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DEPARTMENT OF STATE
ACTION MEMORANDUM

S/S [Signature]

1419

November 11, 1975

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To: The Secretary
Through: The Deputy Secretary [Signature] PSL
From: EA - Philip C. Habib [Signature]

Marianas Commonwealth Covenant

The Problem

At its markup session on Thursday afternoon, November 13, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee may disapprove or recommend that the Senate defer action on H.J.R. 549, a Joint Resolution to approve the "Covenant to Establish a Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands in Political Union with the United States of America". We need to impress upon Chairman Sparkman and Senator Case the fact that the Department fully supports the Covenant and requests favorable Senate action during this session of Congress.

Background/Analysis

The Covenant was approved by the House of Representatives by a voice vote without any opposition following unanimous approval by both the House Interior and Insular Affairs. The Senate Interior Committee has also given its approval.

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee, which has not held hearings on U.S. policy toward Micronesia since 1947, requested (at the behest of Senator Pell) and received jurisdiction, as did the Senate Armed Services Committee, which is scheduled to hold hearings on November 17. Both Committees have until December 3 to complete their action.

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The Department fully supports approval of the Covenant as consistent with U.S. interests and policies and as a step toward the fulfillment of our pledge to give the people of the Northern Mariana Islands and the rest of the Trust Territory the right to choose their own political future. In particular, approval of the Covenant would accord with the UN-observed plebiscite held on June 17, in which the people of the Northern Mariana Islands clearly expressed their desire for self-government in political union with the United States.

The Deputy Secretary expressed the Department's full support for the Covenant in testimony at Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearings on November 5. Senator Pell, who chaired the hearings is unalterably opposed to the Covenant and took the position that Congress should defer action until the Administration can present a comprehensive package that would decide the future of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands as a whole.

We hope that the Senate will take final and favorable action on the Covenant before the Christmas recess. Further delay would increase the uncertainty that now exists concerning the future status of the Northern Marianas and hamper our efforts to complete negotiations with the rest of Micronesia, which desires a different and less close relationship with the United States than the Marianas.

The Department is using all its resources to bring about a favorable Committee vote, but we expect the vote to be close. Six Senators seem definitely opposed; four appear in favor; and six appear uncommitted including Chairman Sparkman and Senator Case. We believe that a letter from you to Sparkman and Case might make the difference in ensuring a favorable Committee vote.

Recommendation:

That you sign the letter at Tab 1 to Chairman Sparkman and the letter at Tab 2 to Senator Case.

Attachments:

- Tab 1 - Suggested letter to Chairman Sparkman.
- Tab 2 - Suggested letter to Senator Case.

Drafted by: EA/ANP:JFKnowles:mhs
x20870 11/11/75

Concurrences: IO - Robert O. Blake^{RB}
L/UNA - R. Stowe^{RS}
H - WRichardson^{WR}

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THE SECRETARY OF STATE
WASHINGTON

Dear Mr. Chairman:

I am writing to urge early approval by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee of H.J.R. 549, a Joint Resolution to approve the "Covenant to Establish a Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands in Political Union with the United States of America", as reported by the Senate Interior and Insular Affairs Committee.

As Deputy Secretary Ingersoll testified before the Committee on November 5, the Department of State fully supports the approval of this Covenant as a major step which is consistent with the national interests and foreign policy of the United States, and as a step in the fulfillment of the international obligations of the United States.

Among these obligations, we attach particular importance to the fulfillment of our pledge to give the peoples of the Northern Mariana Islands and of the rest of the Trust Territory the right to choose freely their own political future. In line with this principle, the United States held a UN-observed plebiscite on June 17, in which the people of the Northern Mariana Islands freely and clearly expressed their long-held desire for self-government in political union with the United States. Having determined what the people of the Northern Mariana Islands wish, we are in a position to begin to put their wishes into effect, thus moving to a substantially greater degree of self-government. The representatives of the other districts of the Trust Territory who are seeking a different and less intimate relationship with the United States are also closely watching to see how the U.S. Congress

The Honorable
John J. Sparkman,
Chairman,
Committee on Foreign Relations,
United States Senate.

handles this problem, and I am convinced that early Congressional approval will be taken by them as a sign of good faith by the United States Government. After these negotiations have been concluded and the peoples of the other districts of the Trust Territory have freely expressed their wishes in a plebiscite which the United Nations will be invited to observe, the United States fully intends to seek, and expects to obtain, Security Council agreement to terminate the trusteeship for all areas of the Trust Territory including the Northern Mariana Islands.

I should emphasize that the granting of Commonwealth status to the Northern Mariana Islands would not constitute any new foreign policy commitment on the part of the United States. The United States has longstanding national interests and responsibilities in that part of the Pacific Ocean area in which the Northern Mariana Islands are located. Guam, which has been a part of the United States since 1898, and the Northern Mariana Islands are part of the same geographic grouping of islands and the great majority of the population of the Northern Mariana Islands share the same culture and language with the American citizens of Guam. We believe that the granting of Commonwealth status to the Northern Mariana Islands would also be an element of stability in an area of direct interest to the United States.

I therefore hope that the Senate Foreign Relations Committee will recommend speedy approval of the proposed legislation so that the Senate floor vote, the House-Senate conference that appears required, and any necessary reconsideration in the House or Senate can be accomplished before the end of this session of the Congress.

Warm regards,

Henry A. Kissinger

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THE SECRETARY OF STATE
WASHINGTON

Dear Cliff:

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The Honorable
Clifford P. Case,
Committee on Foreign Relations,
United States Senate.

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