

SPECIAL COMMITTEE REPORT NO. 21-16

RE: COMMITTEE TO WAIT ON THE PRESIDENT

JANUARY 12, 2021

The Honorable Wesley W. Simina
Speaker, Twenty-First Congress
Federated States of Micronesia
Sixth Regular Session, 2021

Dear Mr. Speaker:

Your Committee to Wait on the President was duly appointed on January 11, 2021, 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 January 11, 2021, at 12:00pm. The President greeted the committee and thanked everyone for the opportunity to meet. Chairman Moses expressed Congresses gratitude for the meeting and reported that Congress is in the Sixth Regular 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 COVID-19 vaccine distribution. The President's address is about 17 minutes long and has been published on social media. 8,200 additional vaccines received this weekend. CIA flying to Kosrae, then Weno. PMA will intercept in Chuuk to take Yap's portion. CDC has been reporting a weekly distribution for the FSM. The FSM will then distribute to the states. The President spoke with Speaker the day the COVID case was confirmed. The President spoke with all of the states to update them. They are going to be aggressive with vaccine distribution to the front liners and those at high risk. When we have vaccinated most citizens, will then be prepared to discuss repatriation of citizens further.

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Vice Speaker asked about the distribution plan beyond the front liners and at risk. The governors have identified over 2,000 citizens that are prioritized. The Department of Health and Social Affairs is maintaining the list. Currently waiting for information to access the numbers for Pohnpei to receive additional doses because of the positive case here. Shipping time can be problematic. Would like CDC to ship directly to the states, but currently all doses are coming through Pohnpei. Chief Mailo crew will be vaccinated. Concerned that the Captain may have anti-bodies that are showing a positive test. They are going to do the swab and blood test. 17 and under is half of the population, hoping to get all other vaccinated as quickly as possible. There is discussion about making the vaccine mandatory. The President supports this. He thinks people will be eager to voluntarily get vaccinated. The people are already motivated, not sure if we will be able to keep up. Based on availability, would like to have most of the population vaccinated within a couple of months so we can get back to planning repatriation. Currently have sufficient amount of vaccine to vaccinate the frontline workers. Will base initial doses on up to date information on availability.

Regarding stranded citizens, Vice Speaker asked about working with Guam and Hawaii to assist them with getting vaccinated. FSM has been discussing this with the CDC. Foreign Affairs will continue to work with Guam and Hawaii to ensure they are prioritized.

Regarding students and other residents who living in the US, there is nothing that excludes them, bases on citizenship for vaccination. They should be eligible the same as US citizens, based on the same prioritization.

Chairman Perman inquired regarding kids under 18. He noted that many kids have underlying medical issues. He requested that the Task Force inquire of this with the CDC. It was noted that they have not done safety studies for under 18 as of yet.

The second agenda item was regarding the supplemental budget request. There are numerous requests, the highlights are FSMT Cable Corp (OAE) \$2.2 million being submitted separately, TC&I \$3.788 million and Foreign Affairs request \$632K for the Portland Consular office. Total supplemental request is estimated to be approximately \$6 million. Revenue projection offers a cushion for the additional requests. OAE will submit directly to Congress because they are a separate entity. FSMT is seeking additional funding due to the work on the cable.

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The Portland office is working on the purchase of the building. Asking price was \$3.5 million and they offered \$3 million. They are preparing to fence up the property, biometric security, etc. as soon as they take possession of the property.

Personnel, etc. from the national government also requested in the supplemental. The President is providing the cabinet, etc. with their contracted amounts and there is a shortfall. It is not anticipated that future large requests will be made in future supplemental requests. It was shared Chairman Figir will be having a hearing on Wednesday to discuss.

Can patrol boats and Voyager be sent to Chuuk? Concerned about outer island service. Not sure if Chuuk leadership will allow them in.

Stranded citizens assistance, some people have not received their checks. Finance reports 80% have received. The ones that they have all of the required information on, they have paid. There was a delay for some of them due to the bank. Need verifiable information to process. There were a lot of new applications. It was shared that they have been requesting information on who is in the Chuuk house for months, but have not received.

The National Government is offering to pay some of the doctors who are assigned to clinics, to assist at the hospital. They are working on personnel and funding with Pohnpei State. National has indicated they will offer all available funding to support the response to the current case. Situation is more manageable because the case is isolated on a ship. Pohnpei State says they are as ready as they are going to be.

The President does not want to specify a time for the repatriation of citizens, but rather focus on the foundation of getting the vaccination rolled out. We are moving in the right direction.

PUA taxation issue. The letter has been forwarded to Congress. Department of Labor has given their opinion that the PUA cannot be taxed. FSM DOJ opinion is that if they had moved forward with the taxation it would have been problematic pursuant to the terms of the CARES Act. The President is requesting that the funds that have been collected and the law be repealed.

Regarding PCDs and the outer island airports in the Ta airport. The President terminated the contracts with the Adams for the Sokehs Ridge Development. They did not move forward as agreed. They kept the Wolei

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contract in place to mobilize so as to not cause further delay. Larry has indicated that the lockdown has been the problem, but it was noted that domestic travel has been allowed. There has also been a shortage of coral for gravel for the projects. TC&I will rebid the Ta airport. They will be sending staff out on the next vessel, probably next month on the Navigator. Working with Larry on Wolei, transportation is an issue. MSC is issuing a permit for Fahrenheit to create additional coral to meet the need.

Regarding Chief Mailo, unclear what will happen with the ship. The President noted that he instructed the Secretary of Health and Social Affairs to notify the Pohnpei State leadership that they were following the same protocols as when the Voyager arrived. He noted that over the holidays there were some communication breakdowns. Pohnpei was aware of the plan, but not the final schedule. They have been provided with all information currently. Chuuk State asked that the ship be taken to Pohnpei, which is more prepared to deal with it and the President supported this. He noted that the crew is eligible for stipend or pay. There were concerns that the crew was going to abandon the ship and make their way back to Guam. The protocols were followed and leadership is puzzled as to how the captain tested positive. Eventually the ship will go back to Chuuk.

Regarding the testing capabilities, our labs can do the blood testing. We have the GeneX PCR test. The medical team wants to do the GeneX test and a blood draw to look at previous antibodies, etc. There have been no symptoms exhibited. No one on the vessel has shown any symptoms. Hopeful that the positive was triggered by antibodies, but treating it as a regular positive case.

Chairman Perman noted that no one has gotten sick on the ship. He noted that he visited the Pohnpei State Hospital isolation area and they are prepared with oxygen, etc. He noted that the hospital is ready to receive cases if needed. The President is hoping that his address to the Nation will help to keep people calm in the community.

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.

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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

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