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(MARIANAS)

WASHINGTON (UPI) -- PRESIDENT FORD TODAY URGED CONGRESS TO ACT PROMPTLY ON A REQUEST BY RESIDENTS OF THE NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS TO DECLARE THE PACIFIC OCEAN CHAIN A COMMONWEALTH "IN POLITICAL UNION WITH THE UNITED STATES". "FAVORABLE CONSIDERATION BY THE CONGRESS WILL REPRESENT ONE MORE IMPORTANT STEP IN THE FULFILLMENT OF THE OBLIGATIONS WHICH THE U.S. UNDERTOOK WHEN THE CONGRESS APPROVED BY JOINT RESOLUTION THE TRUSTEESHIP AGREEMENT ON JULY 18, 1947," FORD SAID.

CONGRESSIONAL APPROVAL OF THE "FREELY EXPRESSED WISH" OF THE PEOPLE OF THE NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS WILL ENABLE THEM TO MOVE TOWARD THEIR LONG SOUGHT GOALS OF SELF-GOVERNMENT IN POLITICAL UNION WITH THE UNITED STATES, HE ADDED.

ON JUNE 17, THE PEOPLE OF THE NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS APPROVED A COVENANT IN A UNITED NATIONS OBSERVED PLEBISCITE, FORD SAID IN A LETTER TO HOUSE SPEAKER CARLHALBERT.

UNDER THE COVENANT, THE UNITED STATES WOULD GUARANTEE A LEVEL OF DIRECT GRANT ASSISTANCE TOTALING \$14 MILLION A YEAR TO THE GOVERNMENT OF THE NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS FOR EACH OF THE FIRST SEVEN FISCAL YEARS AFTER APPROVAL BY THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT OF THE LOCALLY ADOPTED CONSTITUTION.

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