

Borja Speaks On Land, Salaries, Investment

SAIPAN (MNS) — Marianas Sen. Olympio I. Borja took the floor in the senate Monday to discuss three areas of legislative concern he feels are of primary importance during the current session of the Congress of Micronesia.

He mentioned legislation dealing with land matters, salaries for government employes and foreign investment.

The senator said a bill that would facilitate return of public land "may be one of the most important pieces of legislation with which this Congress has (dealt) in its nine years of existence."

He indicated he favors the intent of the legislation, with some exceptions. Chief among these, he stated is that the measure would not return to Micronesian control those so-called military retention lands which would remain under U.S. control.

Borja also said he opposes that portion of the bill that

would preclude previous decisions regarding titles from further consideration and change. Retention of the power of eminent domain in the TT government also could cause problems, he said.

Concerning salaries, Borja mentioned an administration bill that would amend the law on compensation for so-called "local hires" to give them higher salaries than their Micronesian counterparts. He said he finds this concept "very objectionable" and a "step backward." This provision has been deleted from the bill by a Senate committee. The senator said he supports this action.

Commenting on provisions of

the salary plan bill which would reduce the number of legal holidays, lower certain salary levels and make other changes in salary and personnel, the senator said he feels the plan should be made applicable to all government employes rather than exempt certain high-level positions as it does now. He also said he feels the lowest three levels of the pay schedule should be eliminated as a step toward equalizing salaries and helping those persons in those lowest categories cope with the rising cost of living.

Borja also said he strongly favors higher compensation for medical officers and doctors.

"I find it hard to understand

why we give higher salaries to program managers who are concerned with inanimate objects and with paperwork than we do to people such as district directors of health—who are intimately concerned with life and death," he stated.

Regarding holidays, Borja said he opposes any attempt to take paid holidays away from government workers.

On foreign investment, Borja recommended that safeguards to insure such investment is truly beneficial to Micronesia must be strengthened and that Micronesian ownership in such ventures must be provided for.

To this end, district economic development boards must be

given the resources to carry out their duties and keep accurate records and their memberships must be expanded to insure coverage of a broad spectrum of interests, he said.

"There is no reason why we should pass legislation on salaries which is geared to the local hire of non-Territory citizens," Borja said. "There is no reason why we should support provisions of a law which will keep from us...our own land. The time has come for us to make the laws we feel are fit and proper and in the best interest of Micronesia and not to act as a rubber stamp for the aspirations of the administering authority."