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Action On Covenant

Expected Next Week

By John E. Simonds,
Gannett News Service

WASHINGTON - Congress is expected to begin action next week on the proposed agreement to make the Northern Marianas a U.S. commonwealth.

The House Interior subcommittee on territorial affairs is scheduled to conduct a hearing on the agreement next Monday in hopes of getting the proposal through the House by the end of July.

Chairman Philip Burton, D-Calif., has invited as witnesses members of the Marianas negotiations team, members of the Marianas Legislature and the Congress of Micronesia, along with U.S. Ambassador Franklin Haydn Williams, members of Williams's negotiating team, and other administration officials.

President Ford sent the agreement to Congress last week with a message of support for its adoption by a majority of both houses.

Under the tentative timetable, Burton said he hoped to bring the matter before the full House Interior Committee by July 18, and onto the House floor for action July 22.

The Senate has not scheduled hearing dates on the agreement, but the Interior Committee is expected to take up the matter July 24.

This would follow by one day the scheduled July 23 hearings on the proposed \$80 million authorization for the Trust Territory for the current fiscal year. That measure passed the House.