

SPECIAL COMMITTEE REPORT NO. 21-14

RE: COMMITTEE TO WAIT ON THE PRESIDENT

OCTOBER 27, 2020

The Honorable Wesley W. Simina
Speaker, Twenty-First Congress
Federated States of Micronesia
Eighth Special Session, 2020

Dear Mr. Speaker:

Your Committee to Wait on the President was duly appointed on October 26, 2020, consisting of members Esmond B. Moses, Ferny S. Perman, Peter M. Christian and Dion D. Neth. Esmond B. Moses was designated as the chairman.

The Committee met with the President on October 26, 2020, at 12:00 p.m. The President greeted the committee and thanked everyone for the opportunity to meet. Chairman Moses expressed Congress' gratitude for the meeting and reported that Congress is in the Eighth Special Session and was ready to transact business.

Your Committee received an agenda from the President communicating the priorities the Executive branch wished action on this session. Upon review of the agenda the Chairman stated Congress is prepared to move forward on at least some of the items.

The first item on the President's agenda was an update regarding the National Government revenue projection. There were 4 options presented during an oversight hearing last week. One was to leave the projection as is, the second was to look into the earmarked funding from MRA and the fishing fees, the third was to reduce the appropriation amount and the final option was to look at the CIP that went back to the 15th Congress. The Budget Officer Soha

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Johns, noted that Secretary Amor wants to reduce the amount available. Secretary Amor recently submitted the revenue projection, \$9.6 million. During the hearing, it was shared that CIP and public projects amounts were: public projects was showing about \$15 million back to 15th Congress and CIP, the report shows that since 2014, there are several items that have not been allotted and are under the umbrella of some other projects that have also not been allotted, there is about \$20 million that has not been allotted. They would like to get a confirmation for items prior to 2020, the reports viewed were not current to now. These are section 9 appropriations that do not lapse. The President noted that we need to act quickly to determine what may be available. He noted that we are in an emergency situation and that needs to also be considered and this can be a good opportunity for a positive public relations situation. He noted that it is good news that there are additional \$9.6 million projected. He indicated a preference to look at funds that have not been allocated under the law currently. Chairman Perman inquired as to the status of the Trust Fund. The President noted that we are coming back from the decline. He noted that there is a summary report from Wilt shire that he can provide. He feels the fund is doing well. He has requested that some funds be invested in green/environmental options. The President suggested that the Department of Finance and Administration will crunch some numbers and get back to Congress with the options, especially regarding CIP. President's preference is to not interfere with the administration of the Trust Fund earmarked funds.

The second agenda item was regarding proposed legislation regarding an amendment to the national elections. The President noted that there was a hearing regarding the Public Announcement regarding no in person voting. He noted that we may be going in the direction of suspending voting in person at special voting places. He noted that there have been many discussions regarding this matter. November 2nd citizens can request to vote by absentee ballot or at special polling places, with a closing date in January. He noted that there could be a lockdown that would deny people their right to vote. He noted that some

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will request absentee ballot and some will request to vote at the special polling places. He feels that if we make it known that there will be no voting at special polling places, everyone will know and will request the absentee ballot. He noted this is a concerning matter and noted the importance of keeping things clear for all citizens. He does not want to end up with a last minute decision. He noted that we could open ourselves up to a lawsuit if the votes are close. He noted the proposed legislation will be coming today. The President shared that he spoke with Chairman Romolow this weekend and provided a background on how the decisions have been made.

An update regarding the field trip vessels was the third item of discussion. Chairman Urusemal had asked about the Voyager during session. Both vessels are in Asia and they have been preparing to come back to the FSM. The NTF has been updated the President. The Voyager had a leak in the generator room that required a gasket replacement. He noted that a decision has to be made regarding what the process will be to allow the vessels to return. He noted that there could be a negative community response to allowing the vessels to come in from COVID infected areas. The crew have been tested, a couple were positive but have since tested negative. Secretary of TC&I noted that the crew have been tested three times and currently they are all negative. They are waiting for clearance from Chuuk State and the NTF. The Voyager is at the dock in Japan awaiting authorization. The Navigator left Weno for the lower Mortlocks yesterday. There was a backlog of cargo and passengers so they have to do two trips, the second on November 19th. The President noted that hazard pay can be utilized for the crew of Chief Milo and Voyager because the crew is in COVID infected areas. He also noted that the stipend for crew can be increased as they wait for a decision from the government. He noted the vessels are needed due to the interstate travel requirements currently. The Chuukese boy has been staying on the boat and external affairs has been dealing with the family and one of the crew members is his uncle. Chairman Perman noted that leaving an infected area and being at sea for at least 14 days should be considered. He noted that the diplomats

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have requested to stay in Kwajelein for 14 days. He noted the concern is coming directly from an infected area. He noted that all diplomats from US, Japan and Australia want to use this option. The President asked about the possibility of an asymptomatic outbreak on one of the vessels waiting at the anchorage, we would have to bring them onto the mainland and put them into isolation. He questioned if we have the capacity to deal with this. Chairman Perman noted that Fiji has done an excellent job of catching the cases at the border and then isolated, with no community transmission. Secretary Taulung shared that the NTF is working to ensure all processes are done safely. He noted that they will be at sea for 14 days, be tested again upon arrival, with the hopes of catching any positives prior to entry to the community. Regarding the diplomats, there is a working group to gather all the information on how to transport them safely. The people in the Solomons who tested positive, were tested three times. He questioned if the quarantine was broken and if the rules were properly followed. He noted there are now three students that have tested positive. The asymptomatic transmission is the biggest concern. He noted that they will continue to investigate and bring information to the President for consideration.

The fourth item discussed was an update on CIA. The pilot issue has been resolved and the pilot has arrived from Kiribati. They first went to inspect the plane after the mishap. The Fijian pilot was testing the airports landing options. He noted that the Kosrae airport was probably not going to be a good option because of the type of plane. They are trying to get a different plane, the one they were looking at has been sold. Additional details regarding the incident will be provided after the meeting with the pilot. Safety will be the biggest consideration moving forward, especially when passengers are being transported. The Kiribati pilot is highly trained and was in fact a trainer. He will be working closely with the Fijian pilot. They will retrieve the Y12 plane from Chuuk. He noted that they need to do a test flight because the plane has been sitting for an extended period.

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The update regarding the RMI repatriation was discussed as the fifth agenda item. Chairman Taulung shared that the NTF is planning the repatriation for this Friday. It had to be delayed because the plane needed a service. There are more than 20 passengers, numbers are being verified. They will be tested on Wednesday and fly out Friday. The NTF is working with Pohnpei to get the quarantine and other details firmed up, hoping to get everything secured by Friday. The President noted that when CIA is up and running, they plan to have a run from Palau to Yap, there are 15 Yapese wanting to return.

Pending nominations were the sixth discussion item. FSM Trust board nomination has been submitted and the FSM Telecom board has also.

The seventh and final discussion point from the agenda was the pending legislative action regarding the FSM Interpol membership. The President is requesting that if the CIP option is considered, a special appropriation request has been made that the COM endowment fund was inadvertently missed, \$285,000. Membership in Interpol was requested in last session. The money was budgeted for last fiscal year, but it lapsed. Early December there is a meeting scheduled and if we are under lockdown, the NY Mission will represent them. This is not the annual fee, but it is the initiation fee and other fees, approximately \$30,000.

The President expressed well wishes from the entire administration to Floor Leader for a speedy recovery.

Vice Speaker noted that Congress has been requesting the section 9 items and were advised that a "formal" request was needed. Vice-Speaker requested that this request at the Committee to Wait be considered a "formal" request and the President acknowledged it would be considered so.

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The meeting concluded with mutual agreement to move forward on the above issues in a timely and cooperative manner. Your Committee kindly requests the members address any further questions regarding the priority issues for this session to the members of the Committee during the discussion of this report at session.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ Esmond B. Moses
Esmond B. Moses, chairman

/s/ Ferny S. Perman
Ferny S. Perman, member

/s/ Peter M. Christian
Peter M. Christian, member

Dion G. Neth, member