



# United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20240

May 23, 1975

United Carolinian Association  
P.O. Box 4, Capitol Hill  
Saipan, Mariana Islands 96950

Dear Friends:

Thank you for your recent letter outlining your concerns about the ballot to be offered to the people of the Northern Marianas in the plebiscite to be held on June 17.

The wording of the plebiscite ballot was agreed upon by the various departments and agencies of the U.S. Government concerned only after the most careful consideration of the obligations of the United States under the Trusteeship Agreement.

The "Yes" vote formulation was stated as it was, without amplification, because the Commonwealth Covenant itself sets forth the meaning of a positive vote in terms of the Northern Marianas future political status and the subsequent separation of the Northern Marianas from the other districts of the TTPI, if the Commonwealth Covenant is approved by the people of the Northern Marianas and by the Congress of the United States.

The wording of the "No" option was determined in light of the obligation of the United States as Administering Authority to make it clear to the voters that options other than Commonwealth and political union with the United States were open to the people of the Northern Mariana Islands. The United States wanted the people to know that if the signed Commonwealth Covenant were to be rejected, the immediate effect would be that the Northern Marianas would continue in their present status, that they would not be separated administratively from the TTPI Government, and that the people of the Northern Mariana Islands would have a full opportunity to participate with the other districts of the TTPI in considering various future political status alternatives.

It is relevant to recall at this point that the Commonwealth Covenant is a negotiated agreement, representing a considerable measure of give and take on both sides. It was negotiated

carefully and patiently and in good faith to provide for the people of the Northern Marianas the most favorable and feasible arrangement in answer to their long standing desire for political union with the United States. Given the limits of the U.S. Constitution and political realities, the Commonwealth Covenant, which will come before the voters in the plebiscite on June 17 for their acceptance or rejection, represents in effect the extent to which the United States Government is prepared to go to meet that desire.

To your assertion that "bias and emotion" have been injected into the wording of the ballot, I can only respond with a firm and unqualified disavowal of any such intention. I believe the record of our negotiations with the Marianas Political Status Commission over more than two years stands as convincing proof of the fairness of the negotiations and the just and equitable treatment for all citizens of the Northern Mariana Islands. We would deeply regret any move on the part of any group in the Northern Marianas that would foster the type of attitude which you describe.

I appreciate your giving me the opportunity to hear your views. While it is not possible for the U.S. Government to accede to your request for a change in the wording of the "No" vote on the plebiscite ballot, I wish to reassure you that the present language was intended to be entirely fair and impartial. The United States further intends that the plebiscite education program should provide all of the voters all of the relevant facts including objective information and explanation of the choices offered on the ballot.

Sincerely yours,

/s/ Kent Frizzell

Kent Frizzell.  
Acting Secretary

KF:kkc