

BACKGROUND PAPERONSENATE ACTION ON THE NORTHERN MARIANAS COVENANT

- The Covenant was approved by the people of the Northern Marianas by plebiscite on 17 June 1975. The Joint Resolution to approve the Covenant was transmitted by the President to Congress on 1 July 1975.
- On 16 July 1975, the House Interior Committee approved the Covenant, by a margin of 30 members voting in favor, and not one member voting against. 13 members were absent. The House Armed Services Committee held informational only hearings on 14 July 1975. Chairman Price made it very clear that his Committee was not claiming jurisdiction. The Joint Resolution passed the House on 22 July 1975, under a suspension of the rules in a sparsely populated House Chamber. There was no challenge that would have required a roll-call vote.
- Hearings by the Senate Interior Committee were held on 24 July 1975. Members of the Armed Services and Foreign Relations Committees were invited to attend these hearings. Senators Hart, Byrd, and Pell did. All spoke in opposition to the Joint Resolution. While acting as Chairman, Senator Johnston indicated to Senator Byrd that he was personally inclined toward referral to the Armed Services Committee. That is all Senator Byrd wanted. Hart persisted in his efforts to discredit the Covenant, popping in and out of the hearings only long enough to present opposition witnesses or to levy a blast at the Administration. He did not take an interest in supporting witnesses, including testimony by the Northern Marianas delegation.
- Subsequent to the Interior Committee hearings, Senator Stennis wrote to Senator Jackson, asking that the Covenant be referred to the Armed Services Committee for 30-day jurisdiction. In the meantime, there are indications that the Foreign Relations Committee wants informational hearings before the 10-20 October recess.
- It is not clear whether Senator Stennis is personally committed to jurisdictional hearings or whether he is only trying to please Hart and Byrd. In any event, this is a matter which must be settled by Stennis and Jackson.
- DOD cannot object to jurisdictional hearings by the Senate Armed Services Committee, because approval of the Covenant also will constitute authorization of \$19,520,000 to lease land for defense purposes. However, it does appear to be necessary and proper to press for early consideration and approval of the Covenant.

TALKING PAPER .ONSENATE ACTION TO APPROVE THE NORTHERN MARIANAS COVENANT

- We requested this meeting to express our strong support for the Northern Marianas Covenant and to urge that early action be taken by the Senate Armed Services Committee to approve the Joint Resolution presented to Congress by the Administration. We are prepared to appear for either informational or jurisdictional hearings, whichever you (Senator Stennis) prefer. We hope that this can occur before the October recess.
- The islands are extremely important to the defense of Guam and our long-range posture in the Western Pacific. The 14,300 people have wanted to become American citizens, like the Guamanians, for more than 25 years. The political uncertainty of Trusteeship status hampers their aspirations for economic development. They will become restless if we do not do something to resolve this issue. We cannot afford to cast them adrift.
- The land we want to lease in the Northern Marianas is important to us, and we believe that Ambassador Williams has struck as fair and reasonable a bargain as anyone could. There is no quibbling by either DOD or the people of the Northern Marianas on this aspect of the Covenant. However, it would be an "entirely new ball game" if we had to re-open the negotiations.
- The Senate Interior Committee appears to favor the Joint Resolution, but members of the Armed Services Committee raised a number of questions during the hearings, without waiting for the answer. It is important to set the record straight--that these were fair negotiations which protect our essential national security interests. We want an opportunity to do this in the Senate Armed Services Committee as soon as possible.
- In the Marianas, opposition to this Covenant is negligible. However, the Congress of Micronesia, which opposed separate status talks with the Northern Marianas, will take delight in any problems which appear in the U.S. Congress. Because the Congress of Micronesia meets in Saipan, this puts the leaders of the Northern Marianas--those who worked hard on the Covenant--in a difficult position. They are constantly exposed to flak from outside their own district.
- In summary, we believe that we have a good agreement and see nothing to be gained by a delay in hearings by the Armed Services Committee. We are anxious to appear before this Committee in support of the Covenant, to set the record straight on a number of issues which seem to be distorted, and to urge speedy passage of the joint resolution. The people of the Northern Marianas also look forward to this opportunity.

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