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Covenant Gets Support...

It appears likely now that the Marianas covenant will be approved, granting commonwealth status to the Northern Marianas. The administration-sponsored bill has gained powerful support in the Senate after breezing through the House. Approval could take place within the next several weeks.

Editorial reaction to the Marianas Covenant was very mixed. Both the New York Times and the Washington Post opposed the "acquisition" of the first U.S. Territory in more than 50 years. Both Honolulu newspapers, more atune to the realities of the Pacific and its peoples, endorsed the concept of commonwealth.

One of the strongest editorial supports, however, came from the Christian Science Monitor, a highly respected publication out of Boston. This could be explained, at least partly, through the interest in the matter of former Monitor Editor Edwin Canham. He was appointed by President Ford to supervise the election process in the Marianas, a job he did expertly.

The Monitor said that despite objections by some senators, the case for extending U.S. sovereignty to the islands is a strong one. The administration, the Monitor noted, has not gone into this matter lightly as some have suggested.

Points made by the Monitor included:

— It is unreasonable to argue that political union would implant a kind of an anachronistic American neocolonialism in the area. The people of the Marianas themselves want this form of self-government ... Since the U.S. has a responsibility under the U.N. trusteeship agreement to help the people of Micronesia determine their own political future, it cannot in conscience reject the choice of the Marianas simply because it will cost more.

— It is in the U.S. interest that the islands, which are of enormous strategic value, not fall into the hands of another power. A time may come when the U.S. may have to give up or reduce its military facilities in such Pacific places as Japan, Okinawa and the Philippines. The Marianas, when new bases are built there, together with Guam would become the U.S. forward bastion in the Pacific. To fail to tie the Marianas closely with the United States, given the uncertainties of superpower rivalry in Asia could prove shortsighted in the extreme.

— The Congress of Micronesia itself has approved the covenant of commonwealth. Once the future status of the Marianas is decided on, the other five districts of Micronesia can proceed to determine what kind of relationship, if any, they want with the United States. Failure to act on the Marianas covenant, which has been in the making since 1969, might raise doubts about America's goodwill under the UN trusteeship agreement.

— The concept of "independence" for Micronesia as a whole may sound attractive but it is problematic. This is not a "nation" as commonly conceived but a scattering of more than 2,000 islands with divergent peoples, languages and cultures. Also there is no viable economic base for self-government.

We think that the Monitor has done its homework, perhaps through the help of Canham. Their comments are fair and astute and may have done a lot of good in the right places. JCM.

MWT

It looks like my effort to get "favorable stories and news" out to the PDN is working. Dick is doing a good job and our "press offensive" should continue!

(H)

Dave Dechick also deserves credit for the CSM editorial!

Dave Dechick