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PREBISCITE IN THE NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS

BACKGROUND:

The people of the Mariana Islands in the Western Pacific today voted heavily in favor of becoming American citizens.

The islanders, voting in a plebiscite held under United Nations scrutiny, came out 76 per cent in favor of commonwealth status within the American political family.

It was the first major acquisition of territory by the United States since the Virgin Islands were purchased from Denmark in 1917.

(* * * *)

Q. What is the reaction of the White House to the results of the plebiscite in the Northern Mariana Islands?

A. The President is very gratified with the results of this act of self-determination by the people of the Northern Mariana Islands.

Q. What is the next step?

A. The President will submit the Covenant to the Congress recommending ^{it} ~~their~~ approval by joint resolution. Congressional approval will provide authority to begin the gradual and progressive implementation of the terms of the Covenant. ^{FILE} (This process hopefully will be completed by 1981 when the U. S. trusteeship over all of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands (TTPI)

will have been terminated following a similar act of self-determination by the other districts of the TTPI.)

Any detailed questions should be referred to the office of Micronesian Status Negotiations -- Telephone No. 343-9143, or the Department of Interior Information Officer, Mr. Barry at 343-7561.

February 25, 1976

VOTE ON THE MARIANAS

Q. What is your reaction to the Senate vote (67 - 22) approving the Covenant to Establish a Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands?

A. We welcome the Senate's approval of the Covenant. The House has already approved the Covenant so the legislation will not go to conference where we hope for a speedy resolution of the differences. As you may recall, the people of the Northern Marianas approved Commonwealth status in a UN-observed plebiscite last June.

Q. Who is the President's envoy to the Marianas?

A. Ambassador F. Haydn Williams serves as the President's personal representative to the Marianas.

March 24, 1976

SIGNING CEREMONY FOR THE NORTHERN MARIANAS
COVENANT

There will be a signing ceremony in the East Room at 3:00 p. m. today when the President will sign H. J. Resolution 549 "to establish a commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands in Political Union with the United States and for other purposes."

On July 1, 1975, the President transmitted the Northern Marianas Commonwealth Covenant to the United States Congress for its consideration. This action followed approval of the Covenant by the people of the Northern Marianas in a plebiscite held by the United States under United Nations Trusteeship Council observation on June 17, 1975. Of the registered voters, 95 percent participated, and of those who voted, 78.8 percent voted in favor of the Covenant.

The House of Representatives passed H. J. Resolution 549 by unanimous voice on July 21, 1975. Both the Senate Armed Services and Foreign Relations Committees, as well as the Interior Committee reported out the resolution following which the full Senate passed H. J. Resolution 549 on February 24 by a vote of 66-23.

Participants: A group of over 200 will attend the ceremony, including the President's Personal Representative to the Micronesian Status Negotiations, Ambassador F. Haydn Williams.

Q's and A's attached.

U. N. Approval of the Marianas Covenant

Q: Will the United Nations approve the Covenant?

A: Most of the provisions of the Covenant are consistent with the Trusteeship Agreement and will be implemented while that agreement is still in effect. The balance -- including those sections of the Covenant extending United States sovereignty to the islands and citizenship to the residents -- will come into effect only after termination of the Trusteeship Agreement. The United States has informed the United Nations Trusteeship Council that it intends to seek termination of the Trusteeship Agreement for the entire Trust Territory simultaneously. We have kept the United Nations fully informed of developments in the Trust Territory. The United Nations Trusteeship Council sent a special mission to observe the plebiscite on the Covenant. We will take up the question of termination of the Trusteeship Agreement with the Security Council at the appropriate time.

Cost of Commonwealth Status

Q: What will Commonwealth status for the Northern Marianas cost the U.S. taxpayer?

A: Very little. The major cost spelled out in the Covenant is an annual grant to the Government of the Northern Mariana Islands in the amount of \$14 million, in constant 1975 dollars. Since the United States now bears the cost of government in these islands, this amount is approximately the same that we would anticipate spending there in any event.

If the United States decides to pick up the option to lease approximately 18,000 acres for defense use, it will make a one-time payment to the Northern Mariana Islands of \$19,520,600 for two consecutive 50 year leases.

Military Bases in the Northern Marianas

Q: Are there any plans to build a military base in the Northern Marianas?

A: The Covenant gives the United States the option of leasing some 18,000 acres for defense use, but the Department of Defense has no current plans to build a facility on this land.

Micronesia

Q: Is the United States going against the current trend of history in absorbing new territory and responsibilities in the Marianas?

A: In establishing the commonwealth relationship with the Northern Marianas, we are fulfilling our pledge to develop the peoples of the Trust Territory for self-government or independence in accordance with their wishes. The people and leaders of the Northern Marianas have made clear for more than 25 years their desire to become U. S. citizens. The commonwealth relationship will also assure that the islands do not become the object of international rivalry at some later date, and will thus enhance peace and stability in the Pacific.

DRAFT PUBLIC STATEMENT OF THE PRESIDENT

I would like to take this opportunity to extend to the people of the Northern Mariana Islands my personal greetings and to convey to them my pleasure with the results of the plebiscite held on June 17, 1975.

I have been informed that a substantial majority ^{has} ~~have~~ voted in favor of the Commonwealth Covenant in free and open balloting observed by the United Nations and preceded by a fair and impartial education program. I wish personally to congratulate and commend all of those who were responsible for the conduct of the plebiscite, including the Plebiscite Commissioner and his staff, the Voter Registration Board and the Plebiscite Advisory Committee.

The people of the Northern Marianas have now spoken. The next step will be consideration of the Covenant by the Congress of the United States. I intend to submit without delay the Covenant to the Congress with my strong endorsement for its early favorable action. It is my earnest hope that we may look forward to further steps in the near future which will move the people of the Northern Mariana Islands still closer to the long-desired ultimate goal of political union with the United States. I know the American people join with me in sending to the people of the Northern Mariana Islands our warmest regards.

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