

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MARCH 24, 1976

OFFICE OF THE WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY

THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
UPON SIGNING H.J. RES. 549
THE MARIANAS COVENANT

THE EAST ROOM

3:14 P.M. EST

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 Marianas 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 on 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 Senator Bennett Johnston, Cliff Hansen, Chairman James Haley, Congressmen 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.

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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.

END (AT 3:18 P.M. EST)