

1/20/76

THE PRESIDENT HAS SEEN . . .

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MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM FOR: THE PRESIDENT

FROM: BRENT SCOWCROFT *BS*

SUBJECT: Telephone Call to Senator Stennis Re:
Marianas Covenant

The Covenant for the Northern Marianas is in trouble in the Senate Armed Services Committee. Chairman Stennis is not exerting strong leadership on this issue and a telephone call from you could prove decisive when the full Committee meets to report the resolution tomorrow.

The Covenant has already passed the House and has been reported favorably by the Senate Interior and Foreign Relations Committees. However, Senators Harry Byrd and Gary Hart have joined together to strongly oppose the Covenant in hearings before the Armed Services Committee. Senator Byrd's Subcommittee on General Legislation voted 5 - 2 to report the resolution unfavorably. Senator Byrd is opposed to increasing the burden on the U.S. taxpayers while Senator Hart and others oppose extending U.S. territory and defense obligations so far from the mainland U.S. Our current vote estimates for the full Committee indicate 6 for, 6 against, and most of 4 uncertain leaning against the Covenant. A strong stand by the Chairman will therefore be critical to an affirmative vote.

Failure of the Senate to approve the Covenant, which was ratified by an overwhelming majority of the people of the Northern Marianas last June, would raise serious questions as to U.S. credibility and greatly complicate the future negotiating environment for the termination of the U.S. Trusteeship over the Pacific Islands. It would also create uncertainty over the political future of the Northern Marianas, contribute to a potentially unstable political situation, and lead to possible conflict between the Northern Marianas and the rest of the Trust Territories by denying the former their desire to go a separate way.

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Therefore, I recommend that you call Senator Stennis to stress the importance of a favorable vote on the Resolution approving the Marianas Covenant. For your background, a copy of the letter you sent to Stennis and other Senators on January 17, 1976 urging their support for HJR 549 is at Tab A.

Suggested talking points follow.

TALKING POINTS

-- John, I understand there is considerable opposition in your Committee to the Northern Marianas Covenant. I want you to know how important I consider Senate approval of this Covenant.

-- Senate approval will strengthen our security interest in the Pacific by assuring that those strategically located islands will not become the object of great power rivalry when our trusteeship ends. The Marianas are very important to the defense of our facilities on Guam.

-- Approval will fulfill our obligation to the U.N. to provide self-determination for these people and will respect the wishes of the people who voted overwhelmingly for association with the United States. We cannot renege on our commitment to them.

-- Approval of the Covenant will also act as an incentive to the other parts of the Trust Territory to move ahead with negotiations on their future political status. Negotiations, we expect, will be starting soon.

-- Failure to approve the Covenant would not only raise questions about U.S. credibility, but it would create great confusion over the future negotiations and thereby increase tension and political instability throughout the Trust Territory.

-- The increased costs to the U.S. are minimal compared to the security factors involved, and the addition of this territory to U.S. control can only strengthen our defense posture by denying this area to potential adversaries. There is no increased risk in extending our defense responsibility

since we already have facilities on Guam, which is a part of the Marianas chain.

-- I urge you to consider these factors and exert your leadership in securing a favorable Committee vote for the Covenant.

Max Friedersdorf concurs.

