

S A I P A N R I B U N E

Dedicated to the Interests of the Marianas

August 4, 1995

Convention ends with speeches, controversies

Camacho, Manglona won't sign

BY DAN PHILLIPS

Yesterday's ending of the Third Northern Mariana Islands Constitutional Convention will be remembered as much for who was not there as it will for the speeches and ceremonies held.

Saipan Delegate Carlos S. Camacho and Rota Delegate Benjamin T. Manglona both refused to attend the final session, and both informed Convention President Herman T. Guerrero in writing that they will not be signing the final proposed amendments to the Constitution as approved by the delegates.

The letter from Manglona, a former lieutenant governor and a true "founding father" of the Commonwealth, was read on the Convention floor yesterday by Saipan Delegate John O. Delos Reyes Gonzales, one of the youngest delegates who is considered one of the CNMI's brightest young leaders.

Manglona, in his letter, said that he cannot sign the document because it "adversely affects the public," particularly on the issue of local government and the proposed composition of the Senate.

"The people who elected me (in Rota) want to this convention want to clarify and

strengthen local government. I introduced several proposals to remedy this situation," he said.

"Despite my vigorous efforts, the delegates from the third senatorial district (Saipan) may have already predetermined to unfairly and unnecessarily punish the people of the neighboring islands of Rota and Tinian by denying them a decentralized system of government to manage their own local affairs," Manglona said.

"I am extremely disappointed over the action and maneuvering of the majority of our convention delegates who lack the experience of many years of neglect and insensitivity of the central government

control, and lack the understanding, appreciation and sense of history upon which the Commonwealth and neighboring islands' relationship is founded," he said.

The final proposal on the issue of local government ended up being the continuance of the arrangement called for in Amendment 25 of the current

See Convention, Page 20

Borja welcomes audit of contracts

Convention...

From Page 1

Constitution, along with a provision for reduced funding for local governments from the central CNMI government.

Camacho, who was the CNMI's first governor, said that he could not in good conscience support the delegates' proposed changes to Article 12 of the Constitution, which restricts ownership and long-term leases of CNMI land to people of Northern Marianas descent.

In his letter to Guerrero, Camacho said, "What I regard as the most important issue before the convention was entrusted to a committee whose chair (Joe Lifofoi) and vice-chair (Marian Aldan-Pierce) were fundamentally out of sympathy with the very purpose and existence of Article 12. In fact, they were opposed to it."

"Under your (Guerrero's) leadership, an attorney (Deanne Siemer) was employed and assigned to the Committee on Land and Personal Rights whose personal, private objective was to accommodate the

interests of those who had violated Article 12 and deprived many of our citizens of their land," Camacho said.

"In the name of 'fairness' and 'flexibility' the committee counsel has made highly legalistic and technical amendments to Article 12 which cut the very heart out of it... She has legally forgiven the wrongdoers of the past so that they will never have to relinquish their ill-gotten gains," he said.

"The committee legal counsel made it perfectly clear from the beginning that she thought that 'void ab initio' was too harsh. Too harsh for whom? Too harsh for our people, or too harsh for those who violated Article 12, with the advice and help of their lawyers? ... Void ab initio is gone and our land is gone with it," Camacho said.

Siemer, a well-respected lawyer, has said that she only assisted the committee, but that its members decided what direction they wanted to go. She said that she and the committee members gave everyone with any interest the full opportunity to offer their input.

Lifofoi said that he be-

lieved that the Convention's proposed changes in Article 12 are "simple amendments that will help everyone — an even-handed approach that does not favor any group."

He said that the proposed changes would protect future generations, CNMI businesses, and people who deal in good faith and people who can't afford lawyers, as well as providing

assurances to prospective investors and giving courts flexibility in enforcing Article 12 violations.

Lifofoi said the proposal would also "close loopholes that have allowed lawyers to include provisions in leases that exceed the allowable 55-year interest."

Saipan Delegate Jack Villagomez disagreed, however, saying that the proposal

would weaken Article 12 and "change the rules in the middle of the game."

The proposed changes in local government and Article 12, as well as the rest of the work done by the Convention, still must be decided upon by CNMI voters.

The Convention's delegates are expected to start a public education campaign soon.

