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CONGRESS OF MICRONESIA CONCLUDES SESSION

(Micronesian News Service - March 5, 1974). Ending with the usual marathon meeting, the Fifth Congress of Micronesia concluded its second regular session on Saipan March 5, fifty days and a few hours after it began.

Despite some early indications that the session might wind up close to the proper time, the thirty-three members of the House and Senate soon found themselves involved in conference committees and debates that pushed the final time of adjournment into the wee hours of the morning.

Invited to deliver brief remarks in the House, TTPI High Commissioner Johnston called particular attention to two of the major accomplishments of the session, the establishment of a constitutional convention for Micronesia and the creation of the seventh administrative district of Kusaie.

These two bills were probably among the most significant to be passed and sent to the High Commissioner on the final day, but there were 23 other bills which received final approval Monday, more than all the bills that had been approved during the first 49 days of the session, a total of 46 bills passed during the session according to an unofficial tabulation by Micronesian News Service.

Major appropriations included \$659,000 for scholarships; \$1,722,243 for the operating and contingent expenses of the Congress of Micronesia for the year beginning April 1, 1974, the largest congressional budget ever, and \$300,000 to fund a government coconut processing authority. Most of the bills to fund various projects in the six districts were not dealt with during the session, since the leadership decided to put these bills over to a special session which they hope will be called for this summer. This decision accounts in part for the relatively low total of bills passed during the session.

One major bill which failed to win approval in the closing hours was the measure to facilitate the return of public lands to the districts. Passed by the Senate, the bill came to the House in the closing days of the session, when it was passed on first reading. Each time the measure came up for second reading, however, it generated debate and suggested amendments until finally, in one of their last official actions before adjournment, House members voted to defer action on the return of public lands questions until a special session this summer, if one is called.

Resolutions and joint resolutions also formed a substantial part of the last-minute work of the Congress and a number of them were of great interest. The lawmakers adopted a measure "demanding" that the United States terminate the moratorium on homesteading on Tinian, for example, and another urging the U.S. to grant a greater degree of "political autonomy" to the Trust Territory, including permissions to elect their High Commissioner and Deputy High Commissioner. They adopted a resolution urging the U.S. to sponsor Micronesian membership in the Asian Development Bank, which was a companion measure to another of the important bills passed on the last day which would establish a Micronesian Development Bank.

Although on the 49th day of the session there had been strong indications that many important bills might be overlooked in a political dispute over the

question of revenue sharing, on the final day the lawmakers chose not to bring that question up again, and moved instead to the other items on their agenda, turning out a considerable amount of legislation in the final hours.

Unless a special session is called, the next regular session of the Congress of Micronesia will be the first session of the Sixth Congress, convening in January, 1975 following the 1974 general elections. A special session this summer is quite likely, however. It will be up to the Congress leadership to request such a session and designate their choice for a location and agenda to the High Commissioner, who must issue the official call for any special session.