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DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR

THE WHITE HOUSE

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The Honorable Robert S. Ingersoll  
Deputy Secretary of State  
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Bob:

As background for our meeting on Friday, October 3, I would like to summarize where we stand with respect to Congressional consideration of the Marianas Commonwealth Covenant.

The Covenant had smooth passage through the House largely due to the interest and active leadership of Congressman Burton. It was passed on the floor of the House by voice vote on July 21st.

The Senate in further response to the President's request for early and favorable action took up the matter on July 24. Hearings before the Senate Interior Committee were held to which members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and Armed Services Committee were invited. Senator Pell from Foreign Relations and Senators Byrd and Hart (Colorado) from Armed Services dominated a large part of the hearings and clearly indicated their strong opposition to the Covenant. On the other hand the members of the Interior Committee including its Chairman Senator Jackson voiced their full satisfaction with the Covenant and the record of the Administration's consultations with the Congress throughout the negotiations.

The mark-up session and vote on the Covenant in the Interior Committee is now scheduled for Friday, October 3, with the possibility that it may be put off until Monday, October 6. Nearly every member of the Interior Committee has been consulted and their staffs briefed. It would appear that a strong vote for the Covenant is likely and our informal poll indicates that it could go as high as 12 or 13 to 1 in favor of Commonwealth if all the members were present to vote.

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The situation with respect to the Armed Services and Foreign Relations Committees is far less clear. Senators Byrd and Hart, and Pell are leading the opposition to the Covenant. They have asked for hearings and there is the possibility that Senator Hart may even ask for hearings in the Marianas and in other parts of Micronesia before the matter is referred to the full Senate. Senator Pell too has asked for hearings before his Committee and he has made it clear that he too wishes to delay bringing the matter to a vote by the full Senate.

After a good bit of wrangling over jurisdiction, agreement has now been reached that the Covenant will be referred to Foreign Relations and Armed Services simultaneously for a 30 day period beginning with the filing of the Interior Committee Report which should be prior to the full recess starting October 10. It is thus possible that the two hearings before the Foreign Relations and Armed Services Committees could be held during the last part of October or the early part of November.

Senator Hart is the most active opponent. He is charging that the Marianas negotiations is nothing but "a military land grab", that the Northern Mariana Islands are to be turned into a "military colony", that the Congress has not been consulted nor has the U.N. It would appear that his objective is to either defeat outright or delay indefinitely the approval of the Covenant. Senator Jackson feels that Senator Hart could mobilize about 25 "anti-military" Senators to vote against the Covenant and that Senator Byrd who opposes the agreement for different reasons, could possibly win over a significant number of conservative southern Senators, thus placing the passage of the Covenant in serious jeopardy.

In short, Jackson has advised me that the Administration should not take approval of Commonwealth for the Northern Marianas for granted and has in fact urged me to enlist the active help of the State Department, the Defense Department and the White House with the Congressional leadership and with key members of the Foreign Relations and Armed Services Committees.

In response Bill Clements and other Defense people have been contacting members of the Armed Services Committee and are preparing for the Armed Services hearing. The Deputy Secretary will testify for Defense. In turn EA (Owen Zurhellen) has been helpful in enlisting the help of State's Congressional relations people and contacts have been made with Senator Sparkman's office and the Senate Foreign Relations

Committee staff. I have also made a number of calls on members of both Committees including the Chairman and the ranking minority members.

I would like to ask you to be the State witness at the Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearings. I would also be there as would Bob Ellsworth from Defense and Mr. Erwin Canham. We understand that Pell's primary concern revolves around the questions of where do the Northern Marianas fit into the larger framework of American foreign policy interests in the Pacific and how will approval of the Covenant affect our relations with the United Nations. He has also made it very clear that he is opposed to the building of any military bases in the Northern Mariana Islands. He has said furthermore that he believes all of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands should be kept under trusteeship until they are ready for independence. EA and UNP are working together with my office on back-up materials for the Foreign Relations hearings including a series of questions and answers.

I also hope that State can help us assure that the Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearings are not a "one man show" (Pell) and that some other members (friendly ones I hope) can be persuaded to attend. Anything you can do in this regard would be very much appreciated.

I look forward to seeing you tomorrow.

Sincerely yours,

*Haydn*

Ambassador F. Haydn Williams  
The President's Personal Representative  
for Micronesian Status Negotiations

FHW:kkc