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April 8, 1975

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BY HAND

Mr. Adrian Winkle
Legislative Assistant to
Congressman Burton
Room 2454 Rayburn Building
Washington, D.C.

Dear Adrian:

In accordance with our conversation this morning, I am enclosing a copy of the section-by-section analysis prepared by the Commission to explain the Covenant, and a draft of some material which the Congressman may find useful in explaining his position concerning S. 326 and the Covenant itself.

With best regards,

Sincerely,

Michael S. Helfer

Enclosures

bcc: Howard P. Willens

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Mr. Speaker, the Bill before us provides \$1.5 million to assist in the transition of the Northern Mariana Islands from its present political status as a District of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands to its proposed future political status as a self-governing Commonwealth of the United States. The Bill specifically provides that the funds authorized cannot be obligated or expended until the Commonwealth status -- as embodied in the proposed Covenant -- is approved both by the people of the Northern Marianas in a free and open plebiscite, and by both Houses of the United States Congress.

If the Covenant is approved by the people of the Marianas and ratified by Congress, the funds will be needed immediately to prepare for the transition to self-government. The institutional delays which would inevitably be involved if action on the authorization were withheld until after Congress reviewed the Covenant -- delays in committee, in floor action, and in awaiting the next budget cycle -- would result in undesirable and unnecessary postponement of vital transition planning and programs. That is why this Bill is being presented now. I want to emphasize the Committee's understanding and intention that the Congress is not in any way committing itself to approve the Covenant if we approve the transition funds under the conditions set out in the Bill before us. This Bill is designed just to avoid delay in

instituting the transition program, if the Covenant is approved. Our later consideration of the Covenant itself will be uninhibited.

Mr. Speaker, I have followed the course of negotiations in the Marianas and in the rest of Micronesia very carefully. I have been to the Marianas and I have spoken to the people there. Soon the people will have an opportunity to exercise their right of self-determination in a free and democratic plebiscite which will be preceded by a fair and impartial political education program. If the people of the Northern Marianas approve the Covenant in that plebiscite, I for one will support the Marianas Commonwealth in Congress.

There will be, and should be, a thorough study and debate on the Covenant when and if it is presented to us. Today, I wish to make just one general point. In my view, Mr. Speaker, the military aspects of the proposed Commonwealth relationship are entirely separate and distinct from the human aspects. The Covenant gives the United States the right to lease a portion of Tinian for a military base. But there is no obligation upon the United States to lease the land or to build a base. No military base can or will be built in the Marianas unless Congress authorizes and appropriates the money for it. The fact that I will support the Covenant here if it is approved by the people of the Marianas does not at all mean that I will support building a military base on Tinian.

The decision whether to build that base is one we will face after we consider the Covenant, and it is entirely a different kind of decision.

Just because the people of the Marianas, if they approve the Covenant, will have agreed to allow the United States to use a goodly portion of their scant islands to protect what they have been told are important defense interests of the country they wish to join, is no reason to lose sight of the human aspects of the proposed relationship. The people of the Marianas have close ethnic and language ties with the people of Guam, who are U.S. citizens. The people believe in a democratic form of government and want the protections of the United States Bill of Rights. If they approve the Covenant, the people of the Marianas will formally have asked to join the American political family and to undertake the responsibilities of United States citizenship -- truly an extraordinary request in today's world. In view of the unique relationship between the United States and the Marianas created by the United Nations Trusteeship Agreement, this request alone -- offering as it does an honorable way to end at least this part of our Trusteeship responsibilities -- is entitled to our greatest respect and each Member's most serious consideration.