

Funds Low; Camacho Recalls Legislature

By Pat McElroy
Daily News Staff Writer

Gov. Camacho announced yesterday that GovGuam's operating funds are almost exhausted and called legislators back into a special session to act on a supplemental appropriation bill that would total some \$9 million.

Camacho announced his unusual move for special budget action at a hastily called press conference at his office yesterday. He said it is a way to salvage a depleted budget that must have supplemental funding to carry both the administrative and judicial branches through June 30.

This year's \$72 million budget reverted back to last year's budget figure when the Governor vetoed a \$93 million budget bill in August, and the senators did not override the veto.

The move—an option given a Governor in the Organic Act under emergency conditions—is more tactical than critical since most of the agencies won't run completely out of funds until the end of the month or later. But the Governor argued that there is no assurance from the senators that they will act on the supplemental request before the funds run completely out.

Senators were scheduled to return to regular session March 11.

Budget and Management Director Jerry Perez yesterday said the sum for supplemental money would be scaled down to about \$9 million, since the request for some \$12 million was made several months ago. He said the agencies have managed to tighten their belts and get along with less.

The problem the Governor faces is loss of money manipulation powers that, "though slightly illegal," according to Attorney

General Keith Andrews, allowed the Governor to shift funds from one area to another. Since January, installation of the legislative-sponsored certifying office ends any shifting of funds specifically earmarked for one kind of expenditure. All appropriations now are subject to scrutiny by the new agency, and, if misspending is uncovered, severe penalties are imposed on the responsible director, who must pay back the misspent money from his own personal account—and may be expelled from office.

Another problem the Governor said called for the special session of the Legislature is passing "pork barrel" appropriation bills—he wants to make sure there will be enough money to operate until the end of the year.

He said some 18 public safety positions remain open because of lack of money for

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new salaries. All overtime pay also has been frozen for lack of money, he added.

Camacho said he also wants the senators to look into the Head Start school lunch program which has run out of funds. He said he sent the Legislature a bill Feb. 27 requesting a supplemental appropriation for \$36,026.

But that bill has not been introduced yet.

Someone from the administration mailed the request instead of delivering it in person and it did not arrive until yesterday. Speaker Ramirez yesterday said he could not act on the request since it "reached my hands only this afternoon."

Ramirez took offense at the Governor's action, saying yesterday that the session is convened "because I called it."

The one-upmanship battle between the Legislature and the Governor's office appears to be on again. The governor admitted yesterday he has no guarantees anything will be resolved on either the supplemental budget issue or the Head Start program.

The Legislature's Finance and Taxation Committee has been holding public hearings on GovGuam supplemental requests the past four months. The bill may not be ready for legislative action today.