

Marianas Political Status Change May Be Delayed³

By Joan King
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SAIPAN — "The United States is attempting to evaluate the possible significance of the Marianas Congress of Micronesia (COM) election in terms of (Marianas) status negotiations," said Savid Schiele, deputy status liaison officer, when questioned about U.S. reaction to the recent election.

Sen. Edward DLG Pangelinan, chairman of the Marianas Political Status Commission, lost his senate seat to Territorial party challenger Pedro A. Tenorio by 380 votes in an unexpected Popular party defeat Nov. 5.

Throughout the campaign, Popular candidates stressed Pangelinan's role in the status negotiations, noting that he has been chairman since the commission's inception in September 1972.

The commission was created by the Marianas District Legislature in May 1972.

Urging the voters to support the Popular party for a speedy road to commonwealth, the party emphasized that for the immediate economic well-being of the Marianas, commonwealth should be entered into as quickly as possible.

Territorial candidates questioned the speed of the negotiations, and while all publicly admitted that they, too, are for commonwealth status, advocated caution and protection of Micronesians'

rights, especially regarding land.

Questions being asked now are: Will the election change the status negotiations? Do the people of the Marianas want commonwealth status right away? Are they dissatisfied with the way negotiations are going?

Popular party members say that the outcome of the election was influenced by people of other districts and that the people of the Marianas still want a speedily negotiated commonwealth agreement.

Territorial members such as Tenorio say, "The people realize we are supporting commonwealth, but we are objecting to the manner in which it has been handled."

Tenorio and other Territorials feel that the people want change.

Dr. Francisco Palacios, president of the Territorial party, said, "Ambassador (Franklyn) Williams should realize Pangelinan doesn't carry the mandate of the people anymore." Palacios also minimized the effect people from other districts had on the election.

Since both Pangelinan and Rep. Hermun Q. Guerrero lost their COM seats, they automatically lose their positions on the Joint Committee on Future Status, (JCFS) which is how they were serving on the status commission.

New Marianas members to the JCFS will be appointed by presiding officers after the

Marianas delegation (which is now three Territorials, two Populars) makes recommendations.

With the next round of Marianas-U.S. status negotiations beginning Dec. 2 and expected to continue about three weeks, there is a possibility the negotiations will be over before Pangelinan has to leave the commission, sources indicate.

Vicente Santos, vice chairman of the 15-member commission, said that even though the major issue of land (whether it will be leased or bought) has not been settled, he is "optimistic" an agreement will be worked out in December.

Tenorio, who is on the commission and serving as land committee chairman, recently went to Washington for meetings to discuss land. Tenorio, with the commission behind him, is firm on the position that land will not be sold to the United States but leased. The U.S. position is that the land should be sold.

Santos indicated that if an agreement is not reached in December, ways are being considered to keep Pangelinan on the commission. One method being discussed is to have him appointed by the Municipal Council in a special session. A government source confirmed that there is no provision for a special session in the municipal code, however.

Asked what effect the
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Status Delay?

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election will have on Marianas Status Commission voting, Santos said that while there are eight Popular and seven Territorial members now, "Voting does not go by party."

"Any major decision requires 10 members, two-thirds of the total," he said.

Sources generally feel it is too early to speculate on which two Marianas delegation members from congress will be selected to serve on the JCFS (if, indeed, any are: It is up to COM leadership).

If and how Guerrero and Pangelinan can continue to serve on the status commission are still other questions.

It is difficult to predict what, if any, change will occur in the negotiations until it is clear, from an election investigation and analysis, whether it is the people of the Marianas who want the negotiations slowed.

If they do, and there still is time for change, will the commission be responsible?

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