

Joining America.....

All of us on Guam, as Americans, are delighted with how well the Northern Marianas Political Status talks are progressing, and look forward to the day when our sister islands truly join the community of the United States.

Ambassador Franklin Haydn Williams, passing through Guam at the conclusion of the current talks on Saipan, expressed his delight too, over the warmth and friendly atmosphere surrounding the negotiations. He also told of his admiration for the Northern Marianas delegation, noting especially their diligence in doing their homework.

Not everything is coming up roses, of course. There still are differences between the two sides, on land at Tinian, whether it should be sold or leased, on financial support for the Commonwealth-to-be, and on some other minor matters.

The joint communique stated: "Much work remains to be done on a range of complex issues before the signing of the final agreement," yet the Ambassador said that if all goes well they could see a basic time-table forming on the political change—perhaps as soon as two years after the final agreement is signed. Edward DLG Pangelinan, chairman of the Marianas delegation said that he did not expect the next round to take place until at least after Easter.

Basic tentative agreements reached so far include:

- *Marianas citizens will become U.S. citizens, although those wishing to become a national but not a citizen of the U.S. could do so by making a declaration to that effect in court.

- *Federal income tax will apply only on U.S. sources of income, not on income earned in the Marianas, and this will be rebated to the Marianas government along with custom duties and excise taxes collected by the U.S. in the Marianas.

- *Certain fundamental provisions of the status agreement may not be amended or repealed without the mutual consent of the parties.

- *It was recommended that the Marianas District Legislature establish a nonprofit corporation to receive and administer public lands once they are returned by the U.S. The corporation also would be responsible for making the necessary public lands available to the U.S. under terms of the final agreement.

- *The U.S. will fund transitional activities between the signing of the status agreement and the installation of the new government including a political education program, a plebiscite on future status, a constitutional convention and referendum, various legal, social, economic and physical planning, and a study of the economic and social impact of relocating the capital of Micronesia from Saipan.

In short, although the name will be different—a Commonwealth, instead of a Territory—it appears that the Northern Marianas will have a status very similar to Guam in many ways. The tax status will be similar. The citizenship is similar. The Northern Marianas will be eligible for many federal programs, as is Guam. They'll be under the U.S. flag. Mail and money will be the same. Immigration probably will be the same, although the delegation from the Marianas still are looking into this problem, because they don't want to be inundated by large groups of aliens. Regulatory boards, such as the FCC, or the CAB will probably apply in the Northern Marianas as they do on Guam.

Yet, there are going to be some important differences between the two parts of the Marianas, too. One is that the Northern Marianas will be assured of funds from the federal government, at least initially, with which to operate their government. This breaks down into \$7.5 million for budgetary support for government operations, \$3 million for capital improvement projects and \$1 million for a Marianas development loan fund. Guam, of course, has received similar monies in the past, and is still receiving some direct federal support.

The second difference, though, is a vital one. The agreement calls for the Northern Marianas to have a political education program, plebiscite on future status, and a constitutional convention—something that Guam has never had the opportunity to do. Nobody suggested that Guam has a plebiscite when the Americans acquire Guam from the Spanish, nor when the Organic Act was adopted. Nobody suggested a program of political education at that time. No did anybody suggest that the Guamanian people draw up their own constitution.

Frankly, we wouldn't blame the Guamanian people for feeling at least a little upset in that it appears on the surface that the Northern Marianas is coming out a little better than are the people of Guam—part of the American community for 75 years. We certainly should begin making moves to work towards a Constitutional Convention of our own, as has been suggested by Sen. Tony Palomo recently.

We also feel that some of the Guamanian leaders, and some of it people, brought a little of this on themselves, when they earlier rejected re-integration for the Marianas. Now, as the Northern Marianas move up into an equal status (or better status) than Guam the incentives which they may have had for joining with Guam are gone.

Still, we have nothing but fondness for the people of the Northern Marianas, and along with Ambassador Williams, we too express our admiration for the way the Status Talks are progressing, and for the skillful way the Marianas negotiators are handling the talks. If we were one of the political leaders of Guam, we would ask for another referendum on the re-integration issue. It may be too late now, but we believe that such a referendum would show overwhelming support for the eventual merger of the island chain. We too suspect that there may be many people in the U.S. Congress that will object to the United States having two separate governments in the Marianas island chain.

For all their benefits in their proposed new political status, the people of the Northern Marianas will only have to give up two thirds of the land on Tinian—land that will be leased from the people, or land already owned by the military. It appears that both sides are going to come out very well on these negotiations, which speaks well of the negotiators. JCM.