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Submerged Lands Bill Passes House

Gives Guam More Control

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WASHINGTON — The House in a routine vote yesterday unanimously passed two bills that would help Guam regain control of its submerged lands and other federally owned property.

One bill, co-sponsored by Reps. Antonio B. Won Pat of Guam and Ron De Lugo of the Virgin Islands, would transfer from the Interior Department to the territorial governments ownership of all the land between the mean high water mark and the three-mile limit at sea.

This would relieve both territories of having to obtain department clearance for any waterfront construction. Won Pat has said the existing situation is fraught with bureaucratic delays and has served to obstruct the development of Guam's economic potential.

The second bill, also sponsored by Won Pat, applies only to Guam and is a measure that could

result in thousands of acres of U.S. military land reverting to ownership by GovGuam. It directs the President to conduct a one-year survey to determine what federal lands on Guam could be turned back to local control without affecting any strategic policies or other government missions.

The federal government owns about one-third of Guam's land. Most is held by the military, which controls some 50,000 acres. Estimates indicate about 10,000 acres are not being "beneficially used" by the government.

Won Pat said he was not sure just how much land might change hands after the proposed survey. He recalled his previous frustrations in trying to get the Pentagon to supply him with the "Project Gateway" report on its land requirements on Guam. This bill, he agreed, would achieve the kind of military land inventory he was unable to get earlier.

Initially, Won Pat wanted the President to

complete his land survey in 120 days, but committee Republicans insisted on a one-year study.

The bill also reinforces the concept of "concurrent jurisdiction" on Guam by deleting language in the existing law that enables the President to exclude Guam from that law enforcement doctrine.

Concurrent jurisdiction prevails in the 50 states as a legal arrangement by which military and local authorities overlap. In foreign outposts, the U.S. military retains separate jurisdiction over its people. Although this latter policy has not been invoked in Guam, the possibility that it could be a factor in local tensions with the military has become a symbolic irritant to Guamanians and Won Pat said the two bills represent the most important legislation now pending for Guam. He predicted smooth passage for them through the Senate.