

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

Old Executive Office Building
Room 361
Washington, D. C. 20506

July 2, 1975

The Editor
The New York Times
New York, New York

To the Editor:

I was greatly surprised to read your June 29 editorial, "Planting the Flag", and to learn of your concern that the Northern Mariana Islands were going to be "annexed" without proper advance Congressional consideration of this important and historic event. Moreover, I was keenly disappointed that the New York Times would have written such an editorial without at least interviewing the parties to the recent Marianas Commonwealth negotiations, without apparently reviewing the public record of Congressional consultations on the Marianas talks, without evidently even bothering to check the accuracy of the factual information contained in the editorial, and, seemingly, without reading the text of the Commonwealth Covenant itself.

The editorial implies that the Congress of the U. S. had not been consulted and that it was not involved in the early planning stages for the negotiations. As a matter of fact, members of the Congress of the U. S. were fully consulted months before the negotiations with the Marianas commenced. Likewise, the Congress of Micronesia was also fully informed of the U. S. decision well in advance of the talks, as was the United Nations Trusteeship Council. Furthermore, public announcements of the U. S. decision to accede finally to the desire of the Northern Marianas for talks leading to political union with the United States were made in Washington and the Marianas.

The talks were conducted openly, in a highly democratic fashion with unusually wide local public participation in the negotiating process. The full proceedings of the negotiations which were carried on between December 1972 and February 1975 were made available as the talks progressed to the U. S. Congress, the press and the general public. It would seem that the late discovery and editorial interest in the significance of these negotiations by the New York Times might more honestly be attributed to a lack of past concern or indifference rather than to the unfair inference in your editorial that the negotiations were being conducted quietly with the deliberate intent of presenting the U. S. Congress and the American public with a "fait accompli."

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This suggestion has no basis in fact. Contrary to the false impression which your editorial conveys, the Administration has worked closely and cooperatively with those members of the Congress and those Committees that have legislative responsibility for the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands. The record of formal hearings, formal and informal briefings, and individual consultations on the Marianas negotiations over the past three years shows conclusively that rather than the charge that there has not been "as yet even the semblance of serious Congressional consideration", the exact opposite is true.

Since December 1972 there have been ten formal hearings or briefings in the House and the Senate dealing with the Marianas negotiations. The Administration has conducted at the request of the Congressional Committees an even larger number of informal briefings and consultations with members of the full Committees and the Subcommittees concerned. Detailed individual consultations with the Chairmen and the Ranking Minority Members of the Senate and House legislative committees dealing with territorial affairs were also held prior to and following each of the five rounds of the negotiations and before the Covenant was finally signed.

Further evidence of Congressional interest and involvement is to be found in the visits of the House Subcommittee on Territories and by individual members of the Senate and House to the Marianas to discuss the Marianas negotiations with local leaders and citizens while the talks were in progress. Members of both the Senate and House have also spoken in hearings and briefings of the serious and continuous effort of the Administration to keep the Congress informed on the U. S. negotiating objectives and the progress being made in the talks. All of the above, it would seem, represents much more than "a semblance of Congressional consideration." In fact, the final language of the Covenant reflects in many respects the advice and specific guidance of members of the Congress.

Your editorial goes on to ignore certain historical facts. You have chosen to overlook the record that the people of the Marianas and their elected representatives have been requesting political association with the United States for nearly a quarter of a century through free referenda, resolutions, and petitions to Washington and to the United Nations. On the other hand, you have said that the U. S. singled out the Marianas for special treatment only when local "authorities across Micronesia began to agitate for eventual independence..." Contrary evidence shows clearly that the United Nations Trusteeship Council's Visiting Missions and the Congress of Micronesia acknowledged years and years prior to the commencement of U.S.-Marianas negotiations the persistent desire of the people of the Northern Marianas to become American citizens and voluntarily to bring their islands under U. S. sovereignty.

While some members of the Congress of Micronesia have subsequently shown their personal disfavor with the Marianas Commonwealth talks, the Congress of Micronesia's Future Political Status Commission stated in 1968, some five years before the Marianas talks began, that it would not oppose the people of the Marianas choosing freely their own future political status so long as the choice represented majority opinion and the rights of the minority would be protected.

Even the figures given in your editorial for annual financial support for the Northern Marianas are in error. In fact they are several hundred percentage points off the mark. The Commonwealth Covenant provides for \$14 million per year in direct grant assistance for the first seven years. This is quite a difference from \$140 million annually for the first seven years as stated in your editorial. Your exaggeration of the actual agreed amount comes to almost 900 million dollars. Your statement that "American negotiators ... announced plans for a lucrative new naval base ..." in the Northern Marianas also carried an inaccurate implication, is misleading and is outdated. The public record shows that I announced in December 1974 and in February 1975 that the Department of Defense plans had changed and that the U. S. did not have any current intentions to build any military facilities or to station any U. S. military personnel in the Northern Mariana Islands. At present, the only planned use of Tinian is for occasional small-unit, three- or four-day amphibious exercises to keep the Fleet Marine Forces in a state of combat readiness, and the continuing intermittent use of a small uninhabited and inaccessible island north of Saipan for a bombing and ship-to-shore gunnery practice target area.

Finally, I do agree with your pronouncement that the Administration cannot be allowed to make the decision on the Marianas "on its own." But it should be clear that such has never been the Administration's intention, as any objective reading of the record will prove. It said long ago for any who cared to listen that the decision in the first instance was one for the people most directly concerned to make for themselves in a free and fair internationally-observed plebiscite as an act of self-determination as provided for in the Trusteeship Agreement. This they have done. They have voted overwhelmingly in favor of political union with the U. S.; they did so with the knowledge that several options were open to them if they had voted "No." The Administration has also said publicly on numerous occasions that after the results of the plebiscite were known and certified the negotiated arrangements would then be formally submitted to the Congress of the United States to be either approved or disapproved by a joint resolution of the full membership of the House and Senate in keeping with their legislative procedures. This is where the matter now stands.

Sincerely yours,

Ambassador Haydn Williams
The President's Personal Representative
for Micronesian Status Negotiations

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