

**Roscoe Drummond** 9.83

## The Marianas choose 7/30/78

Washington

In war the United States sought to protect the right of self-determination for the people of South Vietnam — and failed.

In peace the United States has the opportunity to retrieve part of that reverse by honoring the right of self-determination to the long-harassed people of the Northern Mariana Islands in the Far Pacific.

There is promising evidence that Congress will do so.

The people of the Marianas have been ruled by successive waves of foreign domination under the Spaniards, the Germans, and the Japanese, and they have emerged a mature and hardy race.

When Congress approved the trusteeship agreement with the United Nations Security Council in 1947, it promised the people of the Marianas and other islands that eventually they would have the right to choose their own political future.

Now the Mariana islanders have chosen. In choosing they exercised the franchise in a way which should be a challenge and a model for Americans who, though they would not want to lose their right to vote, fail to use it in large numbers. In U.S. congressional elections it is not uncommon for the vote to be under 50 percent of those eligible and in presidential elections the vote does not often go above 60 percent. On June 17, 95 percent of the 13,000 people of the Northern Marianas went to the polls to vote in a UN-observed plebiscite to determine their political future.

They knew what they wanted. They had been living under American trusteeship for 30 years and they wanted more of the political system they had begun to experience for the first time in their history. It was agreed in advance that unless 55 percent voted in favor of political union with the U.S., it would not be binding. The vote was massively decisive. With 95 percent going to the polls, 78.8 percent registered their wish to become a permanent member of the American family like their close neighbor, Guam, which has been American territory for 77 years.

The vote was a verdict in favor of a commonwealth relationship with the U.S. comparable to Puerto Rico. Federal law, including the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, will govern the Marianas and local government will be comparable to that of the 50 states.

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There are significant advantages which accrue to the U.S. Having the Northern Marianas as American territory will enhance the operating flexibility of American security forces in the Western Pacific — and that was eminently agreeable to the people of the Marianas. They knew that our security meant their security. As we have learned in Turkey, Portugal, and the Philippines, U.S. bases are far more secure than "foreign bases."

One question should be candidly raised: Will our commitment to defend the Northern Mariana Islands increase the possibility of U.S. military involvement in the Western Pacific? The answer is doubly no. We are committed to defend Guam, which is already American territory and is only 20 miles distant from the Marianas, and we are committed to defend the Marianas under UN trusteeship. No new defense commitment is added. The Marianas were stepping stones for an aggression in World War II and they will no longer be inviting to any potential new aggressor.

Ambassador F. Haydn Williams, who was drafted from private life by President Nixon to conduct the negotiations which ended so constructively, must have been an effective witness because after his presentation the full House Interior Committee voted its approval of the Northern Mariana Commonwealth Covenant 30 to 0.