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PACIFIC DAILY NEWS, Thursday, November 8, 1973—Page 3

Lands Bill Clears Subcommittee

Giannett News Service

WASHINGTON—The House Interior Subcommittee on Territorial Affairs voted yesterday to approve legislation aimed at conveying to the Government of Guam submerged lands and other federally owned property on the island.

The subcommittee, headed by Rep. Philip Burton, D-California, reported favorably on two bills sponsored by Rep. Antonio B. Won Pat after turning back efforts by the Guamanian delegate to lessen future chances that the President might declare the island a defense security area.

One of the bills would also apply to the Virgin Islands and American Samoa. It would transfer from the Interior Department to local governments the title to all land between the mean high tide level and the three-mile point at sea. Existing law requires approval by the department on every petition to build along the territorial

shores, a time-consuming arrangement that has delayed development.

The bill includes a section reserving the right of the President to maintain or establish "defensive sea areas and naval airspace reservations around and over the islands." Won Pat moved to delete from the bill language to permit the continued right of the President to use the island for national security purposes, but was voted down.

Although the law clearly gives the President this power in Guam and other territories, Won Pat argued that to put it also in the Submerged Lands Bill underscored Congress' intent that it should be preserved. Burton, who voted against Won Pat's amendment, said, "deleting it would create ambiguity" among House members, even though "it is not designed to reflect adversely on the faculty of the people of Guam."

A second bill, pertaining only to Guam, is Won Pat's measure directing the federal government to give back to Guam all of the property that it cannot show it still needs. This would include

military land, but would allow the President to repossess it whenever he "deems it necessary to the national security" and to keep it "for so long as the national security interest requires."

Won Pat sought to change the wording to "national emergency," but Burton suggested that in view of the obvious votes against it in subcommittee, Won Pat would be wiser to withdraw and offer it again to the full Interior Committee.

Won Pat agreed. The subcommittee also adopted an amendment by Rep. Don H. Clausen, R-California, giving the government a year to carry out a property inventory, instead of 120 days as in the Won Pat bill. The bill on submerged lands would require action by Interior within 120 days of enactment.

Won Pat told the subcommittee that he had sponsored the bill requiring military land review in Guam because of the Pentagon's delays—and more recent refusal—to provide him with a report of such a study, "Project Gateway."