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THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

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ON JUL 10 1985 UNDER PRO-  
VISIONS OF E.O. 12356 BY  
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SPECIAL ASSISTANT, OMSH

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

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March 27, 1975

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Dear Mr. President:

The "Covenant to Establish a Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands in Political Union with the United States of America" was signed in Saipan on February 15. It was subsequently unanimously approved by the Marianas District Legislature. Two important actions must still be taken, however, before it is finally approved.

The first is for the United States as Administering Authority under the United Nations Trusteeship to arrange a plebiscite wherein the people of the Northern Mariana Islands can exercise their right to self-determination freely and fairly by accepting or rejecting the Covenant. The second is the approval of the Covenant by both houses of the U.S. Congress.

On the former score the Secretary of the Interior, with the concurrence of State, Defense and Justice, will issue a proclamation and accompanying Secretarial Order in the near future, which will set a date in June for the plebiscite and prescribe the form of the ballot. The proclamation will also welcome the presence of observers from the United Nations and the United States Congress to witness the registration of voters and the actual voting.

Some criticism of the United States for our action in the Marianas is expected both from the other Districts of Micronesia and within the Marianas itself. Already charges have been unfairly made in the U.S. Senate that the Administration is trying to railroad the Covenant through both the plebiscite and the Congress.

In order to assure a posture of complete U.S. objectivity in the conduct of the plebiscite, free from any suspicion of official interference, it is recommended that you name a distinguished American citizen from outside the Government

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the President's Personal Representative  
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with national and international stature to serve as Plebiscite Commissioner. Mr. Erwin D. Canham, editor (emeritus) of the Christian Science Monitor would be a most appropriate choice for this position.

A biographical summary of Mr. Canham is attached. Informal soundings indicate that he would be available to serve from approximately April 15, 1975 through the plebiscite. In the event the appointment of Mr. Canham is not feasible Mr. Barry Bingham, publisher of the Louisville Courier-Journal, or Dr. Nathan Pusey, former President of Harvard University, are considered to be suitable alternates; but their availability is unknown at this time.

The duties of the special Plebiscite Commissioner will be set out in the Secretarial Order which will accompany Secretary Morton's proclamation. These will include supervision of all aspects of the plebiscite and the institution of an objective plebiscite education program for the people to inform them fully of the nature and implications of the proposed Commonwealth arrangement and the alternatives available to them if they reject the Covenant in favor of remaining with the rest of Micronesia.

The educational material put out under the Plebiscite Commissioner's supervision must be impartial, factual and fully informative. The Marianas Political Status Commission, however, will be free to espouse the Covenant in any proper fashion, just as opponents will be able to express their contrary views.

The Plebiscite Commissioner will be advised by a special committee of Marianas citizens and will be assisted by a Voter Registration Board. The High Commissioner of the Trust Territory and the headquarters of the Trust Territory and Marianas District will be expected to provide all necessary administrative support for the Plebiscite Commissioner and the activities he will supervise.

If the plebiscite results in a favorable vote of 55% or more the next step will be to present the Covenant to both houses of the U.S. Congress, where we have been maintaining

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close contact with the leaders in the Interior Committees in particular. We are proceeding now to broaden materially the number of members of the U.S. Congress who are to be informed in detail concerning the proposed new Commonwealth arrangement. I will be making a further report to you in this regard in the near future.

Very respectfully yours,

*F. Haydn Williams*  
F. Haydn Williams

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