

**NORTHERN ISLANDS SEEK TIE****Marianans vote for U.S. union**

SAIPAN, Mariana Islands (UPI) — The people of the northern Mariana Islands have voted overwhelmingly to become U.S. citizens and turn the Pacific archipelago into a U.S. commonwealth.

The islands, which stretch for 500 miles across the Western Pacific, would be the first new territory acquired by the United States in half a century.

Still incomplete returns in yesterday's plebescite indicated more than three-quarters of the voters favored political union with the United States.

U.N. observers spent two weeks in the northern Marianas to oversee voting on the future of the 16,000 persons living in the chain of 14 islands.

The United States has ad-

ministered the islands since 1948 as part of the United Nations Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, also known as Micronesia.

The plebescite endorsed an agreement signed in February by U.S. and northern Mariana officials. The accord goes before Congress in September for ratification.

The islands, used by American planes for the World War II atomic bombings of Japan, would have a commonwealth political status similar to Puerto Rico's.

Under the pact, which had to be ratified by 55 per cent of the archipelago's voters, the northern Marianas would sell the United States land for military bases.

The islanders have been

asking for U.S. citizenship for a quarter-century, endorsing union with the United States in two previous plebescites.

But it wasn't until three years ago that the United States agreed to begin talks aimed at separating the northern Marianas from the rest of Micronesia.

The commonwealth agreement provides for the breakup of the Marianas district, one of six districts in the Pacific Trust Territory.

Under the pact, the five northern Mariana lawmakers in the Pacific Trust Territory's legislature would give up their seats.

"The commonwealth status is good for the people and I will happily give up my seat for the benefit of the people," said Sen.

Olympio Borja, mentioned as a likely candidate for chief executive of the new territory.

The new commonwealth, to be made up of all the Marianas north of Guam, would include Saipan, the capital, and Tinian, the island used to launch the 1945 atomic bombings of Japan.

The northern Marianas would be the first U.S. territorial acquisition since the purchase of the Virgin Islands from Denmark in 1917 and the annexation of Swains Island near American Samoa in 1925.