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Campaign Fever Is Building As Marianas Election Nears

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SAIPAN — A court hearing on the proposed ballot, increasing attendance at political gatherings and bitter personal attacks marked the final weeks of what may be the last Congress of Micronesia (COM) election campaign for the Marianas.

With five days remaining, candidates on both the Popular and Territorial party tickets are predicting victories and voters are solidifying their choices.

The some 6,300 registered voters in the Marianas will select a senator and three representatives to the Sixth Congress of Micronesia when they vote Tuesday.

The Senate seat is being sought by Territorial candidate Pedro A. Tenorio, challenging incumbent Sen. Edward DLG. Pangelinan of the Popular party.

Voters in Representative District 1 (Precinct A) will choose among incumbent Felipe Q. Atalig, former Popular party member now running on the ticket of the Popular party of the First Representative District; Joseph Inos of Rota, running as an independent; Jose P. Mafnas of the Territorial party; and Herman Palacios of the Popular party.

Hernan R. Guerrero, Popular party candidate, is running against Territorial party incumbent Pedro P. Tenorio in District 2 (Precinct B). Tenorio is the only Territorial incumbent.

Oscar C. Rasa, Territorial party candidate, is seeking Popular party incumbent Herman Q. Guerrero's seat in District 3 (Precinct C).

In this last frantic stretch before the election, a hastily called hearing Oct. 23 sought a decision on the new ballot form to prevent controversy after the election.

Trust Territory (TT) Chief Justice Harold Burnett heard the arguments.

Assistant Attorney General Carlos Salii spoke in favor of the new ballot form, which puts candidates' names in alphabetical order, with party affiliation indicated (as specified in the TT code), rather than listing candidates under party name, as has been done.

Sen. Pangelinan, representing the Popular party, objected to the ballot change, arguing that the political party is the most important aspect of the ballot. Challenger Tenorio, on the other hand, supported the ballot change.

In an Oct. 25 ruling, Burnett affirmed the new ballot form. According to an election commission spokesman, explanations and demonstrations of the new ballot form will be given to the voters via television and radio.

Although both Territorial and Popular party candidates publicly support a separate administration for the Marianas (which means that Marianas affiliation with COM would be ended), the candidates are running hard for their COM seats. Knowledgeable sources indicate that the Marianas could be administered separately as early as next spring.

Questioned about the

incongruity of running for COM seats while opposing a United Micronesia concept, the candidates generally see no problem, explaining that as long as they are part of Micronesia they have a right to be part of its congress.

As campaign fever rises, more billboards supporting various candidates are appearing and two defamatory papers have surfaced to attack candidates, party members, wives, daughters and families. The first paper circulated chiefly attacked Popular party members and the second focused on the Territorial party. "Disgusting trash" was the consensus of candidates questioned about the papers. Observers say this is the first campaign in which such papers have appeared.

While the major areas of concern for both parties are economic issues, candidates indicate that the key to solving these problems of inflation, high prices and low wages is through change of Marianas political status. As far as the candidates are concerned, tourism and gambling are not important issues.

Traditionally, both parties in the Marianas have favored a

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closer relationship
United States than
Micronesia has
Originally, the Popular party
sought reunification with
as a way to the U.S. and
Territorial party saw a more
direct connection to the U.S. as
advantageous.
With commonwealth status
almost a reality, the previous
differences are blurred. While
the Popular party candidates,

led by Sen. Pangelinan,
chairman of the Marianas
Political Status Commission
(MPSC), appear to be the most
vociferous supporters of
commonwealth status.
Territorial candidates, led by
senate challenger Tenorio, status
commission member and
chairman of the land
committee, are declaring that
they also are for common-
wealth.

Popular party candidates
insist that Territorial candidates
aren't really for commonwealth
or for a closer tie with the U.S.
Territorial candidates respond
that while they are for
commonwealth status, there are
certain provisions being
negotiated with which they
don't agree.

Generally, political observers
feel, Popular party candidates
emphasize that for the
economic well-being of the
Marianas, commonwealth
should become a reality as
quickly as possible, while

Territorial party candidates tend
to take a more cautious
approach, emphasizing the need
to protect the Marianas people
by questioning U.S. policy on
control over the Marianas.

Party lines blurred somewhat
during the recent Saipan
Municipal Council session when
three councilmen (all popular
party members) questioned the
speed of the status negotiations
and charged that the political
education program (ESG) is
ineffective.

Whether election results will
be an indicator of Marianas
support for a quickly negotiated
status agreement with the U.S.
is difficult to say, observers
agree.

In the past, voters have
tended to vote for the party,
resulting in Popular party
victories. Indications this year
are that more voters may be
casting ballots for the candidate,
rather than the party. While
observers agree that the Popular
party has more supporters, no
one is sure how many more.

The senate campaign
primarily has revolved around
the issue of status negotiations
since both candidates are
involved in the current talks. At
campaign rallies, Sen.
Pangelinan says Tenorio is
slowing down the status talks,
while Tenorio tells his listeners
that Pangelinan is negotiating
away the rights of the people.

The race in District 1
(Precinct A), with four
candidates, is especially difficult
to predict, observers say.
Incumbent Atalig, who left the
Popular party to run on his own
when Palacios received the party

nomination, is confident he can
pick up enough Popular votes to
win. Popular officials, on the
other hand, say the party vote
will go to Palacios. Mafnas, the
Territorial candidate, is not
expected to get all the available
Territorial votes because Inos,
the candidate from Territorial
stronghold Rota, although
running as an independent,
probably will split that party's
vote.

What the more than 300
voters in Tinian will do is
uncertain.

District 2 (Precinct B) voters
will choose between Territorial
incumbent Tenorio, who at one
point in the campaign was said
to be not running, and
Guerrero, Popular party
candidate who, because he is
half Carolinian, is expected to
pick up some of the
traditionally Carolinian
Territorial vote.

Early in the campaign
political observers seemed to feel
that the District 3 (Precinct C)
race would be the closest, with
young radical Territorial
candidate Rasa challenging
Guerrero, the Popular party
incumbent. Rasa ran a close race
against Sen. Olympia Borja two
years ago for the senate seat.
Now some political observers
feel, Rasa has less chance of
winning, primarily because of
his youth and radicalism.

Despite the issues of status
talks, inflation and education
and the personal attacks, most
political observers feel that the
results of the election ultimately
will be based on party and family
ties with, generally, Popular
party candidates favored to win.