

file: Plebiscite

Tempers, Accusations Fly In Plebiscite Preparations

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SAIPAN — Tempers are flaring and accusations flying between pro-and anticovenant forces here, as both sides attempt to marshal support for the June 17 plebiscite.

Sen. Pedro A. Tenorio, in a Monday letter to his colleagues in the Congress of Micronesia (COM), stated: "I would like the (COM) leadership to account for every single penny of the public funds spent for the Marianas political education in the name of unity."

Tenorio questioned the legality of spending funds from an unsigned bill of the recent sixth COM session. Congressional sources explained that the unity-fund money came from the past fiscal year and said the expenditure was legal.

The \$10,000 COM set aside for a political-education program was criticized harshly by some Marianas Political Status Commission (MPSC) members, especially Tenorio, who charged that the action was a "violent, dangerous and coordinated subversive effort tactically camouflaged in the name of unity." He made his charges in an April 3 letter to COM leaders.

In an April 7 response, senate President Tosiwo Nakayama and house Speaker Bethwel Henry said they would have expected a letter more "diplomatic in its tone and Micronesian in its approach."

"We feel your charges are unfortunately based on emotion and instinct -- not on facts and realities -- and it is apparent that only the sensitive political situation in the Marianas is accountable for your remarks," their letter contended.

Nakayama and Henry maintained that their actions were consistent with expressions of the U. N. Trusteeship Council and COM resolutions affirming the Micronesian congress as the sole bargaining agent on status. COM consistently has opposed separate administration of any district before the end of the trusteeship

agreement they pointed out.

Tenorio, in his April 4 letter to his colleagues, criticized COM Reps. Jose Mafnas and Oscar Rasa (also an MPSC member) for writing a letter to Marianas teachers stating that residents and teachers "will no longer enjoy first preference for jobs" if the covenant is approved and the Marianas becomes a commonwealth.

Tenorio said "Reciprocal privileges and immunities will be applicable only after the termination of the trusteeship agreement which the U.S. Congress may see fit to drag on for five years or indefinitely."

Legal sources indicated that, according to the covenant, provisions dealing with "job preference" would take effect after the covenant and constitution are approved by the U.S. Congress and would not wait until the trusteeship agreement is terminated.

Tenorio, in an April 12 letter to Abel Olopai, acting president of the United Carolinian Association (UCA), accused him of a "distorted and erroneous" statement on whether Carolinians would be able to own land under a commonwealth.

Olopai had said that Carolinians would be disqualified from owning land since "only persons of Northern Marianas descent will be able to."

Tenorio insisted that "Northern Marianas descent includes Carolinians as well as Chamorros."

While letters fly back and forth, the most-recent Covenant newsletter (the MPSC's political-education paper) carried an article accusing Rasa of not paying his hotel bill in Washington and asking Tenorio to pay it.

When questioned, Rasa responded that he had paid Tenorio and Tenorio "owed him the change."

Political observers contend that the covenant campaign is "degenerating" into personal political attacks, "just as previous elections have."