that we have the same language and perhaps culture, I feared for the dominance of the Guamanian people over the Rotanese—in education, in economic standing, and social standing. I don't see much gain to be had through that political affiliation.
- Willens: So in your affiliation with the Territorial Party then, you supported the idea of achieving U.S. citizenship through annexation with Hawaii. Did there come a time when you changed your view on that? The Popular Party sort of had their eyes opened when the Guamanians rejected the plebiscite referendum in 1969. Did there come a point at which your views or your party's views changed?
- Taimanao: Eventually the views of the party changed. Originally they wanted to go to Hawaii, the State closest to our area. But later I understood that the route has changed, and it was now direct annexation with the U.S. government. Personally my desire had not changed. As I saw the process, Hawaii is part of the Union, so perhaps the right move is to go with the Union and not with a part of the Union. But I always believed in the democratic system of the U.S. government. The U.S. government has its problems, and those problems were created by the administrators, but to this moment I have never faulted the system. It's the people who are applying the system that I find a problem with.
- Willens: You know over the years that the Marianas Political Status Commission worked that there was this tension between the islands of Rota and Tinian on the one hand against the more populated Saipan. When you were in Rota as a teacher and then working for

the administration, did you feel that Rota was being treated fairly by the Trust Territory Administration with respect to such matters as education, infrastructure and so forth?

Taimanao: Yes. Before 1962 Rota was a separate district and administered its own affairs. After 1962, Saipan and Tinian, who were being administered separately, were unified with Rota. And certainly during those days I had big reservations about the level of support at the subdistrict level. We had an old saying then that you know—"We in Rota always get the crumbs"—and I had a real feeling that that was the situation. In 1967 or 1968 I became a member of the Rota Municipal Council, and we had a perennial problem with water. Our water came from the mountains or water caves, and whenever we had a typhoon, the pipes would break in many places. So we wanted to re-route those pipelines and go along the roadside from the source. We came to Saipan to plead for funds. The local Saipan senators asked us why does Rota need pipes when there is an abundance of bamboo. They could make us use bamboo for our pipes. On the other hand, we were also asking money to furnish our public library. We needed some funds to get some resource books. We were told to find lewd magazines and provide our library with that kind of books.

Willens: You were going to the Marianas District Legislature for appropriations of funds for those purposes?

Taimanao: Yes.

Willens: How about the TTPI funds? Were they being distributed through the Marianas Legislature?

Taimanao: That's right. We have to make appropriation from the District Legislature.

Willens: Now that's when you only had one or was it two representatives in the District Legislature?

Taimanao: Three, I think. Three.

Willens: Three? But they still were a very small number.

Taimanao: Sure, definitely.

Willens: Those are two specific examples.

Taimanao: That's when I was deeply involved, yes.

Willens: When you were personally involved and you remember being told by the Marianas District Legislature to use bamboo to transport your water and to buy lewd magazines for your library. Were they truly serious in dismissing you in this way?

Taimanao: Well, for one thing, they never submitted an appropriation on the floor. If those comments were made on the lobby or elsewhere, I would forego it, but it came up during the discussion when we were presenting our justifications for the funds.

Willens: I have seen many documents from that period and subsequent years, where the Municipal Council of Rota was addressing petitions to the United Nations or to the United States complaining of its treatment. There were times at which the Popular Party leadership thought that maybe Rota would not remain part of the Marianas but would seek to stay with the rest of Micronesia. Did you feel that the people of Rota had any relationship or affinity to the rest of Micronesia? There were some, as you know, in the Carolinian community who really had some ethnic ties to the people of Yap and elsewhere and were very reluctant to support a separate status for the Northern Marianas. How did you feel about that aspect of the matter?

- Taimanao: Well, during those days, the Rotanese were known for their hospitality and their ability to get along with other people in times of need or suffering. At that time, we didn't have any qualms about the other districts, at least when I was there growing up. I got involved with the Congress of Micronesia, our local legislators were trying to belittle the other Micronesians. They tried to make us believe that Saipan or the Marianas Islands had not progressed at its own rate because of the slowdown created by the other Micronesian islands.
- Willens: Did you believe that?
- Taimanao: Probably yes in some ways, but no in others.
- Willens: Did you travel in the 1960s or 1970s to any of the other Districts?
- Taimanao: At that time, no.
- Willens: In the late 1960s, the Congress of Micronesia had a Future Political Status Commission that issued a report. The report in 1969 declared that free association with the United States was the preferred approach or else independence. A year later in 1970, the Congress of Micronesia rejected what was called the "Commonwealth Proposal," and at that point the Northern Marianas political leadership decided well, they want something different than we want. Do you remember those events?
- Taimanao: Yes. We heard almost every day how free association would hamper our development. We were made to believe that such an association would limit whatever funds we get from the U.S. government. They claimed that the other Micronesian islands were about 30 years behind and to bring them up to par would probably require all the funds that we can get out of the U.S. government. That was during those times when the Popular Party was espousing—in announcements or in meetings—that the disadvantage of the Compact was that most of the funds, a substantial amount of the funding, would go to the other Micronesians and would leave very little for Saipan or for the Marianas. Having gone through the same process in our association with Saipan, you know, certainly there is truth to that.
- Willens: That argument had some meaning to you from Rota because of your own experience.
- Taimanao: Yes. Probably that's true. The Marianas would be left with meager funds, because it has better roads, better water systems, and better schools than most of the other islands in Micronesia. We were sort of indoctrinated three years out of high school.
- Willens: How did it happen to be that you got appointed to the Marianas Political Status Commission in 1972?
- Taimanao: I was a member of the Rota Municipal Council.
- Willens: Was Ben Manglona also a member of the Municipal Council at that time?
- Taimanao: No, but Ben is one of the most outspoken politicians in Rota. I think he was at that time the Director of Public Works.
- Willens: Assigned to Rota?
- Taimanao: In Rota. Yes, but I'm not too sure. Ben is well-respected in Rota. He has this sort of charisma. I think the Mayor of Rota was the appointing authority.
- Willens: Either the Mayor or the Municipal Council, I forgot.
- Taimanao: Yes. I was on the Municipal Council then, and probably among the group I talked the loudest.

- Willens: You must have been one of the youngest, though?
- Taimanao: Yes.
- Willens: So the Council or the Mayor designated you and Ben. There's some confusion in the record. There's some indication that Gregory Calvo was appointed to the Commission. I don't remember that.
- Taimanao: No.
- Willens: He never served on the Commission, did he?
- Taimanao: No.
- Willens: But he lived in Rota at the time?
- Taimanao: No. He was living here but, you know, Greg Calvo is Rotanese, and I think he was working here [Saipan] under contract.
- Willens: I see.
- Taimanao: But he votes in Rota. He was here working. He was provided government housing. But he was never appointed.
- Willens: I didn't remember that either. The publication of the first round of the negotiations has his name in the list, and I was very surprised to see it.
- Taimanao: No. There were only two of us. Ben and I were the original members.
- Willens: And you stayed.
- Taimanao: Yes, and we stayed until the conclusion.
- Willens: Until the conclusion. Unlike your colleagues on Tinian, who were changing from time to time. Was it something you wanted to do?
- Taimanao: Probably not, but it would be interesting.
- Willens: Well how was it, looking back on it? Was it an interesting assignment?
- Taimanao: Sure. It certainly was. It was quite interesting. It was quite educational.
- Willens: What was your reaction to the opening of the negotiations at the Royal Taga Hotel in December of 1972? By this time, the Commission had designated Pangelinan to be the chairman, Santos to be the vice chairman.
- Taimanao: Yes.
- Willens: Do you have a recollection about getting together with the other members of the Commission and figuring out how to accomplish this task?
- Taimanao: Let me go back and say that politics was so dominant, it was a dominating force during the early 1960s.
- Willens: Early 1960s and early 1970s.
- Taimanao: 1970s too.
- Willens: You were a Territorial Party member as you came on the Commission, as was Ben.
- Taimanao: That's right, yes.
- Willens: So did you feel that it was dominated by the Popular Party?

- Taimanao: Yes. Eddie and Ben Santos are both members of the same party. I give the Popular Party respect for their efforts in bringing this thing up. I think it was a right move, and I give them due respect for that, and I think it's only proper that they should control the chairmanship and the vice chairman. But I think we got the best legal service, because, although Eddie was a practicing attorney, I didn't think he had the caliber to set things in motion. We had to rely very heavily on you in particular and your associates for setting the mode of the negotiations. Without those, I don't know.
- Willens: Well, I want you to be frank on that point. There was some joking with Dr. Palacios years later about how he had told members of the Commission that they should not hire a U.S. lawyer; they ought to hire a lawyer from Australia or the Soviet Union.
- Taimanao: Japan, yes.
- Willens: You remember a conversation of that kind?
- Taimanao: Well, yes, I remember Dr. Palacios. Knowing Dr. Palacios, I didn't take those things very seriously. Our argument there was frankly, that because we are negotiating with Americans and we have an American attorney or legal service, they could, you know, sidestep our interests. Their rationale for getting a Russian lawyer was that the Russians hate the guts of the Americans. But the real issue was that we need people who understand the American legal system, because we are dealing with Americans. I guess if our legal counsel screws us up, then it's too bad, but we are dealing with the American legal system. We should have Americans, and your company was highly recommended.
- Willens: It was a very unusual experience for me and my firm. I remember coming out here to a part of the world I've never been in. I think it took some time for the Commission to get to know each other and for the Commission to get to know the consultants, not just the lawyers, but Jim Leonard in particular who did such good work. Going back to the political point, which is a point I've heard before, there was an official representative from the Territorial Party, which was Dr. Palacios; there was a representative from the business community, which was Joeten at the beginning; and then there was a representative from the Carolinians, which was Felix. I think all three of them were Territorial Party. So when it comes down to it, there were probably at least five of the 15 members of the Commission who were Territorial Party. Did you think that politics played a role in considering what positions to take in negotiating with the United States? Legal issues, economic issues or whatever?
- Taimanao: No, no. I don't think so.
- Willens: I don't remember examples of that particularly.
- Taimanao: The only way politics got involved is the organization of our side—our chairmanship and vice chairman. That's where our local politics got involved. But as far as the negotiation process, there may be some politics involved between Rota, Tinian and Saipan. Because of our experiences in the past we vehemently fought for a bicameral legislature. That's the only place where politics was involved. But as far as our contacts with the U.S. negotiators, or with our legal counsel, there weren't politics that I observed. It's just in-house politics.
- Willens: Some members of the Commission told me that they felt it was a Popular Party-run organization to some extent and so they felt a little bit hesitant about speaking out and contributing. Did you have that feeling?
- Taimanao: That's why I say if there was any political bickering, it was among ourselves, the members. There were some problems other than that. Personalities. I'll tell my case. During the elections, Olympio Borja was running in the Popular Party; I was a Territorial.

- Willens: This going back to 1972?
- Taimanao: Early 1960s, the late 1960s. And he was down in Rota campaigning. He mistook me as one of the challengers in Rota; he was up talking and I was heckling and things like that. So there were some personal problems involved. But I think it was probably one group, you know, worrying that another group will get the credit—the Territorials saying that we're afraid that when all is said and done the Popular Party will get the credit for it. So Ben and I revised our method of operation, and we decided that we're going to fight for Rota.
- Willens: Within the Commission?
- Taimanao: Within the Commission. Let them take everything as long as there is something for Rota. Our mandate was the bicameral legislature and that funds are earmarked for Rota aside from the general appropriation. That was our mandate from the Rota Municipal Council and the Mayor.
- Willens: Was that a mandate that you were given very soon after your appointment?
- Taimanao: No. It was later. Normally after our sessions we would go back and report to the Mayor and the Council. So it was basically an informal decision with Ben. We were seeing the disintegration of the membership into special interest groups. We have the Carolinians, Tinian, the business community and the political parties. So that's why we decided to work for Rota—if there's anything that's going to affect Rota that's when we're going to stand up and fight hard.
- Willens: And a part of that strategy was to align yourself with Tinian when you had similar interests?
- Taimanao: That's right.
- Willens: As with the bicameral legislature. What was your impression of Ambassador Williams and the staff that you met from the United States?
- Taimanao: I think Ambassador Williams is a straightforward gentleman. It's unfortunate that some members of his staff could not give us the answers that we wanted.
- Willens: Do you have any specific examples that you remember?
- Taimanao: Immigration for one matter. What I'm trying to say is that we come and sit down and then they cannot give us any response to our concern. They have to go back and find out from their office. You may remember how we wanted to get the Department of Interior out of our system, but there's a problem. I don't know if you remember Joe Cruz saying the Department of Interior is good for the Indians and we're not Indians here. So those are some of the problems.
- Willens: That's a good example of Joe Cruz. How would you describe Joe as a personality and a member of the Commission?
- Taimanao: He's great. He surely did break the monotony.
- Willens: Yes, he certainly did that. So who did you feel were the other strong members of the Commission that you have distinct recollections of?
- Taimanao: I never forget what Joeten had to say. We were deliberating on the immigration issue, how we want to control the flow of immigrants into the Commonwealth and, once they're here, how we're going to deal with it. Joeten said, "My dear friends, the problem is not

with the aliens—you can deport them anytime. It's our own people that we have to worry about. It's our own people that can screw us and there's nothing we can do about it.”

Willens: Own people meaning the Chamorros, the Carolinians?

Taimanao: Meaning the Carolinians. That has to do with importing foreign laborers. When there are problems with alien laborers and their employers, there's nothing that we can do about the problem. I mean we cannot deport our own people. So I respect that. I think that was one of the comments made by Joeten that really impressed me.

Willens: Joeten resigned from the Commission after the first two sessions. The second session was in May of 1973. That was the time at which the United States announced its plans for Tinian. At that time, as you may remember, they wanted the entire island and they were going to lease back the southern third to the civilian community. It provoked headlines in the *Pacific Daily News* of a very large size. It provided a lot of opposition on Tinian and in the Commission. After that round was over, there was an interview in the *Pacific Daily News* with Joeten, Felix Rabauliman, and Dr. Palacios. They answered some questions from the *Pacific Daily News*, and they were critical of the way in which the Commission was functioning. They were saying the Commission was moving too fast. They said the Commission wasn't prepared, whereas the U.S. delegation was prepared. They were concerned about giving sovereignty to the United States, and they were generally critical of the way in which the Commission was functioning. Do you have any recollection of that, and did you share those feelings at the time?

Taimanao: No. I have no recollection. I was not aware of that view. But coming from Rota and representing Rota, and knowing how our people wanted commonwealth status, I wouldn't share the same view.

Willens: Your people from Rota had a strong desire to become U.S. citizens?

Taimanao: Yes.

Willens: Do you think that two and a half years of negotiations in retrospect today looks like it was too little time to devote to negotiating a political status? There are some who tell me even recently that maybe it all moved too quickly. The Popular Party leaders that I talk to today say that they perceived a window of opportunity and that they felt that they should take advantage of it at the time.

Taimanao: During our meetings in Rota, we were made to understand that we were progressing at the right pace and that the people wanted to get out of the Marianas District and to get this Commonwealth going. I mean, what else could we have done? I think we diligently and honestly negotiated and, like you say, there was a window of opportunity. It didn't have anything to do with three cars parked in a garage, or things like that, as some people allege. No. It's the opportunity in every respect—economically, educationally, and foremost U.S. citizenship. And the ability to govern ourselves internally. The question of sovereignty. We understood that.

Willens: Do you remember that was something that we spent a lot of time on before the second session. You will remember that my law firm produced a thick memorandum that tried to lay out some of the alternatives and discuss the issues. Then we spent a good deal of time talking about it. These are difficult concepts; they are difficult concepts for lawyers and for laymen. It was my sense at the time that ultimately the members of the Commission, including Dr. Palacios, came to understand that becoming part of the United States meant that sovereignty would rest with the United States.

- Taimanao: Yes. Our level of thinking probably is not the same. I was keeping an open mind on this thing. I mean, we have to give some and take some, so that's one of the sacrifices that we have to make. We were not espousing independence then. There were some discussions about independence, and perhaps only then can we have full sovereignty. But if we chose any other type of political affiliation, there was that question there of sovereignty. I had no problem with U.S. sovereignty over the Commonwealth. We expected that, you know.
- Willens: Did you think that the fact that the Commonwealth is part of the United States has contributed to the economic development that has happened here over the last 20 years?
- Taimanao: Yes, there is no question about that. Very much.
- Willens: Why do you think that is so evident?
- Taimanao: Well, let's take foreign investors. Before they invest, they look at the location—that's one area. But they are also concerned with the U.S. jurisdiction, and the Commonwealth being U.S. soil and in close proximity to Asia, that gives us an edge over other areas. If the Marianas islands were not U.S. soil, then we wouldn't see much development here. So that, I believe, played a tremendous role in our prospering as a U.S. commonwealth.
- Willens: There were some concern within the local business community here on Saipan during our negotiations that a commonwealth relationship would bring too many foreign investors and mainland U.S. investors in to dominate the economy. Do you recall concerns of that kind coming up during the negotiations?
- Taimanao: No, but I can see some quarters where those concerns would be coming from. Of course, Joeten is a businessman himself, Olympia Borja is a businessman himself, and I can see their concern that, you know, opening up the commonwealth as a development area would probably affect them. But you know, the fact of the matter is that they are still up and strong.
- Willens: The evidence would suggest that the local business enterprises have thrived.
- Taimanao: That's right.
- Willens: Is that an overstatement, because you are closer to it than I am? I understand the foreign investors typically pick a local company to be a partner or do a joint venture with?
- Taimanao: That's true. But the foreign investors that are here do not provide the type of investment that those local people are in. Those investors are basically engaged in hotel and real estate investment.
- Willens: Whereas the local people are in the retail.
- Taimanao: Retail, wholesaling. So because of this, the great strides that are made in the hotel rooms, in tourism, have also helped the local retailers and wholesalers.
- Willens: Now what is the nature of your business here?
- Taimanao: We are a stevedoring and terminal operation.
- Willens: Is your company in charge of operating this commercial port?
- Taimanao: Commercial port. Yes, that's right. And during the economic boom, the benefits spread out. We have also taken advantage of the boom. Because of the hotel construction industry. We also benefited from that. Whereas now the slowdown is affecting everybody. Of course, there are some shoddy operations here.
- Willens: Shoddy?

- Taimanao: Yes. The local government would have taken care of that.
- Willens: Does your company have any relationship with Saipan Shipping?
- Taimanao: Yes, we are affiliates in the sense that the stockholders are the same. The same stockholders own our company and Saipan Shipping. So we are affiliated companies, but we have distinct responsibilities and distinct management teams. There are some differences in the board members, but they run their own show and we run ours.
- Willens: Is your company under contract with the Commonwealth government to operate the terminal here?
- Taimanao: Yes, we have a lease agreement with the Commonwealth Port Authority. The Commonwealth Port Authority is basically the provider, but we have contracted for that service, so it's a privately-run port facility.
- Willens: I have heard some very favorable comments about the Commonwealth Port Authority, which also runs the airport, I gather.
- Taimanao: That's true.
- Willens: When Joeten resigned from the Commission in late 1973, he wrote a letter in which he explained that one of his reasons for resigning from the Commission was that he felt that when he spoke up within the Commission, his views were tainted because he was a businessman and people thought he was trying to serve his own commercial interests. Do you remember having any concern about Joeten's participation in the Commission on that ground?
- Taimanao: No, it never crossed my mind that when he speaks it has to do with his own personal gains. Like I said, I respected the gentleman. I looked up to him because, you know, aside from being a businessman, Joeten is a good old man. And that is why I keep saying that sometimes it becomes political. Joeten is a stalwart of the Territorial Party. We have the opposing group, the Popular Party. So, I can understand that those comments were coming from the Popular Party. I can see every day we meet there, members of the Popular Party sitting on the veranda to the conference room. Sometimes they threatened that, if you speak up against their group's ideas, we could be harassed.
- Willens: You remember people sitting on the veranda around the room on more than one occasion?
- Taimanao: Yes.
- Willens: Just to leap ahead a bit, do you remember the final meetings of the Commission, before the Commission voted on the Covenant in early 1975, and the meeting was at night. Gradually a group of observers appeared on the veranda, many of whom were elderly women. Do you have any recollection of that?
- Taimanao: Yes, I remember that. I remember the day we had to take a vote on the section-by-section the Covenant and they were out there too, you know, peeking in through the louvers.
- Willens: Peeking through the louvers of the windows?
- Taimanao: That's right.
- Willens: Were you one of those who may have said, "What's going on here, I feel threatened by these people listening to us?"
- Taimanao: No, I was not very controversial in that discussion. Like I said, I had a preconceived objective, and that is to safeguard and to promote the interests of Rota. My top and

foremost concern was that we get some goodies for Rota. In some sense I felt threatened because I am a member of the Territorial Party, but those people standing out there include people that I have come across. In fact, one of the ladies there was my cousin.

Willens: Did you know that at the time?

Taimanao: Yes, I knew it.

Willens: Was she a member of the Popular Party women's organization?

Taimanao: That's true.

Willens: Well, I asked Eddie about where these people came from? And he smiled and he said well, the word got around that the Commission was going to vote.

Taimanao: Yes, they were heckling what's his name, . . .

Willens: Who were they heckling?

Taimanao: Felix and Oscar.

Willens: I think that is right. I remember someone, I think it may have been Felix.

Taimanao: Felix and Oscar, because we were taking a vote, a roll call vote. And those two guys didn't vote.

Willens: Didn't they abstain?

Taimanao: Yes, they abstained. So you know that is when we heard the rumbling from out there.

Willens: It didn't change their position, did it?

Taimanao: No, it never did.

Willens: Well, talking about Rota then, let's go to the bicameral legislature. After several sessions, we finally came to a point in December of 1974 where there was a draft Covenant that, after a lot of effort and negotiating, the parties had more or less agreed to. The United States wanted to go back and get clearance on a few relatively minor matters. All the lawyers, I think on both sides, certainly including me and my colleague, wanted to take some time to look it all over because it was a very complex, important document. So we recessed for approximately six or seven weeks. I came back in early February for what was thought to be largely a formal signing ceremony. It was at that time that the Rota and the members of the Commission came forward with a specific proposal for a bicameral legislature. The provision as it stood provided for representation, but it was a very general language and did not require a bicameral legislature. What is the best of your recollection as to why you came back with that specific proposal?

Taimanao: Okay, the first argument on the unicameral is the one man, one vote concept. And if we go for that, then we going to lose out. Rota and Tinian will lose out.

Willens: And so you thought that the constitutional requirement of one man, one vote, if it were applied here, would necessarily mean that Rota and Tinian would be . . .

Taimanao: Would probably have no representative.

Willens: Would have a representative but be far outvoted by the Saipan Legislature.

Taimanao: Yes, that's true.

Willens: Just like you had been in the District Legislature.

Taimanao: That's true.

- Willens: But you knew that from the beginning, or is that not correct?
- Taimanao: Yes, we knew from the start that the unicameral legislature would be to our disadvantage.
- Willens: Why didn't you insist at an earlier point on a bicameral legislature? Was that a strategic move that you and the Tinian people made to save this issue for the last weeks of negotiation?
- Taimanao: No, there was no strategic move. It's just that we were hoping that the representation under one house would be equally divided per island.
- Willens: In a single house?
- Taimanao: In a single house, yes.
- Willens: I forget, did you ask counsel whether that was going to be possible, and did you come to the conclusion that it was not going to be legally possible?
- Taimanao: We could have asked for counsel's opinion because we got information back that under the U.S. Constitution the one man, one vote concept would have to apply. And if we don't do that, then there's no other way. So fearing what has happened in the past with the Marianas Legislature, we moved to have a bicameral body. That would take care of our concerns even if we have only one representative in the lower house, because we are sure that the upper house would balance it out.
- Willens: Did you have a meeting between the Rota and the Tinian representatives during the recess to develop this approach?
- Taimanao: Not necessarily develop. The plan would have to come from you, our legal counsel, but develop in a sense that we will pursue a bicameral legislature.
- Willens: You certainly did pursue it. In fact, a definite impression was, and I think this was shared by the Popular Party, that Rota and Tinian members of the Commission might not support the Covenant if there was not a bicameral legislature.
- Taimanao: That's true. See, what we gathered is that the Popular Party is shooting for this commonwealth at any expense. We knew that the plebiscite required a majority from each island, and so we took advantage of that. We had an informal meeting, just between Rota and Tinian, over dinner. We decided to pursue the bicameral legislature and the half a million dollars every year earmarked for Rota and Tinian. The Democratic Party was worried that if we don't support the negotiations, then it's going to flop, so eventually we got their support. I mean they hesitantly, reluctantly gave their support.
- Willens: Did you remember which of the Popular Party members of the Commission were very supportive of your request and which were most resistant?
- Taimanao: I wouldn't say there was any resistance.
- Willens: There was not?
- Taimanao: There were no encouragement.
- Willens: No resistance. But no encouragement.
- Taimanao: But no encouragement, yes.
- Willens: They basically were being realistic about this.
- Taimanao: They just keep an open mind. It just turned out, you know, that I guess they realized that if we don't accede to those demands, the negotiations are not going to go anywhere.

- Willens: The Popular Party leadership wanted if possible to have a unanimous vote in favor of the Covenant in the Commission. The Commission rules called for ten votes of 15 to pass.
- Taimanao: And I could see you know that's your brainchild, that's the Democratic Party's effort, just to get these negotiations going.
- Willens: You associate the bicameral legislature issue with the reserved half a million dollars for each of Rota and Tinian in their capital improvements project budget. But I recall that happened at an earlier stage during discussion about the level of U.S. financial support. The United States originally offered the Commission \$11.5 million a year plus \$3 million of Federal funds. Jim Leonard's studies justified a much higher figure. And then there was some negotiating about the level of financial support. Do you have any recollection of the discussion of the financial support and how the Commission managed to get a larger settlement agreed to by the U.S.?
- Taimanao: If I'm not mistaken, I think following our discussions with the U.S. team, they would not consent to increasing the financing level. But then, we came back and asked for \$1 million more between Rota and Tinian. So then they increased the level by \$1 million.
- Willens: They did increase the capital improvement. They increased it from \$11.5 to \$13.5.
- Taimanao: Because there's that teacher training, the training funding, too.
- Willens: There was some money set aside for training.
- Taimanao: Training, yes.
- Willens: Do you remember a session of the Commission where we had decided in advance that individual members of the Commission would speak to particular needs of their island—infrastructure, education, whatever, and individual members would make their case?
- Taimanao: Yes, I remember that, towards the end of the negotiations.
- Willens: Do you remember speaking up yourself?
- Taimanao: Yes, in fact Mr. Herman Marcuse after I finished came over to say, "You did quite well." Because basically that's the only time that I expressed myself in the meetings with the U.S. delegation.
- Willens: When you spoke up?
- Taimanao: Spoke up.
- Willens: That's right. You did not speak up as much as many of the others. Do you remember what you spoke on? Probably Rota.
- Taimanao: It's about Rota. But, of course, I gave the U.S. government all the credit for what they have done for us.
- Willens: You were being politic?
- Taimanao: Yes, and I'm being very nice. And he came up and shook hands, and said very good, very good.
- Willens: There is some interesting information in the documents about the way in which the United States observed the Commission performing. One of the observers maintained that the Commission gained in self-confidence as the negotiating went on, that after the first and second sessions where the Commission was somewhat more tentative in terms of presenting its views, by late 1973 the Commission was much more ready to speak out in

spontaneous exchanges with the U.S. delegation. Do you have any recollection of the way in which some of these discussions developed into a give and take format?

Taimanao: No, I think that was basically between the counsel and the chair.

Willens: The military issue was, as you know, terribly important. What was your reaction when the United States first announced its demands on Tinian? Did you feel that was something where you should sort of step back and let the Tinian members of the Commission take the initiative, or was that a subject that you felt strongly about also?

Taimanao: I had a preconceived notion that the people in Tinian were settlers.

Willens: Were settlers?

Taimanao: Resettle in Tinian.

Willens: Resettle on Tinian or someplace else?

Taimanao: They were first settled in Yap, then they were brought over to Tinian, and that's where they started their homesteading. I had a notion then that over 50 percent of the people on Tinian were from Rota and elsewhere. But no, it never crossed my mind that this matter should be dealt with by the Tinian people alone. I think it's a decision that we had to come up with after going to Tinian to discuss the issue with the people there.

Willens: Many times.

Taimanao: Many times to consult them. But this matter should be dealt with by the Commission.

Willens: Was it your sense that ultimately the Tinian people would agree to make at least two-thirds of the island available for military purposes?

Taimanao: Just like in Rota, they needed the political affiliation for economic reasons. There were only a few people in Tinian against this move, but they were very vocal.

Willens: There were many against the original request for the entire island and relocation of the village. Do you remember the evening where Ambassador Williams went over to speak to a public meeting at Tinian and the meeting went on for seven hours?

Taimanao: No. I was there only once when the Marianas Political Status Commission went down. The next time around, I think there was a different group, that comprised the entire Commission members. I think there were some select groups out of the Commission. I know Ben, the Lieutenant Governor, was there. The chairman, vice chairman and several other members, but there was a select group to work on the Tinian military issue.

Willens: Did you think that Joe Cruz played an active role in bringing about the ultimate resolution of this matter?

Taimanao: Certainly.

Willens: The other Tinian member near the end was Bernard Hofschneider. Do you have any recollection of Mr. Hofschneider and what contribution he made to the Commission?

Taimanao: No, it was only Joe doing all the talking.

Willens: Do you have any recollection of their predecessors, Frank Hocoq or Herman Manglona?

Taimanao: Herman Manglona is one of a kind.

Willens: Why is that?

Taimanao: He is full of hot air.

- Willens: He was just elected Mayor, wasn't he?
- Taimanao: That's how Herman is, how he was then. Even now I think he is just talk, talk. I give credit to Joe Cruz. I think he's the real man in this negotiation.
- Willens: Some of the most vocal opponents did include Herman Manglona after he left the Commission, Felipe Mendiola, and Felipe Atalig, who was a congressman representing Tinian and Rota too, I think, in the Congress of Micronesia. At least he was there for a few years. Some of them argued that there should be a referendum in Tinian on this issue and that if the majority of Tinian people don't want the U.S. military to use any portion of their island, then the Marianas Political Status Commission was obligated to follow that direction. I gather from what you say that you do not agree with that.
- Taimanao: No, I don't agree that Tinian should decide for itself the military requirements in Tinian. In the same respect, if there is was any need for the military in Rota, the Rotanese should not be the sole judge of that decision because this is a cohesive collective work. The Commission was selected by each government entity to represent its interests. So we are there working as a group for the entire community. As far as holding a referendum on that matter, I don't agree.
- Willens: One of the problems that came up frequently was the extent to which the Commission was informing the people of the Northern Marianas to what they were doing and what issues remained to be resolved in the negotiations. Did you think the Commission made a decent effort to engage in political education and keep the constituents informed?
- Taimanao: Yes, the Commission as a whole I think did its work diligently in educating its people. I know that we did our work with our constituents in Rota.
- Willens: You mentioned that you would go back and report to the Rota Council.
- Taimanao: We would have a public meeting. I'm afraid that the problem in Tinian may have been the result of a lack of communication between the representatives and the community. Probably the reason for that was that everybody else in Tinian was against the military taking over their island. And yet Joe is here working toward making sure that Tinian agree to giving two-thirds of their island to the military. So as far as our communication between our Rota constituents and us as members of the Political Status Commission, I think we have adequately met with our people and made them aware of what was coming up. In fact, in one of our meetings, one Commission member engaged in a lengthy discussion with one of our constituents about the selective service. That, you know, if we become U.S. citizens we will be subjected to the selective service system. But in time of peace they are scaling back the requirement of the selective service. And that is one of the sacrifices we have to make as part of the American political family. You serve your country. If you reach the age of 18, you have to register, but that doesn't necessarily mean that when you register with the selective service you will automatically be drafted. It's the law. But we got into those kinds of discussions. That's the type of communication that we have whenever we meet here with ourselves. I'm pretty sure that if Tinian had done that, they would probably have had a lesser confrontation with the anti-military group there. But I think the Commission as a whole had a responsibility of educating the people of the Marianas about what's really coming up.
- Willens: One of the complications was that during this time the Congress of Micronesia had a joint committee headed by Senator Saliu from Palau which was actively engaged in negotiations with the United States looking toward free association. That joint committee conducted its own political education program, which was considerably different from

that of the Marianas Political Status Commission. In July of 1973, for example, the joint committee, or six members of it, went to Rota. They held a public meeting in Rota, and they came back and wrote a report which they submitted to the Congress of Micronesia saying that the people of Rota did not want to be part of the Northern Marianas. They wanted to stay with the remainder of Micronesia. They also wrote the same thing about the Carolinian community here. Do you remember any conflict between what you were doing as a member of the Commission and what the Congress of Micronesia was trying to do through its joint committee?

Taimanao: No. I know that I was offered a job to work for the Trust Territory political education program to be a translator. That opportunity came when these people were in Rota.

Willens: Which people?

Taimanao: The Trust Territory political status education committee. The Trust Territory government was mandated to provide the education, so these guys were the members of that political education committee or representatives from the TT headquarters when they visited Rota and I was selected to interpret. The guy running this show came in the next day and says, let's go to Saipan.

Willens: Do you remember who it was? It wasn't Sam McPhetres, was it?

Taimanao: No, he's a Palauan guy. I don't recall his name. I didn't know many of these people up here, but this guy offered me a job, and to move my family to Saipan, to work for the political status education commission.

Willens: Well, the TTPI program was called education for self-government. It was announced in late 1973 but didn't get under way until some time in 1974. It laid out different status alternatives: free association, commonwealth, status quo, and independence at one point ultimately got added to it, I believe. Some people recall there was great confusion here in the Northern Marianas, because they had one group disseminating materials setting forth this wide range of alternatives, whereas the Marianas Political Status Commission had a single objective of commonwealth and was talking to the people only about that.

Taimanao: I think that after the burning of the flag at Capitol Hill, I think that was the onset of the commonwealth move here.

Willens: There were some dramatic incidents.

Taimanao: But I think that commission on self-education existed before the Marianas actually went on its own way.

Willens: I think that's true.

Taimanao: Because the offer came in before I became a member of the Political Status Commission. That was in the late 1960s.

Willens: There were some complaints in the Congress of Micronesia that the political education effort run by the TTPI was deficient, and many years later they tried to rehabilitate it.

Taimanao: I recall that they were espousing different forms of political association, being independence, free association, compact and commonwealth. Our Commonwealth is far different from what they're doing. They're trying to educate us what type of affiliation or government we want. They have those education programs. Then they want us to make the ultimate decision whether we want to have commonwealth, free association or compact, or independence. But that is different from our move. Following the burning of

- the flag at the TT headquarters, that is when we, the Marianas, actually went on our own way to ask for the commonwealth negotiations that led to the Covenant.
- Willens: Did you get any impression as to how the TTPI Administration felt about the Northern Marianas separate negotiations? Did you feel they supported that objective, or were they opposed to it, or were they simply neutral?
- Taimanao: I don't know, really. That's all taking place here. Down in Rota, what we read is basically what we can get, but I'm not too familiar with its history.
- Willens: What is your recollection of the day on which the Covenant was actually signed in the auditorium? Do you remember, for example, there was a lawsuit filed to stop the signing of the Covenant the Friday before the Saturday on which the ceremony was to take place?
- Taimanao: No.
- Willens: Do you recall having any particular feelings of accomplishment or satisfaction at the time that the Covenant was actually signed after working on it for two and a half years?
- Taimanao: Yes, I felt a great sense of accomplishment there. I was so excited that I couldn't figure out how to sign my name on the document, whether to go the long route or use my usual signature. It turned out I used my usual signature.
- Willens: Which is the shorter version?
- Taimanao: Which is the shorter version. That's how excited I was.
- Willens: Did you have family there on the occasion?
- Taimanao: No, I don't have my wife, just myself. Of course we have relatives here, but you know it doesn't coincide with the signing.
- Willens: Did you play any role in the political education effort that preceded the plebiscite on the Covenant?
- Taimanao: Yes, certainly.
- Willens: Did you concentrate on Rota?
- Taimanao: On Rota, yes.
- Willens: Was there any meaningful opposition to the Covenant on Rota?
- Taimanao: One guy.
- Willens: Was he a vocal and effective person?
- Taimanao: Vocal, yes. Not necessarily effective, but he's out there campaigning house to house. Not out with a PA system, he's just coming to a gathering, and telling people how this is not the best that we can get.
- Willens: What was his principal complaint?
- Taimanao: Nothing. I understood this guy wanted to be a member of the Commission, but the Mayor didn't appoint him, so I think he was sour about it. A sore loser.
- Willens: Why do you think Oscar Rasa and Felix Rabauliman decided not to sign the Covenant?
- Taimanao: I don't know, it's hard to tell. I don't want to guess, I could be wrong. There could be many reasons. Probably because of the political affiliation, but perhaps it's personality, personal differences, perhaps it's ethnic background.

- Willens: Well, that certainly was Felix's point.
- Taimanao: I understand he said there's not enough benefit for the Carolinians. It probably had to do with the ethnic factor.
- Willens: Have you stayed out of political life since your membership on the Commission?
- Taimanao: Yes.
- Willens: When you moved to Saipan, of course, you went off the Municipal Council, but you've never run for office here in Saipan?
- Taimanao: No, and, you know, years back you could win an election through how well you can talk to the voters. Now, you need financial backing, huge financial backing. The voters now want more material goods than what you can put up. And secondly, I just want to stay out of politics. Even in the last election, I know whom to vote for, but our company has to stay in limbo; we don't want to lose this contract because of our political affiliation. But certainly in private I had a view about choosing a governor.
- Willens: Just to conclude the interview, how do you think the Covenant and the Commonwealth have worked out? What have been its successes and what have been its shortcomings?
- Taimanao: Let me say, the shortcomings are essentially matters of personality. People not working hard to come to an understanding.
- Willens: You're talking about political leaders from different parties?
- Taimanao: From the U.S. and locally, I think the problem is that different people have different interpretations of what the Covenant entails.
- Willens: You're speaking of some of the revisionists or what?
- Taimanao: No, not necessarily the revisionists, but, you know, about the applicability of some sections of the Covenant.
- Willens: Of the constitution, you mean?
- Taimanao: No, the Covenant, the 702 funding for example. Some people are saying that the 702 funding is a right, some people are saying it's an entitlement.
- Willens: You and I know that we negotiated a multiple seven-year program. The United States could have stopped a multiple-year program after the first seven years.
- Taimanao: That's right.
- Willens: If they had wanted to.
- Taimanao: I feel confident with what we have.
- Willens: How about the bicameral legislature? There are those who think that the power that Rota and Tinian have in the Senate is one of the reasons the Commonwealth government has not been able to function effectively.
- Taimanao: You know, we have been in this government for how many years now?
- Willens: 15 years.
- Taimanao: 15 years. Only last year, the year before, they have problems with the budget. There must be a reason. For thirteen years there was never a problem.
- Willens: You think it's more a question of people in political leadership than it is the structure of the legislature?

- Taimanao: And personalities, yes. I mean if we can do it for 13 years, why can't we do it for the last two years?
- Willens: How about your economic development, how about the alien labor problem? We preserved for the people here the right to control their immigration. As a result, there are those who think that economic growth went too rapidly, that there are too many aliens on the islands, and that it's adversely affecting the social structure of the community.
- Taimanao: You know, that's one of those things that I'm worried now. Certainly I think that development went rapidly.
- Willens: Too rapidly?
- Taimanao: Probably too rapidly. It went that way because there's not enough study done. That's why I say, I never faulted the system, it's the people who are interpreting the regulations. You know, it's the local people, and that's why I keep going back to Joeten. The local legislature makes some laws to curtail the influx of alien laborers. A couple of months down the line, they repeal the law, and there it goes again. For how many times have the legislature approved laws to control the flow of alien laborers. They make regulations to control these alien laborers, but then a couple of months down the line they repeal the law. There it goes again. The problem keeps cropping up. There's where the problem is.
- Willens: One of the things I remember hearing a good deal about was the desire of the people here to improve the education and health facilities for themselves and their families. How do you think the Commonwealth has performed over the last 15 years in terms of improved education and health care?
- Taimanao: Yes, I have seen some improvement in education and health care. But you know the resources now are directed more toward aliens, because there are more and more aliens coming in.
- Willens: Are they having an impact in the school systems?
- Taimanao: Yes, and in the health services. That's the new problem in the health services. Because the contract workers make use of the health center. But even in education, the number of nonresidents is growing. This is hindering the opportunities for the local population and perhaps that is one reason why the U.S. Congress is on our back, because all these funds are being spent on non-locals.
- Willens: I have heard that because of the economic slowdown, several thousand aliens, principally those employed in the construction business, have left. Are you in a position to know whether that is true or not?
- Taimanao: I don't know. That's what they say, but you can imagine how many illegal aliens are now on the island. I don't know. That's what I heard, that people are sending back their employees. But I don't know.
- Willens: Are you basically optimistic about the Commonwealth's ability to solve its problems?
- Taimanao: Let's wait for the next four years.
- Willens: See whether four years makes a difference.
- Taimanao: Yes. I reserve comment about the next four years.
- Willens: That's fair enough. I'm carefully preserving a position of political neutrality here. Do you have any other general assessments of the Commonwealth and the Covenant that you would offer to me?

Taimanao: As far as the Covenant is concerned, I think it's a document that's workable. I think that it's fair. The problem I see are the people that are interpreting this document, the Covenant. Each individual has their own interpretation about sections of the Covenant. I have no regrets about the final product. I think, under the circumstances, it was one of the best that we could come up. Certainly there's room for improvement. You know this is not something that we just go out and pick from a tree. It's a negotiated document, and we have to bear in mind that we are negotiating with the U.S. Government—what they can give us that is good for us we'll take, and what they cannot give us that is good for us we just have to realize that we're out there asking the American government, the American people, to take us in. So, like you said, in 1974 that was the best that we could come up. Situations have changed. We understand that. But you know we were negotiating in 1974, 1972, 1974, not in 1993, not in 1990, so certainly there is that gap of time. But I think probably the future leaders should embark on redefining the Covenant based on the present conditions. Certainly I find no fault with the Covenant, and I'm not saying this because I was a member of the Commission. But I honestly feel that with your guidance, we came up with a very good workable document.

Willens: Thank you very much, sir, for your time and your comments.

Taimanao: You're welcome.