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Won Pat's Surplus Bill Gets Boost

WASHINGTON -- An official of the General Services Administration (GSA) has testified in favor of Rep. Antonio B. Won Pat's bill to let Guam become eligible for surplus federal property in the same cost-free way states now may acquire it.

Richard W. Austin, deputy assistant commissioner for real property, presented GSA's official support at a hearing of a House government operations subcommittee.

Guam legally is considered a foreign entity in the disposal of goods and equipment declared excess to government needs and

must pay cash to buy them from GSA. When the Federal Property and Administrative Services Act was passed in 1949 Guam, which was part of the U.S. Navy, was excluded from surplus disposal provisions.

"We believe that it is only equitable that as American citizens they (the people of Guam) should receive the same benefits that American Citizens of other offshore areas of the United States now receive," Austin said.

Austin said the effect of the Won Pat bill also would apply to surplus government land on the island.

Won Pat, who has been trying to get federal authorities to identify properties on Guam they no longer need, said "the need for excess federal land becomes more compelling," as the demand grows for more schools, clinics, playgrounds, roads and water treatment plants to meet "unprecedented growth."

"Equally important, large quantities of military surplus equipment, materials and supplies situated in Thailand, Okinawa and other Pacific areas are periodically declared excess to the needs of the federal government," Won Pat said.

"Because of the cost involved in returning these items back to the U.S. Mainland, many of them are abandoned to the mercy of the tropical elements and some are sold as scrap or surplus materials to local buyers." Guam, he said, is missing a chance to receive this material.

Rep. Cardiss Collins, D-Ill., who presided at the hearing, said she thinks Won Pat's bill "makes good sense." She asked Austin if it also could be amended to cover American Samoa. Austin said he thought so, but would have to get the official position from the GSA.

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