

Harold Varity - 7/26/95

# Local gov't article in constitution debated

SHOULD the Northern Marianas have a strong central government, or should it be divided up into three separate executive branches with more powers given to the Mayors of Tinian and Rota.

That was the gist of the three-hour discussion by the Delegates to the Third Northern Islands Constitutional Convention during Monday afternoon's (July 24) plenary session.

Following the sometimes emotional debate, the Delegates voted to send Article Six (Local Government) back to the Committee on Executive Branch and Local Government (EBLG) chaired by Del. Felix R. Nogis with guidelines as to

what the Committee ought to do to work out a compromise and satisfy the concerns of the Delegates from Tinian and Rota.

The Delegates, however, voted to approve Option Number Four, by a 13-7 votes. All seven delegates from the islands of Tinian and Rota voted against it. Floor Leader Victor B. Hocog from Rota was absent due to a medical appointment in Honolulu.

Option Number Four reads: "Amend the language to make clear that the mayors do not have full responsibility for the enforcement of Commonwealth laws but do not have responsibility for the delivery of some,

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departments, agencies, boards and commissions, shall be compensated by the central government which shall cease after five years.

The provision to abolish the office of the Mayor of the Northern Islands passed by one vote, 10-9. Chairman Nogis said he strongly disagreed with abolishing that office.

The Committee is expected to continue working on the Local Government Article (Article 6) and bring it back to the whole convention for further disposition.

iolation of the Rules and Regulation of Alcoholic Beverage Control Board. Mogambo and Pham were insured by Century at the time. By the terms of policies, Century undertook to pay any claims established against defendants.

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if not all, of public services in their jurisdiction.

"This is the option favored by the Saipan Delegates.

"Option Number Three, strongly supported by Tinian and Rota, stated: 'Amend the language to make clear that the mayors have full responsibility for the enforcement of Commonwealth laws as well as the delivery of public services in the island or islands that they serve.'

Nogis said that because of "fundamental differences" among committee members during various meetings and discussions on the local government issue, he decided to bring before the whole Convention the local government issue to hear the other delegates' views to guide the his committee into drafting a language acceptable to all.

Rota Delegate Benjamin T. Manglona pleaded with the delegates to adopt Option Three, reminding them of the "great compromise" during Covenant negotiations and also during the First Concon in which an agreement was forged to have a bi-cameral Legislature and give equal representation in the Senate to Tinian and Rota.

"That compromise... was the glue, the cement, that united us together and established our Commonwealth," Manglona said. He said Amendment 25, relating to the powers of the Mayor, is not a "perfect document" but properly restructured, reconstructed and strengthened, could work effectively.

"We want our mayor to have direct supervision over our government employees," Manglona said. "We want our mayors to oversee the faithful execution of our Commonwealth laws, rules and regulation." Should the Convention deny the islands of Rota and Tinian their desire for a stronger local government, Manglona called upon the people of those two islands to keep their dreams alive, "for I know, I will be long gone before the next convention."

Saipan Delegate Tomas B. Aldan supported Option Four, calling it "the most appropriate compromise.

"He said this option 'makes clear that the Governor may delegate to mayors Commonwealth operations for public services' and can revoke such delegation for just cause."

Nothing that the subject article is a "sensitive issue", Aldan asked for an understanding from the delegates of Tinian and Rota".

"What we are trying to accomplish is difficult at best, yet rewarding if we succeed," Aldan declared.

He said water separates the islands but that is not reason enough to support the establishments of three separate executive branches.

He added that modern communica-

tion and transportation have brought the islands and people closer together.

Nothing that the State of Hawaii, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands and Alaska have communities like the CNMI with a much bigger population, Aldan said they have one strong central government as well as locally funded, local government.

"We must stop the attitude of what's in it for Tinian, and what's in it for Rota or what's in it for Saipan. We must ask what in it for the Commonwealth," Delegate Aldan said.

He reminded the Delegates that the "founding fathers" of the Commonwealth wanted a strong and unified central government, and not "feudal barons" on Tinian, Saipan or Rota.

Delegate Jack. P. Villagomez used an analogy of delegates and the legal team on a "sacred mission" aboard a large canoe on a journey across the Pacific Ocean, arguing among themselves about each other's different positions and views on how to reach their final destination.

He said the islands of Tinian and Rota were "accommodated" during the initial founding of the Northern Marianas in an effort to reach a compromise. Villagomez said he believed there should only be one Chief Executive Officer, and that is the Governor, who may delegate responsibilities to the Mayors.

Like Delegate Aldan before him, Del. Villagomez said the Governor must have the option to revoke responsibilities if they are not carried out.

Concon President Herman T. Guerrero (Jun Pan) said there is what he called a "blame syndrome" in the CNMI where everybody is blaming someone else when something goes wrong.

He said the Mayors can be characterized as "glorified Governor's representative" which were granted more powers during the Second Constitutional Convention in 1985. Guerrero, who was the President of that Convention, admitted they "did a poor job" in passing Amendment 25.

"I strongly believe there is a need for a strong central government," President Guerrero said.

Tinian Del. Henry U. Hofschneider said the central government never address the economic development needs of his islands was sacrificed during the negotiations of the Covenant which resulted in two-thirds of the island being given to the military.

Tinian is only remembered by politicians to gain more power, but is forgotten when it comes time to distribute funds for economic development.

His fellow delegate from Tinian, Joley P. San Nicolas, echoed the same sentiments, adding that it is the desire of his constituents to have a more responsive local government.

Rota Delegate Teresita A. Santos also pleaded for Option Three, warning: "Please save us or sink us." There was also discussion by the delegates regarding funding for the local government. It stated that the Mayor, Municipal Council members, employees of their offices and any locally established

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