

# Saipan Chamber of Commerce

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P.O. Box 806 CK Saipan MP 96950 ♦ Family Building Suite 104 Garapan

June 21, 1995

Mr. Tomas Aldan  
Chairman  
Third Northern Mariana Islands Constitution Convention  
Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands  
Saipan, MP 96950

SUBJECT: NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING  
PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO ARTICLE II  
(LEGISLATIVE BRANCH) OF THE CNMI CONSTITUTION

Chairman Aldan, and distinguished delegates, Your efforts in the Constitutional Convention will have long term effects on the people of the CNMI. It is with that vision that significant and sometimes difficult decisions will need to be made. This is why the Saipan Chamber of Commerce is happy to provide testimony to assist you with the difficult job at hand on Article II of the CNMI Constitution.

The Saipan Chamber of Commerce represents approximately 200 businesses, and is one of the oldest organizations in the CNMI. We wholeheartedly support the committee in its effort to amend the constitution which will reduce the size of the Senate from 9 to 6 members (2 from Tinian, 2 from Rota, and 2 from Saipan) and the House from 13 members to 11 which should be elected from districts, rather than at large.

We disagree however that the term for Representatives and Senators should be increased to 4 years and 6 years respectively. Increasing the term will more than likely result in ineffectiveness, complacency and may create the opportunity for abuse of power.

The Chamber agrees with limiting the legislative budget. Unfortunately, we do not have enough information to provide suggestions on how much it should be. However, simple math tells us that, using 2% and today's budget of \$190 million, this amount would then be \$3.8 million dollars for 19 individuals. This equals \$200,000.00 per legislator to run their office and, we assume, includes their payroll as well as their employee's payroll. This 2% seems too large a budget.

*Filed 6/21/95-ccj*

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Page 2 of 2

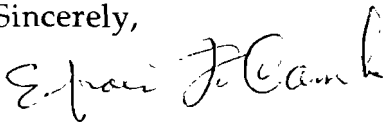
It is noteworthy to mention that there are certain states in the USA, larger than the CNMI, both physically and by population, that have not only a part-time legislature but a unicameral one. While we understand the Commonwealth's reasons for a bi-cameral house, quite frankly, it appears to us that it is not necessary for us to have full-time lawmakers. Possibly the incentive for a person to become a member of the CNMI Legislature should be studied. In addition to a part time legislature, the Chamber would also support a reduced salary with a per diem for every day that the legislature is in session, up to a maximum. This could produce the desired result and allow the legislative branch to work productively.

We would like to reiterate the point that the Chamber has echoed for quite some time now, that the government must take fiscal responsibility for streamlining its operations. The government must be efficient and effective at what it does and rely on the private sector to do what it does best, that is generate jobs. The private sector should not have to compete with the government to employ our local citizens. And finally, to approach a vibrant economic future for our Commonwealth, as is a goal of both the government and the business sector, the government must look at privatizing its operations as much as possible.

The idea of having the Lt. Governor as a presiding officer of the Senate does not seem appropriate. We therefore suggest that the presiding officer of the Senate remain as it is now.

Thank you for this opportunity.

Sincerely,



Efrain F. Camacho  
Chairman of the Board

cc: Board of Directors  
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