

(HOUSE TACKLES LAND RETURN)

SAIPAN, AUGUST 7 (MNS) ^{7A} THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES HELD ITS LONGEST MEETING OF THE CURRENT SPECIAL SESSION WEDNESDAY AFTERNOON (AUG. 7), WITH MOST OF THE TWO-AND-A-HALF HOUR SESSION DEVOTED TO A DISCUSSION ON LEGISLATION THAT WOULD PROVIDE FOR THE RETURN OF PUBLIC LANDS. 11

THE BILL (SB 296), WAS PROPOSED BY THE ADMINISTRATION DURING THE LAST REGULAR SESSION OF THE CONGRESS, IT IS DESIGNED TO ALLOW FOR THE TRANSFER AND CONVEYANCE OF CERTAIN PUBLIC LANDS IN MICRONESIA FROM THE TT GOVERNMENT TO LEGAL ENTITIES IN EACH OF THE SIX DISTRICTS, AND TO EMPOWER THE HIGH COMMISSIONER TO TRANSFER SUCH LANDS. THE SENATE HAS ALREADY PASSED THE BILL, AND WEDNESDAY IT WAS UP FOR SECOND AND FINAL READING IN THE HOUSE.

MOST OF THE DEBATE CENTERED ON THE LANGUAGE OF THE BILL, AND THE MEANING OF ONE TERM IN PARTICULAR--MILITARY RETENTION LAND. MARIANAS CONGRESSMAN HERMAN GUERRERO ARGUED THAT LANDS DEFINED BY THAT TERM IN HIS DISTRICT ARE CONSIDERED PUBLIC LANDS, AND THUS SHOULD BE RETURNED TO THE DISTRICT ALONG WITH ALL OTHER PUBLIC LAND. HE WAS SUPPORTED IN THIS VIEW BY SEVERAL OTHER MEMBERS.

HIS MARIANAS COLLEAGUE, FELIPE ATALIG, THEN PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO THE BILL THAT WOULD EXCLUDE A PORTION THAT FAILED TO DEFINE MILITARY RETENTION LANDS IN THE MARIANAS AS "PUBLIC LANDS." THE CHAIRMAN OF THE JUDICIARY AND GOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE, REPRESENTATIVE POLYCARP BASILIUS (PALAU), OBJECTED, SAYING TESTIMONY RECEIVED BY HIS COMMITTEE DURING HEARINGS ON THE BILL INDICATED THAT SUCH LANDS ARE NOT IN THE PUBLIC DOMAIN.

THE AMENDMENT WAS EVENTUALLY DEFEATED, AND WHEN THE VOTE FINALLY CAME ON THE BILL IT WAS PASSED BY THE 21 LAWMAKERS. BECAUSE THE HOUSE MADE CERTAIN OTHER CHANGES IN THE BILL, IT WILL HAVE TO BE RETURNED TO THE SENATE FOR CONCURRENCE BEFORE IT CAN BE SENT TO THE HIGH COMMISSIONER.

THE QUESTION OF RETURN OF PUBLIC LANDS WAS ONE OF THE SPECIFIC AREAS OF LEGISLATION INCLUDED IN THIS SPECIAL SESSION CALL, AND THE BILL IS CONSIDERED TO BE ONE OF THE MAJOR PIECES OF LEGISLATION WHICH THE CONGRESS WILL CONSIDER DURING THE SESSION.

THREE OTHER BILLS ALSO PASSED FINAL READING DURING THE LONG WEDNESDAY AFTERNOON SESSION IN THE HOUSE. THEY ARE: A MEASURE TO PROVIDE FOR A COMPREHENSIVE AND BALANCED DEVELOPMENT POLICY FOR MICRONESIA, AND APPROPRIATING \$125,000 TO CARRY OUT THE FORMULATION OF THIS POLICY (HB 357); AND APPROPRIATION OF \$385,000 FOR CERTAIN PUBLIC PROJECTS IN TRUK DISTRICT (HB 331); AND \$34,000 APPROPRIATION AS A SUPPLEMENT FOR THE OPERATING AND CONTINGENT EXPENSES OF THE CONGRESS FOR THE CURRENT FISCAL YEAR (HB 361). ALL THREE MEASURES NOW GO TO THE SENATE.

TWO JOINT RESOLUTIONS WERE ALSO ADOPTED AND SENT TO THE SENATE FOR FURTHER ACTION. ONE REQUESTS THE HIGH COMMISSIONER TO DEVELOP A PLAN FOR AN AIRPORT ON JALUIT ATOLL IN THE MARSHALLS, AND SUBMIT AN APPLICATION TO THE U.S. FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION FOR ASSISTANCE IN CONSTRUCTING THE AIRPORT (HJR 143). THE OTHER GIVES FORMAL AUTHORITY TO THE HICOM TO ACCEPT AN FAA GRANT FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF A MASTER PLAN AND CONDUCTING OF AN ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT WITH RESPECT TO THE CONSTRUCTION OF AN AIRPORT ON KUSAIE ISLAND (HJR 150)

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TWO JOINT RESOLUTIONS AND A SINGLE HOUSE RESOLUTION WERE INTRODUCED AT THE CONCLUSION OF THE SESSION. THE JOINT MEASURES WOULD URGE THE TT DIRECTOR OF TRANSPORTATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TO AMEND THE EXISTING PORT REGULATIONS TO ELIMINATE WHARFAGE CHARGES FOR CARGO STORED ON PIER AREAS ON SATURDAYS, SUNDAYS AND HOLIDAYS (HJR 154); AND WOULD REQUEST THE HICOM TO COMPILE AND REVIEW ALL PRIVATE LAND LEASES AND LAND USE AGREEMENTS HELD BY THE TT GOVERNMENT AND BY GOVERNMENT AGENCIES, AND TO CAUSE TO BE TERMINATED ALL PRIVATE LANDS LEASES AND USE AGREEMENTS COVERING LANDS NO LONGER NEEDED BY THE GOVERNMENT (HJR 155).

THE SINGLE RESOLUTION ASKS THAT AN AUDIT BE CONDUCTED OF THE MARSHALL ISLANDS DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY (MIDA) (HR 14). IT IS SIMILAR TO A JOINT RESOLUTION INTRODUCED EARLIER IN THE WEEK.

THE SENATE HELD A MUCH BRIEFER SESSION THAN THE HOUSE WEDNESDAY AFTERNOON, PASSING FIVE BILLS ON FINAL READING INCLUDING ONE THAT NOW GOES TO THE HIGH COMMISSIONER. IT IS A BILL THAT PASSED THE HOUSE DURING THE REGULAR SESSION EARLIER THIS YEAR, AND RELATES TO GIVING THE DISTRICT FISHING AUTHORITIES RIGHTS TO SELL SUPPLIES AND PROVISIONS TO FOREIGN FISHING VESSELS (HB 311). THE HICOM MADE A SPECIAL AMENDMENT TO THE CALL FOR THIS SESSION TO PERMIT THE LAWMAKERS TO DEAL WITH THIS BILL.

OTHER BILLS PASSED WERE ALL APPROPRIATION MEASURES, IN THE FOLLOWING AMOUNTS: \$30,000 FOR POLICE OFFICERS TRAINING (SB 366); \$40,000 FOR THE JALIUT DISPENSARY IN THE MARSHALLS (HB 100); \$70,000 FOR REHABILITATION OF THE MAJURO DOCK IN THE MARSHALLS (HB 200); AND \$304,000 FOR PUBLIC PROJECTS IN YAP DISTRICT (HB 252). THE HOUSE BILLS ALL CARRY SENATE AMENDMENTS, AND MUST GO BACK TO THE HOUSE FOR CONCURRENCE BEFORE BEING TRANSMITTED TO THE HICOM.

SENATE MEMBERS ALSO DEFEATED A JOINT RESOLUTION THAT WOULD HAVE REQUESTED THE U.S. CONGRESS TO APPROPRIATE ADDITIONAL FUNDS FOR EXPENSES INCURRED IN THE TT AS A RESULT OF THE TERMINATION OF THE U.S.D.A. FOOD PROGRAM (SJR 129). THERE WAS NO DISCUSSION ON THE RESOLUTION, AND NO INDICATION WAS GIVEN AS TO WHY THE MEMBERS VOTED IT DOWN.

ONLY ONE NEW MEASURE WAS INTRODUCED IN THE SENATE WEDNESDAY AFTERNOON. IT IS A JOINT RESOLUTION ASKING THE U.S. CONGRESS TO AMEND THE FEDERAL CONTROLLED SUBSTANCES (DRUG) ACT TO EXCLUDE THE TRUST TERRITORY FROM ITS JURISDICTION, AND ASKING THE ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE TT NOT TO ATTEMPT TO ENFORCE THE PROVISIONS OF THAT LAW (SJR 134).

THE HOUSE IS IN RECESS UNTIL TEN THURSDAY MORNING, WHICH WILL BE THE 17TH DAY OF THE 18-DAY SESSION. THE SENATE SCHEDULED ANOTHER MEETING FOR LATE WEDNESDAY EVENING.

(NOTE TO EDITORS AND NEWS DIRECTORS: ACTIVITIES OF THE SENATE DURING THE LATE WEDNESDAY SESSION WILL BE COVERED IN THE THURSDAY MNS DISPATCH. ALSO DURING WEDNESDAY SESSIONS OF THE HOUSE AND SENATE, THE CHAIRMAN AND CO-CHAIRMAN OF THE JOINT COMMITTEE ON FUTURE STATUS PRESENTED A COMPLETED DRAFT COMPACT TO THE MEMBERSHIP FOR CONSIDERATION. MNS WILL CARRY A REPORT ON THE COMPACT AND WHAT IT CONTAINS IN THE THURSDAY DISPATCH.)