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Bikini attorney Jonathan Weisgall, Bikini Mayor Eldon Note, Senator Tomaki Juda, and Bikini Liaison Officer Jack Niedenthal in Washington last week.

Stege says ‘Bravo Pombo’

Mayor James Matayoshi: “While we appreciate the words of the resolution, we want the words put into action in terms of compensation.”

The US House of Representatives last Wednesday passed a resolution that recognizes the more than five decades of strategic partnership with the Marshall Islands.

The resolution, commemorating the detonating of the hydrogen bomb Bravo, was introduced by Rep. Richard Pombo, who chairs the House Resources Committee and was in Majuro in January this year.

Tina Stege, who is the First Secretary at RMI’s Embassy in Washington, DC, told the Journal this week she was amazed at how quickly the resolution had been passed: “The fact that he approved language for a resolution, introduced it and then managed to get it passed within just a couple of months is amazing,” she said.

“For Congress, that is lightning speed. We would have liked to see it go through by March 1 (Nuclear Survivors Day), but that was never likely given the very few days Congress was actually sitting in February.” Stege said that the resolution came about after Pombo met representatives of the four nuclear affected-atolls in Majuro in January.

“He was asked to introduce a resolution commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of Bravo.”

The Congressional record of the statements made on the floor in support of the resolution includes a lengthy tribute to the strong ties between the two countries and goes into detail about the Bravo test.

But while the passing of the resolution was a significant landmark for RMI, there remain questions as to the resolution’s worth to the Marshalls.

In reaction to the resolution Bikini Liaison Officer Jack Niedenthal told the Journal: “The resolution would mean more for the people of the four atolls if the US would finally finish the cleanup and resettlement jobs here in the Marshall Islands, and that takes a commitment of money, not just words.”

In contrast, the US Ambassador to RMI Greta Morris said on Tuesday: “At this point the resolution is a very positive statement about the importance of our relationship with the RMI and the contribution the Marshallese people made towards bringing an end to the Cold War.

“But as far as there being any tangible results (from the resolution), at this point I can’t tell there are any,” Morris said. “It’s a resolution, so it doesn’t have anything monetary attached to it. But it’s a positive statement that truly reflects the importance of the bilateral relationship.”

Morris added that the fact it was initiated by Pombo after his visit here showed what a big impression the Marshallese people had made on him and his views about RMI.

The Journal also talked to Rongelap Mayor James Matayoshi on the resolution: “At leaves it gives a sense of recognition, but the next step should be to set up something more concrete. We’d like congress to hold a hearing on the Changing Circumstances Petition ... The RMI is ready to present information to share with Congress.

“While we appreciate the words of the resolution, we want the words put into action in terms of compensation.”

Details of what they said in DC

The Resolution points to the “significance of the nuclear weapons test that was code-named Bravo and its role in the half-century relationship that still exists between our countries.

“On March 1, 1954, the United States tested BRAVO, the largest nuclear weapon ever detonated by our country, at Bikini Atoll, and its explosive power was nearly 1,000 times greater than the weapon used in 1945 on Hiroshima, Japan.

“This event and the success that came from our nuclear testing program will forever link the United States in history with the Marshall Islands,” stated Pombo.

Marshallese continue to show their support with Marshall Islands’ citizens serving in the U.S. Armed Forces. “Our common pursuit of peace through working closely together through political, diplomatic, and strategic ties continues to this day,” he said.

“This bond should not be understated,” said Rep. Pombo as he encouraged a strong bipartisan support of this concurrent resolution by his colleagues.

Representative from Florida, Katherine Harris, said of the 67 nuclear tests, “Those massive detonations, which represented significant sacrifices by the Marshallese people, were critical to the credibility and reliability of our nuclear deterrent during the Cold War.”

Congressman Ed Case of Hawaii spoke of the permanent effect to the island environment. “This is a resolution of remembrance, of the dire consequences to a whole

people and their aina, or land.”

Rep. Case told of his own recollection of the event “as a boy of just six, sitting on my grandparents’ porch on the Island of Kauai, on a dark night, watching the entire sky light up from a single explosion 2,300 miles away.”

“But the Marshallese lived through it, and they are still living through it, and will live through it for generations to come.”

Ranking Democrat of the Resources Committee, Rep. Nick Rahall (WV) said that “the people of the Marshall Islands made a sacrifice that is unimaginable for us Americans.”

“We may never fully understand the personal hardships our nuclear testing program caused to the people of the Marshall Islands, and more specifically those directly affected communities from the atolls of Bikini, Enewetak, Rongelap, and Utrok,” he said.

Delegate Madeleine Bordallo from Guam also mentioned her recent visit to the Marshall Islands.

“While in Majuro, we met with President Kessai Note and elected officials from other islands, as well as with the Nuclear Claims Tribunal. This visit was important given the recent renewal of the compact, the anniversary of the Bravo blast, and the security issues facing our world today,” she said

“The people of the Marshall Islands have made tremendous sacrifices and contributions on behalf of the United States in the pursuit of peace and freedom around the world. Today, the Marshall Islands are among the United States’ greatest friends and most reliable allies.”

Delegate from American Samoa, Eni Faleomavaega, told more about the events being commemorated by this resolution.

While US servicemen on Rongerik Atoll were evacuated within hours of the blast, Marshallese residents of Utirik and Rongelap were left behind for at least a day, resulting in their exposure to significant radiation. At the time of their removal, the people of these atolls were already suffering burns and loss of hair.

Also returned prematurely to their atolls, the people of Rongelap and Utirik received additional exposure causing many to believe that they were used to study the effects of radiation on human beings. Recently declassified information contains strong indications that human experimentation using the people of the exposed atolls was indeed part of the nuclear testing program in the Marshall Islands.

Congressman Faleomavaega said that these tests exposed the people of the Marshalls to severe health problems and genetic anomalies for generations to come.

“Yet the United States has not made good on its promise to compensate citizens of the Marshall Islands for loss or damage to property and person resulting from the nuclear testing program.”

— **Compiled by Aenet Rowa, Yokwe Online**