

Interior endorses rate program petition to FCC

For the Daily News

High international rates now paid by telephone users on Saipan, Tinian and Rota would be lessened if a plan by Gov. Froilan C. Tenorio goes into effect.

The governor's proposal, now the subject of a petition to the Federal Communications Commission, has won an endorsement from the U.S. Interior Department's Allen Stayman, director of Insular Affairs (formerly OTIA).

Should the CNMI become part of the U.S. domestic rate program, long distance charges are expected to drop by as much as 50 percent, and true 800 toll-free service will become available to the islands. Under the plan, the present 670 country code would become a 670 area code.

In a letter to the FCC, Stayman said, "such integration would enhance economic development and telecommunication access in the United States Pacific islands. With the advancement of facsimile and electronic data transfer, facilitated telecommunication access

with the United States mainland will only help the commonwealth's economy to grow."

According to Stayman, linking phone rates to the U.S. system, "would give more United States citizens economical access to communications and information services, regardless of income, locations, or education level."

Stayman told the FCC that the plan is consistent with the Clinton administration policy to encourage national and global information infrastructure.

Concerning the governor's request to be included in the North America Numbering Plan (NANP) — giving the CNMI an area code rather than a country code — Stayman urged the FCC "to champion the economic goals of Guam and the CNMI in the international forum in their quest to join the NANP."

The FCC is accepting comments on the petition until Aug. 15 and it is expected that the FCC will act on the request by the end of the year.

Budget official challenges himself to ease water crisis

For the Daily News

After 20 years of working with figures, the governor's budget man says he's ready to find solutions to Saipan water problems.

Eli Cabrera, the special assistant for the Office of Management and Budget joined the Governor's Water Emergency Task Force because, he said, nothing is more important than bringing water to the people of his community. "I'll try everything within my limit to make it a reality," he said.

Cabrera is one of seven government officials on the Task Force. After identifying numerous problems with the island's water system, the group is now in the process of fixing them.

The most obvious problem is that 50 percent of the island's water pipelines are obsolete. Cracks and holes in the old pipes are leaking millions of gallons of water everyday, Cabrera said. "That water should be going to the people," he said. "That's why I'm doing a lot of research now — looking into the coffers to figure out how to pay for new pipelines and how to save money at the same time."

Cabrera said the government can save

a lot of money if it gets tough with contractors. He and the other Task Force members say that too often the contractors bid low prices only to come back with expensive "change orders" half way through the projects. "I'm the person who can and will say 'no.' We don't want to see any change orders during these construction projects."

Cabrera said it is his goal to use both local and federal money to the best benefit of the majority of the people — water projects. "I've watched my neighbors and my own family suffer through the water crisis too long now. We all want to see the government dig for new water pipes without digging into the tax-payers' pockets," he concluded.

The task force has approved five construction projects, one pump station renovation and worked with the Commonwealth Utilities Corporation to finalize a Water Master Plan for the island of Saipan.

Other actions include metering all water customers, raising the rates for those customers who receive 24-hour water, exploring for new groundwater resources and teaching water conservation to children.

Flag, seal reflect common ties of commonwealth

For the Daily News

Commonwealth unity provides the theme for the last article of the Commonwealth Constitution as amended by the recently-concluded Constitutional Convention.

"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 titled Commonwealth Unity, is made up of sections on the 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. 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 changed to Marianas Trench blue in order to end a debate about 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 ours," explained the president, who also

presided over the 1985 Constitutional Convention. "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, and 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.