

Brief Statement/Progress Report to the Chamber

Iokwe aoleb...

Before I proceed, I would like to welcome Department of Interior's Assistant Deputy Secretary Mr. David Cohen along with the other guests that have certainly graced us with their presence. I hope that your stay on Majuro has been enjoyable...and these are the people that are providing you all the goods and services so if you are not happy with any of them, I'd blame them.

Just a brief update on what the Chamber has been up to. As you all know, they've listened to us! The drydock will not be located at the Uliga site but other sites are now being looked at. I believe they are looking at Jerry Kramer's compound there after the bridge. So stay tuned for what should be an interesting negotiation between the Chinese and the Jewish!

The Chamber Executive Committee had met with Ms. Monica Harryono, DOI Business Fellow, and a lot of interesting issues were raised at that meeting. Some of the issues that were raised were the need to understand what types of loans are there available for the business community and the need to understand more the construction bidding processes. I hope to bring people who can provide more understanding on these issues to speak to the Chamber. The other issue that was raised is the possibility that we can use some of the Private Sector Development Fund under the Compact for Chamber's uses. As you all know, the Majuro Chamber of Commerce is **the engine** for Private Sector growth here in the Marshall Islands. If we can tap into the Private Sector Development Fund, miracles can happen. On that note, I look forward to working with you, members of the Chamber, to develop a proposal for some funds to help beef up our operations.

Members of the Chamber met with the Nitijela Special Committee on the Ministry of Health Referral Committee. The issues that were raised include the Basic Health Plan and how it does not cover clients with diabetes or cancer, how to better the health services of the Majuro Hospital, the problem of expired goods being displayed on the store counters and the need to sell more healthy food or products, and the fact that some people have been getting sick from some of the types of bottled water being sold. These are all important issues that I believe the Chamber should work collaboratively with those directly involved and see how we can better the system and provide healthy and safe products to the community.

The Chamber Executive Committee also met with Major Jeffrey Klein, who has replaced Major Coffey, and Mr. John Pickler of Kwajalein Range Services. We talked about the possibility of USAKA designating an economic zone on Kwajalein where businesses will be able to sell their products with less restrictions than what they would be experiencing in other parts of Kwajalein. From that meeting, we came to understand the issues at stake regarding the long talked about submarine fiber optic cable. I am sure this issue will be raised at this meeting.

If you all recall, I emailed all of you the amended import tax law. I have gotten a lot of feedbacks on this and the Chamber will have a position on the law. The Chamber and the businesses were not consulted on this law that has dramatically impacted the business community here. With your help, I think we can develop a paper that will point out the deficiencies of this law and present it to the members of Nitijela for possible review and re-amendment.

Other than that, I hope you are all prospering from the influx of Pacific Educational Conference delegates and church groups. I just hope the business community can do something for these people. What are the possibilities of having a block party tomorrow night to show our appreciation to these delegates? Anyways, just a thought...

Kommool tata.