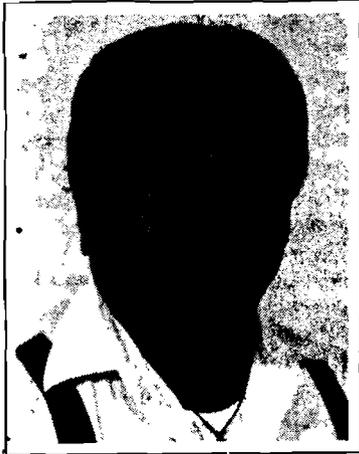


Balanced budget amendment pushed



David Q. Maratita.



Bennet Seman

THE COMMITTEES on Legislative Branch and Public Finance and on Executive Branch and Local Government have tentatively decided to recommend constitutional amendments requiring a balanced budget and reducing the deficit.

For several sessions, the Committees have been considering the problems the Commonwealth has faced by the inability of the governor and the legislature to agree on a balanced budget.

As a result, the government has operated under continuing resolutions which have encouraged budget deficits.

Convention delegates have dealt with this problem in several ways.

First, the Committee on Executive Branch and Local Government had proposed an amendment that requires a balanced budget.

Delegates concluded that the

best way of eliminating deficits is by preventing them from occurring in the first place. Balanced budgets prevent deficits they say.

The most important responsibility of the legislature is to produce a balanced budget" said Delegate David Q. Maratita.

The proposed amendment would eliminate the practice of basing a budget on taxes which the legislature has not yet passed, believed to be major cause of the existing deficit. If a balanced budget is not passed by the start of the fiscal year, the government will continue to operate based on a formula that limits spending.

Next, the Committee recommended changes that would prevent the government from spending over budget.

"We need some teeth in the budget process" said Delegate Bennet Seman. One "tooth" would hold persons with spend-

ing authority responsible if they exceed the budget she said.

I would terminate anyone who spends over budget," said Delegate Tom Aldan. The Committee did not go quite that far, but is recommending that persons with spending authority be held personally liable for spending money that is not available.

Finally the Committee on Legislative Branch and Public Finance has proposed a deficit reduction provision that would require that deficits be eliminated within two years of their occurrence.

The Committee has also proposed a general hiring freeze while a deficit exists as a way of reducing it.

Both Committees welcome comments on these major proposals.

Comments may be addressed to Committee chairs Tomas B. Aldan and Felix Nogis.

Extinct bird species may be found in FSM

By Tom Panholzer
for the Variety

POHNPEI - A species of bird some biologists consider extinct on Pohnpei Island may be alive and winging it in

Buden said he will prepare the specimen for shipment to a research museum in the United States to confirm identification and to store as a voucher specimen.

Local school boards milled

Plans for a Secretary of Education up



Henry U. Hofschneider

Fleming, chair of the subcommittee that was charged with coming up with specific constitutional language, Empowering local schools, and making the system responsive to parents, will help improve the quality of education, the committee said in a press statement.

The subcommittee presented its proposals during committee discussion yesterday.

It will next make a presentation to the full Convention on its tentative plan for locally elected school boards to replace a centralized Board of Education.

Under the proposal, Rota, Tinian and Saipan each would have a school board to administer the school system at the local level.

The local boards, to be composed of five members each serving on four year terms, would be responsible for the faithful execution of the laws and policies of the Commonwealth within the school board senatorial district.

This means the local boards would hire and fire school principals, make decisions with respect to the upkeep and expansion of school facilities and provide a forum for the airing of grievances of parents and PTA organizations.

"Local boards would also focus on methods for improving the quality of instruction and the incentives to keep students in school until graduation,"

The Committee favours decentralization, according to Delegate Esther

the report added.

During committee discussion on the local boards proposal, Rota Delegate Teresa Santos hailed Fleming and the subcommittee for the proposal.

On the other hand, Delegate Tomas B. Aldan expressed doubts the proposal will work as he does not think the boards could be responsible and accountable.

"Accountability comes with the purse. If you don't have control of the purse, you can't be accountable,"

said Aldan.

"Let's be realistic. We're too small and we're too political for this arrangement to work," he added.

According to Aldan, if the school boards would rely on the Legislature for their budgets, the CNM will see more inter-island infighting.

"I bet you this one will again cause delays in the budget process," said Aldan.

Meanwhile, the Committee on Land and Personal Rights, chaired by Delegate Jose R. Lalofoai (Saipan), worked on the constitutional provisions governing public lands.

"The system of land exchanges creates very large problems," said Delegate Carlos S. Camacho. "We should have a five-year moratorium on land exchanges until the current problems are worked out. Otherwise

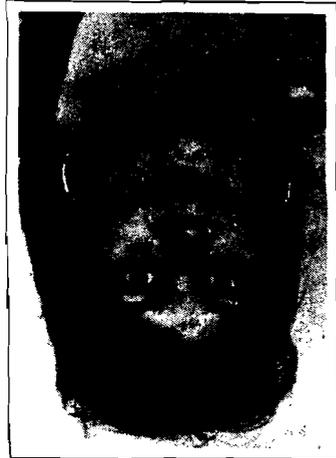
there won't be any land left for our homestead programs."

The Committee favours a tentative plan to change the current homestead program from a land-based program to a program that continues with some land grants, but gradually shifts to housing grants. In the Committee's view, after hearing testimony at five public hearings, there just isn't enough land to go around.

Changing to a condominium grant program for some people would allow the program to accommodate many more homestead applicants.

The Committee will present a plan to the floor that carries forward the Governor's initiatives in consolidating all the land programs in one place to help solve the problems caused by overlapping jurisdictions for land surveys, land titles, public land, and other land matters.

Delegate David Q. Maradita (Tinian) sponsored an amendment to bring all land programs under one roof. The Committee has also proposed changing the rules for the leasing program by extending



Esther Fleming

leases to 40 years but with a requirement that commercial purposes be accomplished within three years or the lease will expire automatically. This would prevent speculation in public land by lessees who obtain leases and then hold the leases without developing them.

The Committee proposal also requires competitive bidding for commercial leases, and reasonable notice and a public hearing before leases can be granted.

THE COASTAL Resources Management Office, the Division of Fish and Wildlife (DLNR) and the Division of Environment Quality-

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