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# Top Negotiator Feels Rota Is In Marianas Fold

By Diane Maddex  
Daily News Staff Writer



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SAIPAN - After a public "town meeting" on Rota last Saturday, the chairman of the Marianas Political Status Commission says he feels even surer that the people of Rota are behind the separate Marianas future status talks.

"At least we've got the leadership behind us," Sen. Edward DLG Pangelinan said back on Saipan.

Taking aim at a Congress of Micronesia report that reached a different conclusion, Pangelinan added: "We came away from Rota with the feeling that the people support the desire to become part of the United States and also appreciate the opportunity for U.S. citizenship.

"We also came back with the sentiment that we should continue our negotiations, because the people know that in the final analysis they are the ones who will decide, who will reject a status agreement or not."

The congress report, prepared by a subcommittee of the Joint Committee on Future Status, suggested that "perhaps as many as 50 per cent" of the people of Rota are dissatisfied with the Marianas talks and would prefer to remain with the rest of the other Micronesian districts.

About 50 to 100 residents joined the members of Rota's municipal council, mayor and District Administrator's representative at the three-hour meeting, Pangelinan said.

The Rota hearing was the first of 12 public get-togethers scheduled in the next three weeks by the status commission as the first step in explaining the Marianas negotiations to district residents.

"The meetings aren't meant to sell, but to tell," said Pangelinan. "The Rota session was very successful. It was the first time the commission was able to bring sufficient information to have a dialogue with the people - something that was very lacking before." Pangelinan said that the commission distributed copies of the two joint communiques setting out tentative agreements reached with the United States.

"The people asked some very good questions about our discussions - about future relationships between the Marianas and the U.S., land, military, components of a commonwealth," Pangelinan

said. "They were particularly interested in the U.S.'s proposed \$14.5 million annual base, the rebates, and other financial aspects."

Money has been at the heart of past rumblings on Rota to become a separate district even apart from the Marianas.

"They've been concerned in the past that they may be short-changed in their requests to receive an equal share of (district) funds," said Pangelinan.

"But if money is the problem, the new Marianas government should offer a new opportunity. We can build in safeguards to assure equal representation for Rota in the legislature, for example - because it's there where the appropriation of money for public purposes is decided on."

Pangelinan said that one possibility seemingly favored by the people of Rota is equal representation in whatever new legislative body is created. There is no indication now whether this will be unicameral as the Marianas legislature is now, or bicameral.

"Perhaps in the past Saipan has taken advantage of its numbers in the legislature or the administration," said Pangelinan, "but I think the people of Rota have put aside past gripes.

"They're now asking, Do we really want to separate for the sake of being a separate district, or just to get more money? Sure, they know they can separate and go back to the pre-1962 times (when Rota was administered separately) when they were making 13 cents an hour.

"But now they're saying, If money is our problem, we'll see what we can get under the new government.

"They know that if U.S. citizenship is what they want, you don't become part of Micronesia, which doesn't want to be part of the U.S."

Pangelinan also said that a future status referendum on Rota and Tinian, as Marianas Rep. Felipe O. Atalig has proposed, "is premature before a status agreement is accepted.

The joint committee," said Pangelinan, who is also a member, "went to the people with nothing to offer.

"They should have reported only the transcript of the hearings (on which the report was based), and asked the congress as a whole to analyze the present state of confusion in Micronesia."

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Development Fund Act, \$1 million was allotted to the island for the development of agriculture, fishing, tourism and commercial/industrial back-up facilities.

However, GEDA has had more applications for agriculture loans than they experienced in any of the other three areas.

"We have approved four loans so far and those loans almost wiped out the agriculture allocation," noted Cepeda.

For that reason, GEDA recently requested from the Department of Interior that half of the funds originally allotted for commercial and industrial back-up facilities receive a non-specific budget. The request was approved and the reallocated funds may now become agricultural funds "or they may be applied to fishing or tourism as well," Cepeda noted.

The original \$1-million allocation to Guam showed

that 15 per cent of the total was for agricultural assistance, 15 per cent for fishing, 10 per cent for tourism, and 60 per cent for back-up facilities.

The new allocation shows that half of the back-up facilities sum, \$500,000, may now go to agriculture, fishing, tourism.

"The funds are available to individuals, corporations or partnerships," Cepeda said.

The interest rate on the loan is regulated on the prime rate of U.S. government notes and securities.

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