

Marianas

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Editorials

Let's Have An Election....

One of the best bills introduced on the island recently is the one submitted by the Republican senators of the 11th Guam Legislature calling for a referendum to decide whether or not Guam should be reunited with the northern Marianas Islands.

It's about time somebody introduced such a bill, and we applaud the Republicans for doing so, and at the same time we feel that the Democratic majority leadership has let the island down by its failure to pursue the idea of reunification.

The bill explains that Guam was separated from Saipan, Tinian and Rota by a treaty after the Spanish-American War, when the U.S. gained possession, but that the islands have always had strong cultural ties. More than that, it was by the decision of one U.S. Navy Captain, who decided that the United States needed Guam for a coaling spot for ships, but wasn't interested in the rest of the Marianas. This decision may have been a contributing factor in World War II, as the Japanese used the islands to the north as a military establishment, making it easy to invade Guam.

Let's go back a few years to 1968. A similar bill was introduced, passed, and Guam residents were given a vote on the same matter. There was little discussion, hardly any publicity, and no organized opposition to the referendum. Everybody, including the editor of this newspaper, just assumed that the reunification measure would pass with no problem, with great support. In the meantime a similar reunification referendum was being voted on in the Northern Marianas.

To the utter amazement of all the observers of the local scene, the reunification issue was voted down in Guam, while it passed with ease in the Northern Marianas. This vote has been a sore spot—and rightly so—with the residents of Saipan, Tinian and Rota ever since. They feel rejected, and feel that Guam doesn't want to associate with their cousins to the north. The feeling persists to this day, despite the efforts to dispell it.

We have long believed that this election was just a mistake. It was badly handled from the beginning, and wasn't given the proper publicity. The question of reunification is one of education of the people of Guam. We think that the first turn down was due, in large part, to the ultra-conservatives on the island, who felt that somehow Guam was going to have to pay out a lot of money to upgrade the schools and other public facilities on Saipan, Rota and Tinian to conform with Guam standards, and thus it would be an expensive proposition. They also felt that with reunification, the people of the Northern Marianas would be flocking to Guam, and taking away their jobs, etc. Yet, none of this was ever brought into the open. It was a secret campaign, conducted by those who had selfish motives. We don't think it truly reflects the real feelings of the people of Guam, who have long wished for reunification with their island brothers. Such a referendum, if held, would not be politically binding. It wouldn't mean that the islands would be reunited immediately. It would simply be an expression of concern among the people of Guam. This is especially important right now, because shortly, this month, talks will begin between the Marianas and Ambassador Williams, concerning the future political status of the Marianas.

Certainly any election on Guam would have an important effect on such talks. Right now in Saipan there is considerable opposition to any political merger with Guam—based primarily on the fact that Guam doesn't want any reunification. If this was proven to be a fallacy, and we believe it is, the attitude of the people of the Northern Marianas might change.

All it takes is a quick look at a map. It's a physical thing. The Marianas Island chain is one group of islands, and it includes Guam. You wouldn't expect the Hawaiian Island chain to have different political structures. It is so obvious that we can't understand why they were separated for so long. They belong together politically. Beyond that, culturally the islands are one. The people on Rota, Tinian, Saipan and the rest are no different than those on Guam. They have the same features, customs, and language. They're all related, and have been for hundreds of years. It makes no sense at all for the islands to be separated because of some political barrier.

More, if Guam ever decided to opt for statehood, or a commonwealth, it makes a good deal of sense that the islands be reunited first. The biggest objection that most Statesiders have towards Guam's possible statehood is the size, and the limited population of the island. Obviously, having the other islands in the chain included would be an added benefit to any thoughts of statehood. The State of Guam doesn't have that same ring as would the State of the Marianas. It may not ever happen, but we do feel strongly that the people of Guam should, at the earliest possible moment, be allowed to vote on reunification. We don't believe that this time we would reject our brothers to the north. JCM.