

Article 19 of Constitution bats for unity under Commonwealth

THE CONCEPT of Commonwealth unity provides the theme for the last article of the Commonwealth Constitution as amended by the recently-concluded Constitutional Convention. The Convention said in a news release yesterday.

"I think the delegates found during the Convention that there is a lot that binds the three islands together and relatively few things on which we have differences," Convention President Herman T. Guerrero pointed out.

"We thought the Commonwealth Unity idea should be made a prominent part of our Constitution, so that our children know how much we value it."

Article 19, which is entitled Commonwealth Unity, is made up of sections on the oath of office, the official seal, the Commonwealth flag, the three official languages, and the capital.

The provision for Saipan as the capital of the Commonwealth is new. The delegates added it, noting that all of the states in the United States, even the smallest, have a state capital.

Four sections had been in the Constitution; the oath of office was a part of the original Constitution prepared in 1976, and the other three sections on the seal, flag and languages were added in 1985.

The new article bringing these sections together at the end of the Constitution, arose out of a delegate proposal by President Guerrero.

"I was impressed by the fact that most of our amendments were passed with an overwhelming majority, usually 20-2, or 22-3 in the voting," said Guerrero.

"We may have differences among the islands on local government, but when it comes to the Legislature, the Executive Branch, the Judicial Branch, and the other fundamental parts of our government structure, the delegates from the three islands were very consistently of one mind."

The Convention tinkered with the language describing the official seal. The color blue specified in the 1985 amendments was



Herman T. Guerrero

whether the seal, and the flag which includes the same symbols, should be a light blue or dark blue.

"Marianas Trench blue is a color that is uniquely our," explained the President.

"We thought that we were clear about the color back in 1985, but since then you find seals and flags using all different colors of blue.

This time, we put in the archives, an artist's rendition of the flag using the proper dark blue. We called that Marianas Trench blue."

The Convention also changed the wording on the seal. It formerly had "Official Seal" at the bottom under the Latte Stone.

Under the new amendments, that wording is dropped and the date "19778" is substituted, signaling the start of constitutional government in the Commonwealth.

Article 19 was prepared and sponsored by the Committee on Executive Branch and Local Government, chaired by Felix R. Nogis, who is also a member of the Post-Convention Committee approved by the Convention before it adjourned.

"You see Commonwealth seals in various government offices that are different," said Nogis.

"If you go from the House Chamber to the Senate Chamber, you will see different Commonwealth seals. Also, if you go over to the Court chambers, you will see still another version. And the Governor's Office has even a

ful to change the seal so that we could get them all standardized."

If the amendments proposed by the Convention are approved by the voters, all current Commonwealth seals will be out of date and will be replaced.

"This will be done over time, as new seals are needed," Nogis said, "but gradually as they are replaced, they will all be in conformance with the Constitution."

One of the delegates, Donald B. Mendiola, who teaches indigenous culture and crafts, instead on the correct spelling of the flowers specified as a part of the official seal.

"The 1985 Convention has used the Spanish spelling. I thought it was important to change the correct Chamorro spelling," Mendiola said. The change, viewed by the delegates as a small but significant correction, was passed without opposition.

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Marianas Unity