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# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

OFFICE FOR MICRONESIAN STATUS NEGOTIATIONS

For Immediate Release June 18, 1975

Barry (202) 343-7561

SECRETARY HATHAWAY SENDS CONGRATULATIONS  
TO NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS ON PLEBISCITE VOTE

Preliminary tabulations indicate that nearly 80% of the voters in the Northern Mariana Islands have decisively approved a Covenant to establish a Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands in Political Union with the United States. In response, Secretary of the Interior, Stanley K. Hathaway stated, "I would like to express my personal satisfaction and that of the Department of the Interior in sending our special greetings and warmest wishes to the people of the Marianas."

Secretary Hathaway went on to observe, "This plebiscite on Political status presented the people of the Marianas with an opportunity to freely express their right of self-determination. We expect to receive certified results of the vote from the Plebiscite Commissioner, Mr. Erwin Canham in the near future."

The Northern Mariana Islands are a district of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands which is a United Nations Trusteeship administered by the United States through the Department of the Interior. The representatives of the Marianas people have been negotiating for their future political status with the United States since December 1972. A Commonwealth Covenant was signed by the Marianas Political Status Commission and the President's Personal Representative, Ambassador F. Haydn Williams, on February 15, 1975.

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE June 18, 1975

AMBASSADOR F. HAYDN WILLIAMS, THE  
PRESIDENT'S PERSONAL REPRESENTATIVE FOR  
MICRONESIAN STATUS NEGOTIATIONS COMMENTS ON THE  
DECISIVE NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS  
VOTE IN FAVOR OF U.S. COMMONWEALTH STATUS

I am naturally pleased that the people of the Northern Mariana Islands have in a free exercise of their right of self-determination voted overwhelmingly in favor of the Commonwealth Covenant and political union with the United States. This popular expression of support for and endorsement of the work of the Marianas Political Status Commission and the Marianas District Legislature must be most gratifying to those in the Marianas who have labored long and hard for a new political status for the Northern Mariana Islands. I send to them my congratulations for a job well done.

Those of us on the American side who had the privilege of participating in the negotiations leading to the signing of the Covenant also take pleasure in knowing that our efforts combined with those of the Marianas Political Status Commission have stood the test of public examination and debate and the free ballot box. With regard to the latter, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Plebiscite Commissioner, Mr. Erwin Canham, and his staff for the essential role they played in the basic planning and administering of the Plebiscite and for the wisdom, understanding and integrity they brought to bear on this process.

Most of all, I would like to take this special opportunity to thank all of the people of the Northern Marianas for all the courtesies and kindnesses they have shown me and the members of my delegation during every phase of the status talks and on many public occasions. I wish all of the people of the Northern Marianas success as they now join in common tasks for the common good, tasks designed to further the well being of all of the citizens of the Northern Mariana Islands as they plan for the years ahead.

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June 18, 1975

NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS VOTES  
DECISIVELY IN FAVOR OF U.S. COMMONWEALTH STATUS

With but a few absentee ballots to count, the people of the Northern Mariana Islands in the Western Pacific have voted overwhelmingly in favor of political union with the United States in a United Nations observed plebiscite held on June 17, 1975.

According to a report from Saipan from Erwin D. Canham, the Plebiscite Commissioner, more than 75% of those casting ballots voted yesterday to approve a "Covenant to Establish a Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands" in political union with and under the sovereignty of the United States. This Covenant, negotiated over the past two years, was signed on February 15, 1975 by the Marianas Political Status Commission for the Marianas and by the President's Personal Representative, Ambassador F. Haydn Williams, for the United States.

The Commonwealth Covenant will now be submitted to the Congress by President Ford for the approval of both the House and the Senate. If approved the Northern Marianas, made up of 14 islands lying north of Guam, will become a self-governing American commonwealth under its own Constitution, with its own elected executive and legislature and its own local courts. Its 14,000 inhabitants will become American citizens upon the termination of the existing Trusteeship Agreement except for those who prefer to become nationals of the United States.

The June 17 vote in the Northern Mariana Islands was preceded by an impartial plebiscite education program under the direction of a Plebiscite Commissioner, with the Covenant and other documents translated into Chamorro and Carolinian for the benefit of the non-English speaking population. The proponents and opponents of the Commonwealth proposal were given equal time on the local government radio and the Saipan commercial television station. Vigorous campaigning was also conducted from village to village on the three major islands of Saipan, Tinian and Rota.

On another June day, thirty-one years ago, in the course of a world-wide war, American forces stormed ashore on Saipan. Yesterday, a generation later, in an open act of self-determination, the people went to the polls and approved the Covenant leading to American citizenship and sovereignty. This act marked the end of a long quest for union with the United States. Some twenty-five years have elapsed since the first resolutions and petitions were passed and circulated, requesting the United States to make the Northern Mariana Islands a U.S. possession or territory. In the intervening years, through referendums and legislative actions, the Northern Mariana Islands continued to appeal to the United Nations and to the United States to terminate the U.N. Trusteeship in favor of permanent political association with the United States.

The Covenant which was finally agreed to and approved yesterday by the people is similar in many important respects

to the Federal government relationships with Guam and with Puerto Rico. The Northern Mariana Islands will be self-governing with respect to local affairs as is the case with the other territories. Similarly certain basic provisions of the United States Constitution will apply. Federal laws applicable to Guam and Puerto Rico will also apply in the Northern Mariana Islands. Federal taxes will be collected in the Northern Marianas but will be rebated to the local government as they are in Guam.

The financial provisions of the Covenant call for Federal assistance to the new Government of the Northern Mariana Islands for general budgetary programs and for economic development loans. For the first seven years the total of grant assistance will be \$14 million annually and after that period of time annual support will continue at the same level unless and until changed by the United States Congress.

The public lands now held in trust by the United States as the Administering Authority under the Trusteeship Agreement will be returned to local Marianan control to be held for the benefit of the people of the Northern Mariana Islands. The Covenant protects all lands in the Northern Mariana Islands against alienation, since under its terms ownership of land will be limited for the first 25 years following the coming into force of the new Commonwealth, to those of Marianan ancestry only--the Chamorros and the Carolinians.

Under the terms of the Covenant the United States will have

leasehold rights for 50 years renewable for another 50 years for the use of a small uninhabited island, Farallon de Medinilla, for aerial bombing and ship-to-shore gunnery practice. It will also have the same leasehold rights to 177 acres in the Tanapag Harbor area on Saipan for use in the event of some future military contingency. In the meantime the land will be leased back to the future government of the Commonwealth for civilian harbor-related activities. The remainder of the land will be converted into a public park as an American Memorial to those American servicemen who lost their lives in the Marianas campaign of 1944.

The approved Covenant also provides for the long-term lease of some 18,500 acres on Tinian Island by the federal government. At present there is no intention to build any military base or to station any United States military personnel on Tinian. The only planned use of the leased land is for the occasional joint service amphibious exercises designed to keep U.S. forward mobile forces at a high state of combat readiness. The harbor area and airfield on Tinian will be available for private use and large areas of the best agricultural land on the military reservation will be leased back at nominal sum for continued and expanded agricultural purposes. These non-military uses of lands may be terminated in case of future military needs. The United States will pay a total of \$19,520,600 for the 50-year leases (renewable for another 50-year period) for all of the land to be used or held for

contingency use on Tinian, Saipan and Farallon de Medinilla.

Upon the approval of the Commonwealth Covenant by a joint Resolution of the U.S. Congress, the Marianas will be fully separated administratively from the Trust Territory Government and the other districts of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands. The Northern Mariana Islands, however, will remain under Trusteeship status until the United Nations Trusteeship Agreement for all of Micronesia is terminated after the other districts have exercised their rights of self-determination and have freely chosen their future political status. Protracted negotiations to this end have been proceeding, but may now be set aside until after the forthcoming Micronesian Constitutional Convention to be convened this summer. The Convention will address the central question of future internal relationships between the Caroline and Marshall Islands, which make up the remainder of the Trust Territory.

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