

THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

July 19, 1975

Dear Bennett:

On July 1, I sent to the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives a proposed Joint Resolution which, if passed by the Congress, would constitute Congressional approval of a Covenant to establish a Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands under American sovereignty. The islands are now administered by the United States as one of the districts of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands.

The Marianas Covenant is the result of more than two years of negotiations between Ambassador F. Haydn Williams and a commission of 15 persons representing the Northern Mariana Islands. The document was signed on February 15 and has been overwhelmingly approved in the Marianas. The local legislature voted unanimously in favor of the agreement on February 20.

At that time, I appointed Erwin D. Canham, Editor Emeritus of The Christian Science Monitor, as Commissioner to conduct an impartial plebiscite in which the people could approve or disapprove the Covenant. The plebiscite, which was officially observed by a Visiting Mission of the United Nations Trusteeship Council, was held on June 17. Mr. Canham has certified to me that 95 percent of the registered voters cast ballots and that a 78.8 percent majority supported the Covenant.

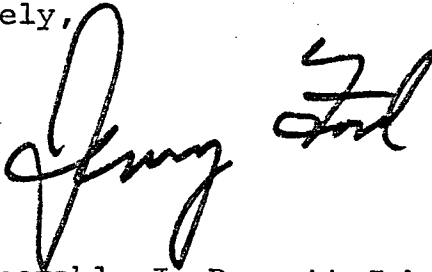
The next step in the approval process is consideration by the United States Congress. Approval will set into motion a series of steps leading to the creation of a Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. The preliminary steps will

include administrative separation of the Northern Marianas from the rest of the Trust Territory and the adoption of a locally-drafted and popularly-approved Constitution. Conferral of full Commonwealth status on the islands, and United States citizenship on the Marianas people, would occur after termination of the Trusteeship Agreement for the entire Trust Territory. It is not expected that this action will take place until 1980-81.

Since the Covenant provides for self-government in the Northern Marianas, approval by the Congress will make possible the implementation of the freely expressed will of the people of these islands.

Favorable consideration of the Covenant by the Congress will represent one more step in the fulfillment of the legal and moral obligations which the United States undertook when the Congress approved the Trusteeship Agreement on July 18, 1947. I urge early Congressional approval.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "J. Bennett Johnston, Jr.", with a stylized flourish at the end.

The Honorable J. Bennett Johnston, Jr.  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510