

Lawyers praise ConCon product

LEGAL counsels to the recently concluded Third Constitutional Convention praised the work of the 27 delegates during the signing of the draft Constitution last week.

Howard P. Willens and Deanne Siemers, attorneys out of Washington D.C. Bernard Zimmerman, recently nominated by President Clinton to be a federal magistrate in San Francisco; former CNMI Supreme Court Chief Justice Jose S. Dela Cruz, and Grace Suarez, Zimmerman's wife who is a Deputy Public Defender in San Francisco all complimented the delegates over the final ConCon product said.

Justice Dela Cruz said that the Convention "has turned out one of the most excellent products in constitutional law to guide the people of the Commonwealth for generations to come.

I believe this Constitution is so good, that it may not be necessary to have another Constitutional Convention for the next several decades.



Howard P. Willens

The issues debated by the delegates have been substantive and reflects in large measure the ability, the camaraderie, the sense of unity that the delegates from all the three islands have engendered, said Dela Cruz.

Willens who is also lauded the delegates for their work. Willens, was also the Chief Counsel for the Marianas Political Status Commission (MPSC) which negotiated the Covenant with the U.S., and Chief Counsel for the First



Jose S. Dela Cruz

Constitutional Convention in 1976.

He said 86 percent of the 15-member MPSC signed the Covenant.

In 1976, 87 percent of the 39 delegates to the First Constitutional Convention signed the Constitution.

This year, 88 percent of the 27-member delegates signed the draft Constitution.

"We have moved from 86 percent to 87 percent to 88 percent."

Willens said.

"The progress is slow, but we are making steady progress toward achieving the measure of consensus here in the Commonwealth."

The chief legal counsel called the delegates who signed the draft Constitution "true leaders and statesmen" of the Northern Marianas.

It is you who have stayed and signed; who have made the tough decision to accept the process of democracy to enter into the spirit of compromise; to reach judgments about the overall documents recognizing that the document in its whole is not fully acceptable to anyone in this chamber.

You are statesmen; you are leaders. You should be proud of what you have done, he said.

"No group of 27 people," Willens continued, "whether they have law degrees, medical degrees, business degrees, or no degrees could come to a single chamber and face issues that you have with more of a measure of

seriousness and discipline than you have."

Willens said he looks forward to working with the Post-Convention Committee. "And to the lawyers on these islands that wish to challenge this Convention and its product, I can assure them that we will be defending the work of this Convention," Willens declared.

Zimmerman called his work with the Convention "an incredible experience."

I will tell you one of the most incredible experiences for me is the number of times the world 'children was used in debate. I don't think a day went by when somebody here didn't speak of their children and grandchildren, and there probably hasn't been a Convention anywhere in the history of the world that has had that though as a focus point, said Zimmerman.

"I think that you have done the job so well that, unlike some of the rest of you, I don't think any of us are going to be back for the next ConCon. I think this Constitution will long endure," Zimmerman told the Delegates.

Zimmerman also had praises for Willens and Siemers.

"I think, as a sometime student of constitutional history, I will tell you that the quality of legal representation that you have gotten from Howard and Deanne is probably unsurpassed in the history of American constitutional conventions," Zimmerman said. "I don't think you have to worry about defending this Constitution."

In closing, Zimmerman paraphrased Benjamin Franklin, an American statesman who told some of the delegates who were reluctant to sign the American Constitution that the Constitution may not be perfect but it is the best Constitution they could agree on.

"I think you will soon realize that it (the Constitution) is much better than you think," Zimmerman said. "Yours is a great Constitution."

The Post-Convention Committee office has relocated back to the Joeten Dandan Office, preparing materials to educate the public about the amendments made to the CNMI Constitution.



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