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TALKING POINTS ON THE MARIANA ISLANDS COMMONWEALTH COVENANT

- The Covenant, which has been transmitted to the Congress in the form of a Joint Resolution, provides for a Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands as an American territory. The United States will have sovereignty over the islands. The islands are now a part of the United States administered Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands.
- The document was signed on February 15, approved unanimously by the Marianas Legislature on February 20 and received a 78.8 percent majority in a United Nations observed plebiscite June 17. The plebiscite was conducted by my personal representative Mr. Erwin D. Canham, Editor Emeritus of the Christian Science Monitor. He reports that 95 percent of the registered voters cast ballots.
- More than two years of negotiations between Ambassador F. Haydn Williams and the representatives of the Northern Mariana Islands preceded the February 15 signing. The people of the islands actively participated in open discussions of the various aspects of the proposed relationship during this period. Likewise, members of the House/Senate and staff were frequently consulted by the Executive Branch. Congressional views helped shape the final agreement.
- Approval by the Congress will set into motion a series of steps leading to creation of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. These include administrative separation of the islands from the rest of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, the adoption of a locally-drafted and popularly-approved Constitution for the Northern Mariana Islands, and the conferral of Commonwealth status on the islands

following termination of the Trusteeship Agreement for the entire Trust Territory.

- The Covenant provides for the extension to the Northern Marianas of Federal programs and services now available to other American territories. Proceeds from numerous Federal taxes, duties and fees will remain with the local government, in the same manner as they now remain with the Territory of Guam.
- Article VII provides for the appropriation and payment to the Northern Marianas of a 14,000,000 annual grant in constant 1975 dollars for the first seven years. The same amount would be paid in future years unless changed by the Congress.
- Article VII authorizes the appropriation of \$19,520,600 to be paid for a 50 year lease, with the option of renewal for an additional 50 years at no additional cost, of approximately 18,182 acres of land and adjacent waters in the Northern Marianas, for U.S. defense responsibilities. We have no plans to build a large facility on the land made available to us - it is for development if we so decide at some date within the lease period.
- Early approval by the House and Senate will represent one more important step in the fulfillment of obligations undertaken when the Congress approved by joint resolution the Trusteeship Agreement on July 18, 1947. These obligations included development of the peoples of the territory toward self-government, which has been defined by the United Nations to include the possibility of association with a sovereign state, should it be the wishes of the people involved.