

COMMITTEE ON LEGISLATIVE BRANCH AND PUBLIC FINANCE
Summary of Public Hearing in Rota
June 29, 1995

The public hearing convened at 9:15 a.m.

Chair Tomas Aldan introduced the committee members and other delegates.

Mayor Joseph Inos: Following introductory remarks, Mayor Inos expressed the pleasure of the people of Rota at being able to see first hand the work of the Convention. He stated that he was there to express the concerns of the people of Rota. The Mayor submitted written materials outlining those concerns which are attached. In his testimony he expanded some of his views..

He favored maintaing the House and Senate at their present size. He emphasized that there should not be any politics involved in the selection of the director or operation of the Legislative Bureau. The most qualified person should be selected as director.

He felt that each house should make internal decisions for itself regarding removal of members from office.

He favors of open government, and would like to see a sunshine law in the constitution, with the details left up to the legislature.

He opposed the establishment of a tax review commission because he felt there was no need for another governmental agency.

He believes that the people of each senatorial district should decide whether to have gambling. The Rota community would like to find additional revenue sources and have looked at gambling.

He said that people have suffered because a budget was not in place at the start of a fiscal year. Operating with budgets produced by continuing resolutions is a problem. He supported what he called the federal approach that governmental activities must stop until the budget is passed. His proposal was that if the legislature does not act upon the budget within a certain period of time, it should be deemed to have passed.

He favored having both houses approve executive orders.

He discussed the recent discovery of a sunken galleon off Rota. The mayor addressed the question of the allocation of profits from the recovery of sunken treasure. He favored a more favorable division of the profits from the salvage effort for CNMI, suggesting 50% or 35%, with 10% going to the island where the treasure was found.

Justin Manglona: Mr. Manglona submitted written materials which are attached. He supported term limits: two for the Senate and three for the House. He favored reducing the senators to two per district, consistent with the United States model. For the House, he recommended eight representatives from Saipan, one from Rota and one from Tinian. He suggested that the lieutenant governor be made president pro tempore of the Senate.

He recommended that there be no property taxes for twenty-five years, to give property owners a chance to develop the land. He felt that senior citizens should not be taxed if receiving less than \$35,000 a year.

He stated that gambling is a means of raising revenue, and that if there are sufficient controls, gambling is not a problem.

Rosita Hocog: Mrs. Hocog emphasized that she did not have prepared materials because she had not been made aware of the issues being discussed. She suggested regulating taxation at the local level because the local government can decide how the people can stand the tax.

She agreed that gambling was a source of revenue but it was a touchy issue. Gambling should be a choice of the people and controlled by the people. It was appropriate for the legislators to make the decision as they had been chosen by the people.

She supported the idea that there be one delegate from Rota, one from Tinian, and the rest from Saipan, running at large within that island.

Vicente Atalig: Mr. Atalig supported the bicameral system, and felt the present composition should remain. He did not want to increase the power of individuals. The present system had been working, and he saw no need to change it. He favored an open government provision in the constitution. He suggested staggered terms for senators, and a tax break for local business proprietorships, as well as exempting senior citizens from taxation. He opposed a property tax, pointing out that many had just received agricultural homesteads, and it would be unfair to tax them.

He approved removing the power of the legislature to decide whether a district should have gambling. He felt that if people were ready they could decide.

He agreed that there should be time restrictions on the budget process, and a budget that would go into effect by itself if the legislature did not act.

Mr. Atalig stated he would submit materials in writing.

Antonio Quitigua: Mr. Quitigua spoke in favor of retaining the bicameral system. He felt the reduction to two senators from each district was acceptable. Regarding the House, he favored retaining one representative each from Rota and Tinian, but thought that if Saipan could give up

representatives, that would be nice. He supported the increase in terms from two years to four for representatives and four years to six for senators.

He thought that the legislative bureau should control all legislative services and make decisions regarding staff such as community workers.

Glenn Manglona: Mr. Manglona stated that what mattered was not the size or composition of the legislature but its product. The primary role of the legislature was to enhance the quality of life for the constituents. The legislature should pass laws to help people make more money.

He thought that taxes and gambling were sources of revenue. He pointed out that the cost of doing business was greater in Rota and Tinian because of shipping costs. He urged that tourists be told that if they had not seen Rota, they had not seen the CNMI.

The public hearing adjourned at twelve noon.