

CURRENT STATUS OF HJR 549, AS AMENDED
(January 19, 1976)

Cov in Cong - Senate

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The Senate Committee on Foreign Relations and the Armed Services Subcommittee on General Legislation are scheduled to vote on January 20, 1976 on the Marianas Covenant, H.J.Res. 549, as amended. Action by the full Armed Services Committee is not yet scheduled, but both Committees are to return the legislation to the floor by January 27, 1976.

Support for the Covenant

The Covenant has already been unanimously approved by the Marianas District Legislature and by a 78.8 percent majority of the voters of the Northern Mariana Islands. It gained the unanimous approval of the House Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs and passed the House of Representatives without dissent. Early passage of the Covenant has been endorsed by the Congress of Micronesia and the Guam Legislature.

The Administration supports early approval of the Marianas Covenant because it will be a significant step toward fulfillment of United States obligations under the United Nations Trusteeship Agreement, help fulfill the desires of the people of the Northern Mariana Islands for political union with the United States, contribute to stability in the western Pacific, and strengthen United States security without new international commitments.

Benefit to the United States

The driving force behind negotiations on the Covenant was the long-held desire of the people of the Northern Mariana Islands for political union with the United States and our obligations under the Trusteeship Agreement. The Covenant is also beneficial to the security interests of the U.S. and peace and stability in the western Pacific. It is impossible to predict whether or not it may be desirable at some future date to construct a military facility in the Northern Mariana Islands, but the United States has a permanent interest in the Northern Mariana Islands by virtue of their proximity to the American territory of Guam. Approval of the Covenant will contribute to the stability of the entire Marianas archipelago, including Guam, and prevent the Northern Marianas from becoming an object of international rivalry, as they have been in the past.

Defeat or Delay could damage United States interests

Rejection of the Covenant by the Senate after approval by the House and after years of close consultation between the Northern Marianas and the Executive Branch and the U.S. Congress, or a decision by the Senate to postpone indefinitely the effective date of approval would seriously undermine confidence in the American sense of purpose in the Pacific, promote needless uncertainty and frustration in the Northern Marianas and create a much more complicated and difficult negotiating environment for the U.S. in its efforts to conclude a satisfactory agreement with the rest of the Trust Territory. An indefinite delay might indeed adversely affect the long-term interests of all parties concerned for no useful purpose.

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FACT SHEET
THE NORTHERN MARIANAS COMMONWEALTH COVENANT

The Marianas Covenant is before the Senate as H.J.Res. 549, as amended. It was approved without dissent by the Senate Interior Committee on October 3. The Senate Committees on Armed Services and Foreign Relations held hearings in November and are scheduled to return the legislation to the floor by January 27, 1976. The Covenant passed the House of Representatives without dissent in July.

Background: The Northern Marianas include 14 islands with a total land area of 183.5 square miles. They extend northward 338 miles from the American Territory of Guam and have a population of 14,000. The islands have been administered by the U.S. since WW II as a part of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands (TTPI).

U.S. Obligation and Political Aspirations of the People: The U.S. is obligated under Article 6 of the Trusteeship Agreement to develop the peoples of the Territory toward self-government or independence and to recognize the freely expressed will of the people in an act of self-determination. The people of the Northern Marianas, for more than twenty-five years, have expressed their desire to enter into a permanent political relationship with the U.S.

The Negotiations and Covenant Highlights: The Covenant is the result of 2 1/2 years of negotiations, undertaken in full and continuous consultation with those Committees of the U.S. Congress which have legislative responsibility over U.S. territories. Under the Covenant, the U.S. will have sovereignty. The Marianas will have local self-government, U.S. citizenship, and the protections of the U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights. Financial assistance of \$14,000,000 per year for seven years will be provided by the Federal Government. The Marianas will also be eligible for federal programs and services. U.S. current and future defense needs are met by the land arrangements of the Covenant.

Self-determination and the Northern Marianas Plebiscite: The Covenant was approved by the people of the Marianas District in a free act of self-determination. In a U.N. observed plebiscite, on June 17, 1975, 95% of the registered voters cast their ballots and a 78.8% majority voted for Commonwealth.

Next Steps Leading to Establishment of Commonwealth: Following approval by the Senate, those provisions of the Covenant which relate to local self-government and are compatible with the Trusteeship Agreement will be implemented. Full Commonwealth status, including the extension of U.S. citizenship and sovereignty will not come into effect until the Trusteeship is terminated. In the interim, if approved by the Senate, the Marianas will be administered apart from the other districts and will begin implementing steps toward self-government under their own constitution.

Negotiations with the Congress of Micronesia: An ad referendum agreement on a Compact of Free Association was reached between the United States and the negotiators for the Congress of Micronesia (COM) in October 1974. Since that time the COM has called for renegotiation of the financial aspects and the Micronesians have drafted a constitution containing clauses which appear fundamentally in conflict with the draft Compact. The United States is prepared to move ahead in negotiations but it is not clear if it will be possible to reach early agreement on a future relationship between the United States and Micronesia.

Final Termination of Trusteeship: U.S. will continue to work with the U.N., keeping it fully informed and seeking its advice on ending the Trusteeship. When all the districts are ready, hopefully in the 1980/81 timeframe, the U.S. will take up the matter of termination with the U.N. Trusteeship Council and the Security Council. It is the intention of the U.S. to seek the agreement of the U.N. Security Council on termination of the U.S. Trusteeship over the TTPI.

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COST OF MARIANAS COVENANT (H.J.Res. 549, AS AMENDED)

- Covenant approval will commit the United States to provide direct Federal assistance to the Northern Mariana Islands in the amount of \$14 million annually, in constant 1975 dollars, for seven years. It will also make available "the full range of federal programs and services available to the territories of the United States".
- A separate potential one-time cost is \$19,520,600 for the use of land for defense purposes. Covenant approval will not commit the United States to leasing this land, but it will provide that option to the United States. If the Administration wishes to lease the land it will have to seek an appropriation from the Congress.
- The cost of government in the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, of which the Northern Mariana Islands are a part, is now borne by the United States. The Senate Interior Committee, which has responsibility for legislation affecting the Trust Territory and has reviewed the entire cost package in depth, has concluded that "Absent approval of the Covenant, the United States would continue to have obligations under the Trusteeship Agreement which would necessitate the appropriation of comparable sums in future years."
- The precise cost of the Federal programs is unavailable because it is impossible to determine in advance for which programs the Northern Mariana Islands will qualify. Eligibility of the territories to participate in Federal programs depends on action by the Congress to extend each one separately to the territories. Many programs will not be relevant or applicable to the Northern Marianas and programs will be extended as the Northern Marianas apply for and establish their eligibility for each one separately. Requirements differ for each program, with some requiring matching funds, others requiring specialized skills, yet others being extended on the basis of population ratios, etc.
- Based on the small population and likely limited, piecemeal participation, the potential cost for extension of Federal programs to the Northern Marianas is estimated at \$3.9 million annually. (This estimate is derived from a comparison of the cost of Federal programs extended to Guam.)
- The Northern Mariana Islands has a full employment economy. With a population of 14,000, only 200-400 persons will be eligible for old-age benefits. Over half of the population is under 18.

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