

STANDING COMMITTEE REPORT NO. 15-46

RE: C.R. NO. 15-20/HESA

SUBJECT: CONFIRMING THE NOMINATION OF ROBERT W. SPEGAL TO BE THE
SECRETARY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS OF
THE FEDERATED STATES OF MICRONESIA

SEPTEMBER 26, 2007

The Honorable Isaac V. Figir
Speaker, Fifteenth Congress
Federated States of Micronesia
Second Regular Session, 2007

Dear Mr. Speaker:

Your Committee on Health, Education and Social Affairs ("HESA"), to
which was referred C.R. No. 15-20 entitled:

"CONFIRMING THE NOMINATION OF ROBERT W. SPEGAL TO BE
THE SECRETARY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL
AFFAIRS OF THE FEDERATED STATES OF MICRONESIA.",

begs leave to report as follows:

The intent and purpose of the resolution are expressed in its title.

Robert W. Spegal has been nominated by the President of the Federated
States of Micronesia to be the Secretary of the Department of Health
and Social Affairs. Title 2, section 207(1) of the Code of the
Federated States of Micronesia sets out that this nomination is
subject to the advice and consent of Congress.

Mr. Spegal is a citizen of the United States of America. He has
worked and resided in the Federated States of Micronesia since the
early 1980s. He originally came to Micronesia as a Peace Corps
volunteer in the mid 1970s. Mr. Spegal earned a Bachelor of Arts
degree in Social Studies from Albright College in Reading,
Pennsylvania in 1974 and a Masters of Public Health degree with a
concentration in Health Services Planning and Administration from the
University of Hawaii at Manoa in 1999.

Mr. Spegal currently works as Program Manager of the Pohnpei
Competitors' Association, a program funded by the Pacific Regional
HIV/AIDS Project in Suva, Fiji. He is also a sub-recipient
grantee/civil society partner with the FSM national government for the
Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and malaria. In addition, he has been
the Administrator of the Micronesia Human Resource Development Centre
since 1997. Previously, Mr. Spegal served as the Director of the
Pohnpei State Department of Health Services from April 1998 until
January 2000. He also served as National Health Planner for the FSM
national government's Department of Human Resources from 1987 until

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1991 and Health Manpower Planner for the same Department for six months in 1987. In addition, Mr. Spegal has worked as Program Coordinator for the Pacific Diabetes Today Resource Centre and Games Administrator for the 5th Micronesian Games, among many other positions during his years in the FSM.

PUBLIC HEARING

Your committee held a public hearing on the nomination on the afternoon of Monday, September 24, 2007.

The hearing was conducted in two sessions, the first being with staff members and employees of the FSM who have worked with and for the nominee and the second being with the nominee, himself. Present at the first session were various employees and officials of the Department of Health and Social Affairs, as well as a representative of the President's Office.

Many of the employees of the national government who have worked with or for the nominee in various capacities were in attendance at the hearing to show their support. Several spoke in support of his nomination or responded to direct questions from Committee members. They were united in their belief Mr. Spegal is more than capable of leading the Department.

On the question of whether Mr. Spegal, as a non-citizen of the FSM, is an appropriate choice for a Cabinet-level position, the witnesses expressed their shared conviction that, having lived and worked in the FSM for more than twenty years, the nominee is familiar with, and understands, the culture, needs and political background of the FSM. Although the witnesses conceded that to appoint a non-Micronesian to represent our nation abroad is a sensitive matter, they asserted that the most important factor in the selection of a Secretary position is the dedication of the individual to the job. The representative of the President's Office informed your committee that the nominee was selected from a pool of possible candidates but that the nominee was seen as the best-qualified individual who was also willing to accept the nomination.

A doctor employed with the Department of Health Services related that she has known Mr. Spegal since her days as a high school student, when he was her counselor. She stated that the nominee understands

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Pohnpeian values and, in addition, has traveled to the other states of the FSM and would be able to work competently with them.

The above expressions of confidence in the nominee's ability to work with all the four states of the FSM were echoed by the other witnesses. The nominee was described as a "doer" who likes to accomplish goals and achieve tangible results.

Mr. Spegal, on being invited to join your committee, affirmed that he has accepted the nomination. He confided that he had originally been surprised by the President's request that he consent to his name being submitted for the position; however, after much reflection, he considered that the position would be, in some ways, similar to his experience as Director of Health Services for Pohnpei State, a position he had enjoyed and had been disappointed to leave when he was not re-nominated following a change in the state administration.

In response to a question as to how his American citizenship may assist the FSM in the negotiation of grant assistance from the USA, Mr. Spegal noted that he knows certain members of the JEMCO committee and staff, some for as long as twenty years. He sees these personal relationships as being beneficial if he were to be confirmed as Secretary of Health and Social Affairs as he would be able to negotiate and discuss all issues with JEMCO. He also noted that reporting is essential to ensure continued grant funding.

During his comments and answers to questions Mr. Spegal emphasized his view that primary health care is of paramount importance in our nation. As a result, we must be proactive in developing and improving our primary health care services. Equipment and supplies are urgently needed. The nominee stated that he would push to put ensure adequate and well-operating dispensaries.

As to traveling to our states, a practice that can sometimes be viewed negatively, Mr. Spegal said he is prepared to visit the states when necessary, but that coordination is more important and can eliminate the need for a great deal of travel. He is ready to use available communication technologies to reduce the amount of travel. He also noted that it is important to respect the different roles of the national and state governments.

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In response to a question regarding the presence of HIV/AIDS on our islands, Mr. Spegal confirmed that, indeed, the virus is here and likely in greater force than we imagine. He used the analogy of the "tip of the iceberg" or the "eye of the crocodile" to illustrate his point. The nominee advocated for changing behavior through information at the level of churches, youth and government. Education, he said, creates change.

Mr. Spegal also referred to the diseases of tuberculosis and leprosy, which are currently prevalent on our islands but need not be if proper health care were in place.

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Mr. Spegal stated, if he were confirmed, he would endeavor to know his staff at the Department of Health and Social Services as individuals and to get their feedback on the operations of the Department. He emphasized the importance of communication and coordination.

Mr. Spegal finally noted that the FSM faces both first and third world health problems in that we face challenges in both sanitation and access to clean water as well as diabetes and motor vehicle accidents. He also pointed to accelerating betel nut and tobacco use as developing health concerns. These problems, he said, are beginning to be seen as "normal". This is dangerous, he noted, as certain matters, such as a chronic obstructive cough, are not "normal" and certainly not harmless.

Finally, your committee notes that requests for comments on this nomination were sent to the four states. Unfortunately, no responses have been received to date.

CONCLUSION

Based on the above hearings, your committee is satisfied with the qualifications and dedication of the nominee and recommends him with confidence for the position of Secretary of the Department of Health and Social Affairs.

Your Committee on HESA is in accord with the intent and purpose of C.R. No. 15-20 and recommends its adoption in the form attached hereto as C.R. No. 15-20.

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Respectfully submitted,

Joseph J. Urusemal, chairman

Claude H. Phillip, vice chairman

Dohsis Halbert, member

Roosevelt D. Kansou, member

Resio S. Moses, member

Setiro Paul, member

Joe N. Suka, member