

## INTERVIEW OF FROILAN C. TENORIO

by Howard P. Willens and Deanne C. Siemer

March 26, 1997

- Willens: We have the honor today of interviewing the Governor of the Northern Mariana Islands, Froilan C. Tenorio, who has served as Washington Representative, as a Senator in the Commonwealth Legislature, and is completing his first term as Governor of the Commonwealth. Governor, thank you very much for being available for this interview. We have on many occasions explained our historical project to you, and it may please you to know that we are nearing the end of our research and will settle down to produce this book sometime in the next several months. Can we begin by asking you where and when you were born?
- Tenorio: I was born September 9, 1939 on Saipan in the old Garapan Village.
- Willens: And who were your parents?
- Tenorio: Well, my father, Albert Camacho Tenorio, died in 1971. And my mother, Rita Duenas Cruz, is still alive. She's 82 years old.
- Willens: You mentioned before we began the interview that you were a U.S. citizen. Was that because one of your parents was?
- Tenorio: No, sir. My older brother, who went to school in Milwaukee, as I did, became a naturalized U.S. citizen when he was on Guam attending school. That was in 1950 (I guess) when the people of Guam were given U.S. citizenship. Any alien at that time got the green card, so when my brother completed the five year residency requirement (or whatever it was) he became a U.S. citizen. He petitioned me as a relative, and I got my green card. I guess I was attending Marquette University in Milwaukee when I qualified to become a naturalized U.S. citizen.
- Willens: Tell us a little bit about your education. How many years did you stay on Saipan?
- Tenorio: I attended elementary school here, six years of elementary school, and then two years at the Saipan Intermediate School. When I finished eighth grade, I went to Guam where I attended Father Duenas Memorial School, graduating in 1958. I attended the Territorial College of Guam, which is now the University of Guam. After three years, I was working and going to school at the same time, I got my AA degree. Then around November or December of 1962, there was a big typhoon on Guam. It just so happened that my brother was coming over here before going into military service. He worked for the City of Los Angeles, and he was going to report to the Army for two or three years of active duty because he was in the ROTC program at Marquette University. On his way back to the mainland, I accompanied him, and that's how I got to Milwaukee in 1962.
- Willens: How many years did you stay at Marquette?
- Tenorio: It took me another five years to finish college, because I was working.
- Willens: You were working at Marquette at the time?
- Tenorio: I was working my way through college, working part-time, going to school part-time, working full-time. Anyway, it took me another five years to finish college. I graduated in 1967 with a bachelors degree in civil engineering. Then I went to work for the City of Los Angeles from 1967-1972.

- Willens: What kind of work did you do there?
- Tenorio: Civil engineering. I worked for the Department of Public Works.
- Willens: That accounts for your interest in public works.
- Tenorio: And I guess being a civil engineer. It comes naturally. At that time, my late uncle Joeten, Joe Tenorio, revived the MCC—Micronesian Construction Company. He offered me a job to come and manage the construction company. I did so, because at that time also I decided that I wanted to come back to Saipan.
- Willens: You came back then in about 1972?
- Tenorio: Yes. I worked for Micronesian Construction Company for two years. Then I quit and started my own construction company, Tenorio Construction Company. Then I started getting involved in politics. In 1979, I ran for the Senate. I was elected for one term of four years. I decided not to run for re-election because in the Second Legislature the Democrats were a minority, six to three in the Senate. In the Third Legislature, I was the only Democrat. So I decided that I couldn't do anything in the Senate. I got out with the idea of running for Governor in the next election. However, as I was getting out of the Senate, Eddie Pangelinan switched parties from Democratic to Republican as Resident Representative to the U.S., so the Democrats drafted me to run against him as a Democrat, and of course I won that election. Then two years later was the election for Governor, and of course re-election for me. I decided that since I was in Washington, D.C. for only two years, it wouldn't be nice for me to give up that position and run for Governor. So I decided to run for re-election as the Resident Representative to the U.S. for another two terms. So I served in Washington, D.C. for six years. When I came back, it was 1990.
- Willens: Right.
- Tenorio: It was in 1983 that I got elected for the Washington position, so I served in Washington from 1984-90. In the 1989 election, I ran for Governor with Victor Hocog and I lost. Then in 1993, I ran again with Jesse Borja, and I won.
- Siemer: When Joeten revived MCC, what kinds of things did the company construct?
- Tenorio: At that time, he was doing housing units like the one in Dandan. That's the project that the company was doing when I first came on board. Then we expanded into Palau, Yap and other parts of Micronesia.
- Siemer: Again doing housing?
- Tenorio: Not housing. Mostly government buildings, like the Hill-Burton dispensary program—I can't remember now the name of the program—to build and to put up facilities in the outlying districts of Micronesia. We also built the 50-room Hafa Adai Hotel, which you don't see anymore.
- Willens: Oh, really?
- Tenorio: Yes.
- Willens: That replaced the very small one that only had 14 rooms?
- Tenorio: That's right. The 50-room concrete structure replaced that one, and then of course now that one is gone also.
- Willens: Was your father active in politics?
- Tenorio: No. My father was just a carpenter mostly and also farming.

- Siemer: How many brothers and sisters did your father have?
- Tenorio: I guess there were seven of them, including my father. My father was the second oldest. The oldest brother died in an accident. That's one reason why I'm so concerned about sight distance on the road, because of what happened to him. There was a curve in the road over there around McDonald's, there was a typhoon at that time, and my uncle was driving fast. He was in charge of Public Works. And at the same time a trailer was backing out into the road, so there was just not enough time for him to see this. So that's why I'm very concerned about this. This is engineering. You should be able to see a distance far ahead in time to stop based on your speed. Anyway, my father is the second oldest. And Juan Guerrero, his mother is the third one. You know Juan Sablan?
- Willens: Yes.
- Tenorio: Juan Sablan is married to the daughter of the former Governor Larry Guerrero. His mother is the fourth. And then Joeten, the fifth. Then Tony Tenorio, the sixth. Then the father of Juan Tenorio, is . . .
- Siemer: The father of Juan Santiago?
- Tenorio: Yes. The seventh.
- Willens: Given Joeten's identification with the Territorial Party, how did it happen that you became affiliated with the Democratic Party?
- Tenorio: I'll be honest with you. I felt more comfortable with the people in the Popular Party at the time. They were people from the poor families that I grew up with—Danny Muna, even Manny Muna at that time, Ben Santos, who was my teacher in elementary school. I felt more at home with the Democrats. The Republicans (I'm sure you know) were mostly the business sector and the Carolinians, and these were the people who I understand voted against the referendum to join with Guam back in I think 1962. To me, I can understand that the local businessmen could see the Guam businessmen just coming over and wiping them out. I mean, they didn't have any money over here at that time, but Guam was already big. And the Carolinians were already a minority, they would become even more so if we united with the Chamorros on Guam. So I could see why they didn't want to join with Guam. And frankly, I also think that they didn't like the idea of the Covenant.
- Willens: Did you share the view of the Popular Party leadership in the 1960s that reintegration with Guam was the best way to become part of the United States?
- Tenorio: Well, I wasn't here.
- Willens: Yes, I gather you really were away from most of the 1960s.
- Tenorio: Yes. I was gone. Frankly, I hate to say this, but when I left Saipan and Guam at that time, I didn't think that I was ever going to come back. And I wouldn't have come back if my father didn't die. Because when he died and I came back for the funeral, I saw what was happening over here, and I decided to come back. But I left with the idea that I was gone for good.
- Willens: Did you make your political decision then when you came back in 1973?
- Tenorio: Right. What happened was that I looked around, and I saw the people in government, the politicians, and frankly you might say that at that time I was one of the few successful local people to go and finish college. Most of the people in politics at that time didn't even finish high school. I just thought that maybe some of our more educated people should

get into politics. Ironically, the more educated you are, the less chance you had of getting elected over here, at that time anyway.

Willens: Why was that?

Tenorio: Well, my opinion is that it's very hard to be educated and be a politician. I mean there's some conflict there, even now. For example, I hear that I have to go against Diego Benavente when I can justify my position, but he cannot justify his. He just doesn't want it, period. And while he's got control of the majority, he naturally will prevail. But it was the same thing at that time also. A good example is Pete A. Tenorio. I'll be honest with you. He was more competent to be Governor than Pete P. But again, it's not how educated you are but whether we can get along with the people. I guess in a way I'm similar to Pete A. in being vocal. Maybe our personalities are not what you would find in politicians. I still say that I am lucky that I'm Governor and that I got elected to public office, because I'm not a very sociable person. And people tell me about that. My staff will tell me hey, go and shake hands and things like that. And I just don't do those kinds of things. I don't know whether it's because I'm educated. But I notice that for some reason the educated people turn off the general public. I don't want to give you an example, but I can think even now some of our people think that when we're educated and we're telling them what to do, how to do it, that we're going too far.

Siemer: Or that there's a lack of respect?

Tenorio: Yes, or somehow they think that just because we're educated, we feel that we know everything. And they get turned off by that. When you know, what can you do? If you think you know better, then you should tell them. But I'm able to blame that on politics because I could still get elected. But some people unfortunately, who I feel should be in government, can't get into the government because of that.

Siemer: Did your older brother ever go into politics?

Tenorio: No.

Siemer: How about any of your other brothers and sisters?

Tenorio: No. My youngest sister was married to John Torres, who was a Republican in the House of Representatives member at one time. Incidentally, my older sister (younger than I am but older of the two sisters) was a strong Republican, like my parents. My own parents were Republicans. They used to fight, throw rocks at the Democrats, because they were really a minority at that time. So they were involved in politics, but not to the extent of running for public office.

Siemer: Who are your brothers and sisters?

Tenorio: Juan C. Tenorio, an engineer from Guam. Then Francis Sablan—I don't know if you know her. And Dicta Torres. As I said, she was married to John Torres.

Willens: To Jack Torres?

Tenorio: The brother of Jack Torres.

Willens: I see. When you came back in 1972 to Saipan, it was about at that time that the United States had agreed to separate negotiations with the Northern Marianas, and the Legislature created what was called the Marianas Political Status Commission. At that time and as you got back into the community, did you share the idea that separate negotiations were preferable to staying with the rest of the Trust Territory?

- Tenorio: No. I was never involved with anything involving the Covenant negotiations. One reason for that was because I was a U.S. citizen, I had to get a work permit to work here, even though I was a Chamorro born here. And of course they didn't allow me to vote in the local elections. So I'll be honest with you. I wasn't paying that much attention to the status negotiations.
- Siemer: You were already a U.S. citizen.
- Tenorio: Yes, I was already a U.S. citizen. That's another reason also.
- Willens: I gather though that your company, the MCC [Micronesian Construction Co.] and then your own company, did projects through the Trust Territory.
- Tenorio: That's right.
- Willens: In other parts of Micronesia.
- Tenorio: Yes.
- Willens: Had you visited those districts before you got involved in the construction business?
- Tenorio: No, I never did.
- Willens: Based on what you saw in the other districts, did you think that the Northern Marianas, the Chamorros and the Carolinians here, could have united with the people from the other districts into a single government?
- Tenorio: No, I didn't think that they could have united. I am glad that the Northern Marianas people decided to go separately.
- Willens: Why did you reach that judgment?
- Tenorio: I would never favor the idea of any kind of a federation with Micronesia. To be honest with you, even at that time a lot of the local people weren't happy with the TT, because naturally many of the Micronesians were staying and working over here. And frankly, they were more educated, more ambitious, and more aggressive, so they got the top jobs in the TT.
- Willens: The people from the other districts?
- Tenorio: From the other districts. And a lot of the local people didn't like it, but you know, we can't blame them. As I said, they're ambitious and aggressive.
- Willens: But how about people like Frank Ada, Juan Sablan and the others who went into the Trust Territory Administration? Is it your view that there were many more people from the other districts who were successful and came here to work for the TTPI, but that the local people didn't want to do that?
- Tenorio: Of course there were a lot of local people working for the TT, but somehow I could see that most of the top positions were occupied by Micronesians from the other districts. I could sense that the people didn't like that. And definitely the other reason of course is that our ethnic background is different from Micronesians. We're not Carolinian in the sense that people from Palau, Yap and Ponape are Carolinians. There was no doubt in my mind that the people here would rather join with Guam or join with the United States. And they showed it, they proved it in the plebiscite.
- Willens: We've talked to a lot of people about this issue. Some people suggest that the other districts had more by the way of local culture or tribal practices than existed here, so the people in the other districts felt threatened by some kind of a democratic form of government. What is your reaction to that?

- Tenorio: I don't know about how the other districts felt, but this is true. The local people just felt that if they joined with other districts that we would be held back. Like you said, in the other districts they're protecting their traditions, their culture, and everything. We wanted to become Americanized, which is in the opposite direction. There was no camaraderie with the other Micronesians. We always felt that we were different, that we're Chamorros more with Guam than with Micronesians. And if it were not for the TT government, we would never have anything to do with Micronesia.
- Willens: You do stress the point of wanting to be Americanized, and also you associate that, as I hear you, with moving forward in terms of economic development.
- Tenorio: That's right.
- Willens: Do you think there were real differences here as opposed to the other districts about wanting economic development?
- Tenorio: Definitely.
- Willens: Why did people here place so much emphasis on that?
- Tenorio: Because again, we were looking to Guam. I wonder if Guam was not around how we would actually feel. But we were going to Guam, we could see them with cars, with nice houses and things like that—things American to me, you know. In other words, a nice job, nice future, good education. So that's what we wanted. We wanted to develop ourselves, and we wanted the opportunity to make something of ourselves and definitely not as one of the districts with the other Micronesian districts. No way.
- Willens: In the course of your work in the private sector before you ran for office, was the TTPI Administration still making it difficult for foreign investment to come into the Trust Territory?
- Tenorio: Definitely.
- Willens: How did you feel about that?
- Tenorio: At that time I knew that we could be better than what we were. But frankly, I didn't know if there was a policy of the United States to keep foreign investors from coming here. I just thought that that's the way it was, you know. There was nothing over here for foreign investors to come to. Of course, I found out later that the U.S. did discourage foreigners from coming over here. But at that time, all I knew was that we could be better than what we were. We wanted again to be just like Guam, with the same kind of opportunities. Definitely we wanted to become U.S. citizens because we all wanted to go to the United States for education, to reside over there, to work over there, which to me is just the opposite of the other Micronesians. The other Micronesians were here because of the good jobs, but I didn't think at that time that they wanted to migrate to the U.S. as we did.
- Siemer: Back in those days, did private businessmen like yourself worry about the Japanese coming here and competing with you?
- Tenorio: Not at all. No. In fact, I guess they started to come. Like the Hafa Adai Hotel, that was a joint venture from the very beginning with the Japanese and my family—Joeten—not my immediate family, but my father's family, the Tenorio family.
- Willens: Some people have commented to us about the fact that the people in the local community didn't develop a tradition of saving money and investing in the private sector. Now Joeten's

interests are an exception to that, as the Hafa Adai arrangement demonstrates. Do you have some sense of whether that's true or not?

Tenorio: That's true. There were only a few entrepreneurs as I guess you call them. Joeten, Manny Villagomez and Manny's brother (I can't remember his name), Herman Guerrero. Those were the few who somehow were business-minded, so they went into business and were successful. At that time I guess our people were not business-minded. I guess we were just trying to stay alive. The people were getting 35 cents an hour. There were very few businessmen at that time.

Willens: You were here during the Covenant negotiations and the plebiscite on the Covenant in 1975. I know you said that for various reasons you were not close to those negotiations. Do you have any recollection today of the debate about the Covenant in 1975 where there was opposition led by Oscar Rasa among others? What's your recollection of that?

Tenorio: Well, I didn't remember anything, and if you didn't mention Oscar Rasa I wouldn't have thought of it. But now that you mention it, I guess I do remember something like that. But no, I wasn't (as I said) paying any attention to the Covenant negotiations. As I said, I was in a way angry at the local people for treating me like a foreigner. So I said hey, look, it's your future then. Of course, their future was mine already. I was already a U.S. citizen, so naturally I supported their efforts. And as I said, I'm glad that they took that route. But frankly it's inevitable. I can't see our people at that time going in the opposite direction with the Micronesians. No way.

Siemer: Did you ever consider running for the First Constitutional Convention?

Tenorio: No. Somehow I didn't realize it, but I always enjoyed, like in school, civics courses dealing with government. But it never occurred to me that I would ever be a politician. Never. And in fact you might say that I didn't want to have anything to do with it when I was growing up. I just never thought of becoming a politician until I got back from Los Angeles.

Willens: I may have misread the records, but I saw something that suggested you ran for the first Commonwealth Legislature in 1977.

Tenorio: No.

Willens: When Carlos Camacho was elected Governor.

Tenorio: No.

Willens: You did not run for the first term, but then you ran for one of the slots that was available in the Senate after two years?

Tenorio: Yes.

Willens: It was a two-year slot.

Tenorio: Yes.

Willens: So you ran for Larry's slot, is that it?

Tenorio: Yes.

Willens: I see. Okay. The records that I read are Trust Territory records, and they're wrong.

Tenorio: Yes.

Willens: And so then you served one full term in the Senate?

Tenorio: Yes.

- Siemer: Who did you run against at that time? Was it Ray?
- Tenorio: Ray Villagomez.
- Siemer: So the first election for the Second Legislature you ran against Ray Villagomez?
- Tenorio: That's right.
- Siemer: Then who did you run against the next time?
- Willens: That was a four-year term.
- Siemer: Oh, that was a four-year term. That's right.
- Tenorio: Yes, one term. Then of course I ran against Eddie.
- Siemer: Then who did you run against for Washington Rep the second time?
- Tenorio: I think the second time I didn't have any opponent. The third time I ran against Jesus Mafnas.
- Willens: You suggested earlier that in the first few years of the Commonwealth's history, the Governor was Democratic but the Legislature was overwhelmingly Republican.
- Tenorio: No, no, that's only in the Senate. The House in the Second Legislature was Democratic.
- Willens: Democratic in the House.
- Tenorio: Yes. Maybe even the third one.
- Siemer: What changed your mind then and made you decide to run in 1979 when you ran the first time?
- Tenorio: I said earlier that I was dealing with people in government some of whom didn't finish even high school. Here I was a college educated person, and I felt that I didn't like what they were doing. I wasn't just going to stand on the side and complain. I mean I'm going to get in there and do something. And you know, actually I wanted to run for the House of Representatives, and it was H.R. Guerrero who told me no, no, no, no.
- Willens: Who did? Herman R.?
- Tenorio: Yes. He told me that he wanted me to run for the Senate. But you know I wanted to start from the bottom up. And lucky that I didn't run for the House of Representatives, because I was staying in my mother's Precinct 3 which was heavily Republican, and I guess I would have lost if I ran as a Democrat. When I ran for the Senate, Greg Sablan (Kilili) ran for the House, and he lost in that district where I wanted to run. So it's a good thing that H.R. Guerrero . . .
- Siemer: And he was very well known at the time, Kilili? He had been in politics for quite a long time?
- Tenorio: No, that was the first time.
- Siemer: That was the first time?
- Tenorio: Of course, his father Jesus, and then his uncle, Greg Sablan, was a long-time Mayor of Saipan.
- Siemer: That's who I was thinking of.
- Tenorio: Yes. That's an uncle of Greg Sablan.
- Siemer: Who took over Tenorio Construction when you decided to run for office?



- Tenorio: Well, I was doing okay when I was over here as a Senator. Although I realized already that the best thing for me was to get out. When I became involved in politics, I got into trouble with the company, because people then were charging and not paying, and I couldn't go up to them because I was a politician. So I should have just closed it down. I didn't. Remember I said that after four years in the Senate, I got out. I wanted to get out and concentrate on the business and wait for two years to run for Governor. But then I got elected to go to Washington, D.C. So when I had to leave, I turned it over to Juan Guerrero, and he operated it until he had to close it down.
- Willens: What is your assessment looking back now on the first years of the Commonwealth political system? Did you think the Commonwealth leaders were ready for the new responsibilities under the Covenant and the Constitution?
- Tenorio: No, and that's the reason why I got in. That's the reason why I decided to become a politician. Because I didn't like what they were doing. I'm sorry that I can't think of any particular thing right now.
- Willens: But you said when you got elected in the Senate, you served for four years, and there was a division between the political parties, where the Republicans had control of the Senate I gather while you were in the Senate. And now you've served as Governor at a time when there also has been a divided government in the sense that the two branches are governed by different parties. What's your judgment about how to deal with that kind of a problem?
- Tenorio: Well, the difference is that I was a minority in the Senate and it didn't matter whether I had good ideas or not. They wouldn't listen to me; they wouldn't do anything; and I couldn't do anything. Well, now it's different. I'm the Governor, and they are on the other side, in the other branch. So now I can influence what they do over there, or I can block what they do. That's different from when I was a minority of one out of nine in the Senate. I couldn't do anything. But now it's different. And frankly, I don't care if both Houses are controlled by the Republicans if they're reasonable. I mean, for example, I just have been helping this one Senator for Tinian. I don't have to mention his name. Helping him, but every time he votes in the Senate, he votes against me. So just today I said hey, this is it. I'm not going to tolerate this any more. So I'm going now to do something about him, but I can't employ a lot of his people on Tinian while he votes against me in the Senate. But I have the power to do something about it, but not when I was in the Senate.
- Willens: You and I have discussed over the years the position of Washington Representative. Based on your six years in that office, do you think it serves a useful purpose?
- Tenorio: No. I would say at that time when our people were negotiating it, I could see that our people needed somebody in Washington, D.C. But there again, our people didn't have an understanding of how they did things in Washington, D.C. The way to do it is the way we're doing it now—hiring lobbyists over there to do the things for us.
- Willens: What kind of work did you do when you were over there for six years?
- Tenorio: Nothing. I didn't do anything. One time in my first year, the delegations from the Northern Marianas came to testify for the budget, and I also testified. Then I realized that if I had differences with the Administration, I didn't want to air those differences in Washington, D.C. I knew at that time that Congress and the Administration (or Interior) were more interested in what the Governor had to say than what I had to say. So that was the only time when I testified in the Congress on the budget. After that I decided I would leave the Governor alone, Governor Tenorio. I mean, that's what happened. Now, as you

can tell, Juan Babauta is testifying against this Administration, against my position, and frankly he's doing it without knowing really what's happening over here.

Willens: Were you involved at all in the negotiation of the second seven-year funding?

Tenorio: No.

Willens: You were also in Washington at the time that the Trusteeship Agreement officially ended in 1986 with respect to the Northern Marianas, and you and I recall that there were some citizenship issues. What was your sense at the time about the Executive Branch understanding of what the Covenant meant?

Tenorio: At that time in 1986?

Willens: Well, just generally based on your experience in Washington. Did you think that the people of the Interior Department understood what the provisions of the Covenant meant?

Tenorio: Oh, you're talking about the Interior Department?

Willens: Yes.

Tenorio: I don't know. I didn't have any ideas on that question. I didn't know until just last year that the Interior Department never considered the Resident Representative office as important.

Willens: You learned that in the course of the [Section] 902 negotiations?

Tenorio: That's right, just now. So I guess it was just a waste of time and money, all the time that I was there, and even now. I knew that they were more interested in the Governor, and I suspect that the reason for that is because Interior was dealing with the Governors of the other Territories, so why should they deal with us differently. But I was surprised that they came out with the position that the Washington Rep was a worthless office. I guess in a way they're saying that they didn't like the idea of that office when the local people suggested it in the Covenant, but we wanted it so we got it. I guess that's what happened.

Siemer: One of the issues that arose during the Constitutional Convention about which there was a lot of debate was the Office of Carolinian Affairs. And there was a suggestion at the time that in the future, as the government developed, the Office of Carolinian Affairs would be very important to the Carolinians. There were a number of very outspoken people who insisted that it be included in the Constitution. When you came into the Legislature, what had happened to that Office? How did it work?

Tenorio: I don't like that Office. I don't think it's needed. The Carolinian Affairs is not in the Covenant, right?

Siemer: It's not in the Covenant; it's just in the Constitution. Right.

Tenorio: But you know I think we're giving too much power, too much recognition to the Carolinians, and to Tinian and Rota. I can understand the Senate is on the basis of island, which as you know is unique among the Territories and the 50 States. But on the other hand, we extended that to, for example, the ratification of amendments to the Constitution. I say that's unconstitutional under the U.S. Constitution where you have to have two-thirds and two districts in order to amend the Constitution. But I guess we're victims of the minority on Tinian and Rota and the Carolinians here. Now if you ask me, I guess the Carolinian Affairs Office serves a purpose, because the Carolinians here care very much for their culture and they want to preserve it. They want to protect it. And maybe

we do need the Carolinian Affairs Office to make sure that that takes place. In the sense that we don't have a Chamorro culture, and so we don't need to have anything to protect our Chamorro culture. But frankly, like many other organizations or associations, it's just an employment agency.

Willens: How do you feel with respect to the fact that the Chamorros and Carolinians tend to look on the government as the principal place of employment and you see relatively few in the private sector? How do you think that development is going to come out?

Tenorio: I don't like it. In one of the meetings in Hawaii of the Commission on Federal Laws, I had a confrontation with Congressman Phillip Burton, and in fact I think he had the heart attack or stroke after that one. I'm sure it didn't have anything to do with my confrontation with him. I can't remember now what we were arguing about, and I was trying to tell him that look, we have to do something for the private sector. And I guess he felt that for a long time to come the government (and maybe Guam was like that at the time already) would be the major employment agency in the Northern Marianas. I was surprised when he brought that up with me. Now I would like to do something to encourage our people to work in the private sector, but it seems that it's going to be costly. To me the solution to this problem is for the employers in the private sector to provide the same kind of benefits that government employees get—annual leave, sick leave, health insurance, even pensions. It's just too much for the employers to pay for that. My idea is to have the government reach agreement with the employers in the private sector and their employees, where the government would share one-third of the cost of providing annual leave, sick leave and all those other benefits. But then that means that the government would have to bring in more revenue to pay for that. I guess frankly at the time I suggested something like this to Dave Cahn. He said no, no, no, you let the private employers take care of their own problem. So as a result, I don't blame our local people for wanting to work for the government. I never did, you know. I never worked for the government. I don't think I'll ever work for the government. I mean other than being elected. But I can see other people going for the government because of the benefits that they get.

Siemer: Why do you think it was, during the boom times when local people made quite a lot of money, that money in most instances never went into business enterprises, wasn't invested in the way that you might have seen in your business or in Joeten's business or Manny Villagomez' business. The money didn't tend to generate more local businesses here. There was a tremendous boom and a tremendous amount of money that could have been channeled into business.

Tenorio: That's right. And in fact just the other day one of the reporters was telling me that Governor Tenorio said that hey look, it was boom time when he was Governor, meaning that he had something to do with it and that he could do it again. And I said well, the trouble is that hardly any of that money was invested. So when the money was gone, there was nothing. Not like what's happening now when we're actually investing in new buildings, new hotels and everything, stores, restaurants. So everything that's happening now will last for a long time and will contribute to the economy for a long time. And as you said, the money was gone during the [Pete P.] Tenorio Administration. The reason for that, as I said earlier, was that the people who had the money weren't educated. I mean they didn't know what to do with their money. There are a lot more now than during Joeten's time, but as I said even during Joeten's time there were only a few of them. And that's the same thing now. Our people don't think about saving money for the future, investing money for the future. And I hate to say it, but I guess I'm one of them. I don't even own a house. To be honest with you, I don't think about the future. I don't have a

savings account. I spend everything I make. So I guess I'm typical of the majority of the local people. They're not business-minded like Juan Santiago, Juan Pan, people like that.

Willens: How serious do you think this threat is of federalizing immigration and minimum wage authority that the Commonwealth has?

Tenorio: I don't think it's a threat any more and, frankly, it's the worst thing that the Congress can do to us. The idea is that we can't do things ourselves, we can't take care of our own problems over here, and Washington, D.C. should take care of us, which is the mentality in Washington, D.C. on the territories. That's how they feel. That we, the natives in the territories, can't take care of ourselves, so they'll take care of us over there. Recently I've been telling Washington, D.C. to let the territories go. Leave them alone and let them take care of their own problems. Let them learn to stand on their own feet rather than every time there's a problem they do something about it. In one of the bills, and I guess it became law, the Congress was going to establish an Economic Council in the Virgin Islands. Holy smoke, you mean they couldn't do something like that themselves? I would never allow that over here. I mean, for the U.S. Congress to do it for us, they'll appoint the members or something like that. Okay, so we're making mistakes. And I'm not going to say that we've been a member of the American political family only for 20 years, that we don't have time to learn to do things ourselves compared to the U.S. They're still having problems in immigration after all these years. But the fact is I just want the Congress to let us take care of these problems. We will make mistakes, but at least we're doing something about the mistakes. We're doing something about the problems. I don't want them to do it for us. And that's what they will be doing if they take over immigration.

Siemer: One of the things that caused a good deal of problems here in the Marianas, as well as elsewhere in Micronesia, was the concept of eminent domain. Back in the 1970s when the first Constitutional Convention had to grapple with this concept of eminent domain, some people argued that Chamorros and Carolinians could not understand what eminent domain meant and that it just could not be acceptable in this kind of society. Yet the federal government insisted that it have eminent domain powers the same as it did in any other state. Can you help us understand what people thought about eminent domain back in those days and what the political argument was here?

Tenorio: Well, I can't answer you how the people felt about it at that time. How do they feel about it now? I don't even know that. But the fact is I'm condemning land. I don't care how they feel about it.

Siemer: Are you the first Governor to do that?

Tenorio: Yes, I think so. Although I don't know, somebody told me that maybe Camacho did one or something like that. We're condemning land now. And in fact, I don't know if you're familiar with Texas Road? Have you ever heard of Texas Road?

Siemer: We drive on it every day.

Tenorio: Well, now I'm going to condemn the land so we can open the road. But I'm not afraid. Let me put it this way. At that time there were only Chamorros, and the Chamorros were the landowners and also the people who were using the public accesses, the roads and things like that. Well now it's different. Now you know we have a lot of taxpayers who are paying taxes to provide roads, water lines and sewer lines, and therefore we have to accommodate these people. So if we have to open a road and the landowner doesn't want to do it, then I'm sorry, I'll just have to condemn it. I'll open it because I have to think about the taxpayers, not just the Northern Marianas descent or the local people. So I don't

- have any problem with eminent domain. No matter how the local people feel about it, it doesn't bother me.
- Willens: I saw that when Ambassador Williams made his comments after you gave him a plaque a few days ago, he pointed to the population of 60,000 or so and the fact that less than half of that figure were local people. Is that a subject and percentage that is of concern to you?
- Tenorio: No. And that's something that I still don't understand what's the problem with that. So what if there are only 20,000 of us in a population of 100,000? What's the problem? You know, the fact is it's better over here than on Guam. On Guam now, the Guamanians are expressing some hostilities (you might say) against the U.S. because it's the U.S. that allows foreigners to migrate to Guam. They stay there, they become voters, and now the Guamanians are outnumbered in votes by people from the Philippines, from Malaysia, from Asia. Interior should be concerned about them, not us, because over here we control our government. And unfortunately also, there's no way that we can have the economic development that we have now without the foreigners over here.
- Willens: Do you think that the people generally here continue to want more economic development to the same extent that they did five or ten years ago?
- Tenorio: I would think so. This morning, for example, I met with Juanita Malone, who is in charge of the developmental disabilities people. (I'm sorry I'm not familiar with all this.) She was looking for additional funds. I was explaining to her that we're lucky now because just since we took office we increased the revenue by \$100 million. It was \$158 million when we took over, and our budget for next fiscal year is going to be more than \$260 million. So I was telling her that now, if they need more money, I can give it to them for the services that we need. I was surprised, because she said that she's actually helping about 2,000 people with disabilities. I mean that shocked me. That was a big figure. She was complaining that she needed additional staff because they were burning out in their office. I don't know if you were here when (maybe in 1995) I had to stop the medical referral program because we didn't have the money. Now we have it. This is the thing. I just have to tell the people look, if you want me to provide you the services that you expect from the government, then you'd better favor economic development.
- Siemer: When you came back to run MCC, did the company employ alien laborers then?
- Tenorio: Yes.
- Willens: Was it clear then that to the extent you wanted to build things, you were going to have to bring in laborers to do that?
- Tenorio: Definitely. No doubts at all. Because we just didn't have the people, we just didn't have the number of people. Even then we were allowed to travel to Guam and Hawaii and the mainland. So a lot of people were already moving away. So as we needed more people, they were moving away, so of course we had to bring people from the outside.
- Siemer: Some people say that they never expected that as the economy grew more and more aliens would be necessary in the labor force to support that.
- Tenorio: And where did they think the people were going to come from? Like every place else, the families are growing smaller. I mean we're having fewer children. So I don't know where they thought we were going to get the people. Maybe they thought that Americans would migrate over here.

- Siemer: But businessmen like yourself in the private sector back in those days, in the early 1970s, understood that as they expanded their businesses, they were going to have to get labor from the Philippines and other places?
- Tenorio: Yes. And I'm saying that we're going to need even more. Just imagine when the casinos are open on Tinian. I mean that will easily double the number of guest workers that we have. Because it's not only the casinos, there will be a lot more stores, more restaurants, more hotels, more golf courses. I can't see in the future when we're going to have to stop bringing them in. See, this is what Washington, D.C. doesn't understand. First, they think that if we increase the minimum wage that the local people will have better jobs. Well, the fact is that as we increase the minimum wage, then we become more expensive. Then as we become more expensive, the tourists will go elsewhere. And if they don't come over here, like what happened to Hawaii three years ago, then our economy will collapse. They don't realize that we're competing with Guam and the other countries around here for the tourists. And the thing to do is to reduce that cost rather than increase it. Actually, I would like to ask the two of you how we can make this place a free zone so that we attract even more tourists, because I didn't know until I became Governor that a lot of tourists (I guess I should have known that) go abroad to go shopping. So let's make this like Hong Kong.
- Willens: We have seen a place or two like that. I think we've reached the end of the interview. But I guess our last question to everyone, Governor, is in general: how do you think it's worked out—the Covenant and the Constitution over the past 20 years? Is there any general assessment that you'd like to put on the record as to how well you think it's worked out or what its disappointments have been?
- Tenorio: To me, the Covenant is (as I've said before) one of the most perfect documents ever drafted. But I have problems with our Constitution. First of all, I don't blame the Constitution. The amendments, like for example I want to call up former Governor Tenorio and tell him that what he should do is challenge the amendment that reduces the number of terms from three to two on the basis that the ratification process in the Constitution is unconstitutional based on the U.S. Constitution. You know the way we amended it, we added 53 amendments. Frankly, I still say that none of them was an improvement. And this is where I need your help. You know what happened when we voted in that election, the people were ordered to stuff the ballots in the ballot box on the amendments whether they voted or not. And yet they weren't counted. To me, amending the Constitution should be a difficult process. So therefore you should include everybody who voted in that election. So I say that those people who didn't vote—and frankly in my case I only voted on one of them out of the what was it—54?
- Willens: Forty-four or something like that.
- Tenorio: Yes. Out of the 44, I only voted on one. And the other ones, I didn't think of it, and so I just left them blank. So what happened, the Board of Elections didn't count those blank ballots.
- Siemer: In determining the majority?
- Tenorio: That's right. So I say it's the number of yes against the no and the blank ballots, the total. So that's one. Well, on the other hand of course, now even if we can have a 75 percent "yes" but because Tinian and Rota say "no," it's no. Now, come on. Something is wrong with that. Unfortunately, I wish that Congress had done something about it at that time. Because Congress accepted the Constitution without any changes, I guess now people think that there is nothing wrong with it. But I still do. Don't you think there's something wrong with that?

Willens: Those are very significant issues that you've raised, and I guess it just goes to show that there are still problems here in the Commonwealth that you and your colleagues will be dealing with. But we thank you for your time. I know it's been a burden on you at this busy time, but thank you very much.

Tenorio: You're welcome.