

THE ROSCOE DRUMMOND COLUMN

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'YANKEE, STAY HERE!'

by Roscoe Drummond

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WASHINGTON--It is a new and welcome change for Americans to see signs going up in the western Pacific reading, in effect: "Yankee, stay here!"

That is the message which the Northern Mariana Islands have just sent to the Congress of the United States.

The 14,000 people of the Marianas have been under the administration of the United States as a trust territory granted by the United Nations at the end of World War II. They have now decided that they want more of it, not less. They don't want political separation from the United States; they prefer political union with the United States.

Last week under the fair-minded supervising of Plebiscite Commissioner Erwin D. Canham, editor-emeritus of The Christian Science Monitor, and the presence of representatives of the U.N. Trusteeship Council, they voted their wishes. They voted overwhelmingly to become U.S. territory as a Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.

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There was no political alienation among the Mariana electorate. Here is what happened:

The agreement with the United States required a 55% approval for the plebiscite to be binding. Any American politician would call a 60% a landslide. It was an avalanche--more than 78% voted yes.

The percentage of eligible voters who went to the polls exceeded by far any popular vote in any presidential election ever held in the United States: 90%.

Why, in light of Watergate, Vietnam, and high taxes (federal law will apply to the Marianas), did the people of these widely scattered islands in the Pacific want to become Americans?

The answer: They wanted freedom and security. They had come to cherish both under U.S. rule.

The Micronesians who made up the Future Political Status Commission to negotiate with Ambassador Franklin Hayden Williams, who had wide Pacific experience as president of the Asia Foundation, says of the U.S. administration of their land: "One contribution has been indelible, one achievement almost unqualified--the idea of democratic, representative, constitutional government."

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Under Commonwealth status the people of the Marianas will have all the sovereignty and self-governance of an American state and all of the security which comes from being a part of the United States.

The next step is up to Congress. It must approve the Commonwealth agreement before it can become operative. The congressional committees and congressional leaders have been closely consulted by Ambassador Williams at every stage of the negotiations.

Congress has been a full participant. This is the way such negotiations should be conducted. This is one reason congressional approval is altogether probable.

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