

Statement of the Committee on
Governmental Institutions
Regarding Local
Government and Lieutenant
Governors

The members of the Committee on Governmental Institutions have spent many days in considering various proposals relating to local government and the responsibility for delivery of public services on the individual islands under the new Commonwealth. These proposals have generally focused on the creation of certain offices on each island -- called either a mayor or lieutenant governor -- who are popularly elected by the people on that island and have certain powers regarding local matters and the delivery of public services. One such proposal (creating the office of mayor) was incorporated in the proposed article on local government and was adopted in principle by a slim majority of the Committee of the Whole on November 11, 1976. This Committee has been considering another such proposal, creating the office of lieutenant governor with greater power over public services than the powers possessed by the mayors to be established under the local government article. This proposal has not been incorporated in the recommended article on the executive branch and this brief statement is designed to summarize the positions of the Committee members on this issue.

Several members of the Committee strongly support the lieutenant governor proposal advanced by the delegates from Rota and Tinian. These supporters believe that an office should be created that possesses supervisory power over the delivery of public services on each island, including the power to appoint supervisory personnel and to expend appropriated funds. It is not important whether the official be called a mayor or a lieutenant governor so long as the office possesses the necessary powers. The delegates from Rota and Tinian emphasize that these full powers are necessary to ensure that the injustices of the past are not repeated on their islands under the new Commonwealth. Without an adequate provision in the Constitution (either in the local government article or executive branch article), the delegates from Rota and Tinian maintain that they would prefer to remain under the present system of government in the Northern Marianas.

The other members of the Committee have decided that further debate on this issue at this time is not useful. Many of these members oppose the lieutenant governor proposal as being impractical, expensive and unnecessary. Others simply want more time to consider the matter. These members of the Committee believe that the Special Committee appointed by President Guerrero should be given time to discuss the issue and look for an acceptable compromise. These

members of the Committee respect the deeply-held views of their fellow delegates from Rota and Tinian and recognize that no Constitution is possible without support from the Rota and Tinian delegations. These members of the Committee urge the Convention to consider the recommended article on the executive branch without any renewed discussion on the lieutenant governor (mayor) issue until such time as the Special Committee completes its work.