

SPECIAL COMMITTEE REPORT NO. 19-08

RE: COMMITTEE TO WAIT ON THE PRESIDENT

FEBRUARY 26, 2016

The Honorable Wesley W. Simina
Speaker, Nineteenth Congress
Federated States of Micronesia
Fourth Special Session, 2016

Dear Mr. Speaker:

Your Committee to Wait on the President, consisting of members Joseph J. Urusemal, Berney Martin, Alik L. Alik and Florencio S. Harper was duly appointed on February 26, 2016. Joseph J. Urusemal was designated as the Chairman.

The Committee met with the Vice-President on February 26, 2016 at noon. Chairman Urusemal greeted the Vice-President and key members of the Executive on behalf of Congress, and thanked them for the opportunity to meet. Chairman Urusemal reported that Congress was in session and was ready to transact business. Your Committee stated the main purpose of convening this special session was the Presidential Emergency Declaration signed by the President on February 18th and transmitted to Congress on February 23, 2016. The Committee also stated it had as priorities the pending nominations, and it's need to make inquires into the delays of allotment for some appropriated funding. Also, raised were concerns relating to interpretations of certain immigration/citizenship provisions by our immigration authorities.

The Vice President greeted the Committee, and he also requested that Congress give priority during this session to request by the President to approve the SEG and Compact funding for tourism (\$1.9million).

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The Vice President began with the Declaration of Emergency by the President. The Departments of Resources and Development, and Justice briefed the Committee as to the shortages in water, and in some instances food, mostly in the outer islands. This information has been communicated by the state counterparts and in some instances the outer islands directly to the Executive. The Vice President stated that as the Office of the President watched the situation unfold they came to understand that the states were reluctant to declare a declaration of emergency at the state level because they did not want to commit funding and resources at the state level. It was also offered that the states did not have sufficient experience with slowly emerging disasters such as the drought caused by the El Nino.

The Vice President advised that for the last year there has been coordination with the states and information/updates has frequently been provided by the National government to the states. The Vice President and Departments stated that immediately after the Declaration of Emergency plans were made to take water, and some food supplies to the outer islands. When the ships are dispatched to the outer islands assessment will be done as well. The Vice President stated that our international donors have expressed willingness to support relief efforts if necessary.

The Committee expressed disappointment with the timing of the Declaration, especially since it came only days after the conclusion of the January regular session. The Vice President stated that the timing was due to increasingly serious reports directly from the states, primarily from the outer islands as to the escalating crisis. The Vice President apologizes as to the National Declaration of Emergency coming ahead of the individual states' declarations, however, as Yap has just declared, and reports are that other States will follow suit that this technical point can be forgiven. Reports from the Department of R&D state that we are now experiencing the peak of the El Nino effects. The Vice President respectfully requested that Congress allow the Declaration of Emergency stand so that all branches and levels of

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government can work together to resolve the suffering and problems created by the El Nino.

The Department of Health and Social Affairs reported that there are spikes in reports of skin rashes and pink eye possibly due to lack of water and sanitation. There are reporting alerts in place to detect any illnesses related to lack of water. Also, the Department H&SA is increasing public awareness campaigns regarding water quality and heat. The Department of H&SA will also be doing an assessment in the outer islands of Yap and Chuuk. The Department of Education stated that some schools in Pohnpei have been running only half days due to lack of water. He also stated that he expects that the outer islands have had and will continue to have disruption of school due to lack of water. It is the Secretary of Education's hope that water can be delivered to public schools so the children can remain in school.

Again, your Committee stressed its disappointment with the lack of planning and coordination between the states and National Government regarding the drought caused by the El Nino as there has been a year to work on this issue. The members of the Committee also stated that they had not received notice from their State Governments as to need to address this during the January regular session.

Discussion on this issue was closed with the Vice President stating he would immediately provide information requested by the Committee as to use of emergency funding under the Compact, and the results of any assessment done regarding this Declaration of Emergency.

As to the nominations before Congress the Committee noted to the Vice President that additional hearings on nominees would be taking place, and that these were priorities for Congress as well.

The Vice President and the Department of Finance and Administration stated that there was no cash flow problem. The Department stated that the delays in processing allotments were due to the heavy workload. They apologized and stated that all allotments had been processed.

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Finally, issues to do with possible poor enforcement and interpretation of immigration laws by our National officers was raised by the Committee. The Vice President and Department of Justice stated that they had noted the issues and would report back to Congress as soon as possible.

The Committee stated that it would report the priorities to the full body of Congress and do its best to work on the priorities as set forth by the President.

The meeting concluded with mutual agreement to move forward on the above issues in a timely and cooperative manner. In order to allow the Congress session to reconvene as scheduled this afternoon at 2:00 p.m. The Committee is submitting a brief report at this time. 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/ Joseph J. Urusemal
Joseph J. Urusemal, chairman

/s/ Berney Martin
Berney Martin, member

/s/ Florencio S. Harper
Florencio S. Harper, member

/s/ Alik L. Alik
Alik L. Alik, member