

PUBLIC PAPERS OF THE PRESIDENTS
OF THE UNITED STATES

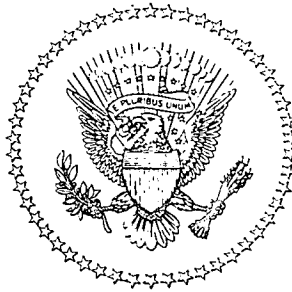
Gerald R. Ford

*Containing the Public Messages, Speeches, and
Statements of the President*

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(IN THREE BOOKS)

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**Remarks Upon Signing Legislation Approving the Covenant
Establishing Commonwealth Status for the Northern
Mariana Islands. March 24, 1976**

Distinguished representatives of the Northern Marianas, distinguished Members of the Congress, members of the executive branch, ladies and gentlemen:

The signing today of the joint resolution of the Congress providing the Northern Mariana Islands Commonwealth Covenant marks a very important moment in our Nation's history. It reaffirms our commitment to the principles of self-determination, and it honors the freely expressed wishes of the peoples of these islands for the political union with the United States.

Those wishes have been recorded formally through the resolutions, referendums, and petitions to the United Nations and to the United States, dating as far back as 1950. We can be proud of the fact that open democratic negotiations led to the covenant. The plebiscite conducted in the islands last June resulted in a resounding 78.8-percent popular approval of the covenant. The final vote in the House and Senate reflected equally impressive majorities.

I congratulate all those involved in the process—the Marianas Political Status Commission, Ambassador Haydn Williams, members of the American delegation, and those Members of the Congress who worked very closely with Ambassador Williams during the negotiations. Let me also thank the distinguished members, past as well as present, of the House and Senate Interior Committees, particularly Senators Bennett Johnston, Paul Fannin, Cliff Hansen, Chairman James Haley, Congressman Phil Burton, Joe Skubitz, and Bill Ketchum.

To the people of the Northern Marianas, I extend my personal greetings and my best wishes as you move closer to your goal of self-government within the political framework of the American family. I warmly welcome your eventual entrance into the union with the United States.

And as I sign this bill, we might recall that these islands were once the scene of bitter armed conflict. My hope now is that they will contribute to the continuing maintenance of peace and stability and friendship among all the peoples in all of the nations in the Western Pacific.

Thank you all very much for coming. I can't say enough for the cooperation that came from not only the people of the Northern Marianas but the

Congress and all others associated. And to you, Ambassador Williams, we owe a great debt of gratitude.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:14 p.m. at a ceremony in the East Room at the White House.

As enacted, the bill (H.J. Res. 549) is Public Law 94-241 (90 Stat. 263).

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Statement on Signing Legislation Approving the Covenant Establishing Commonwealth Status for the Northern Mariana Islands. March 24, 1976

I AM signing today an historic document—H.J. Res. 549, the joint resolution of the Congress approving the Northern Mariana Islands Commonwealth Covenant.

It is an important occasion. First, it is a significant step in carrying out our obligations under the United Nations Trusteeship Agreement which has been the basis of the United States' administration of these islands since 1947. Second, it confirms our national commitment to the principle of self-determination by honoring the freely expressed wishes of the peoples of these islands for political union with the United States. And third, the joining together of all of the Marianas under one flag and one common citizenship represents the first major addition to United States territory in the Pacific since 1898.

History will show that this action has been in clear response to the persistent desires of the Marianas people to become permanently associated with the United States—a desire recorded formally through resolutions, referendums, and petitions to the United Nations and to the United States dating as far back as 1950. History will also show that the negotiations leading to the covenant were conducted in an open and highly democratic fashion, and that the covenant's provisions are responsive to the wishes of both the people of the Northern Mariana Islands and the Congress of the United States.

Those who were involved in this careful and thorough process are to be congratulated: The Marianas Political Status Commission, Ambassador Haydn Williams and members of the American delegation, those Members of the Congress who worked closely with Ambassador Williams during the negotiations, and those who provided the leadership in moving the joint resolution through its final stages in the House and the Senate. I refer to the members of the Senate and House Interior Committees including Senator J. Bennett Johnston, Senator Paul J. Fannin, Senator Clifford P. Hansen, Chairman James Haley,