

GOP bet known by August

Rafael H. Arroyo
Variety News Staff
REPUBLICAN Party will have
official candidate for the 1997
gubernatorial race no later than Au-
gust of this year, party chairman
Benigno R. Fitial said.

In an interview yesterday, Fitial
said that it will be the party's goal to select
an official candidate several months before the
primary ends to give time for "party
wounds to heal" in the event a pri-
mary is to be held.

The party's candidates commit-
tee will set a deadline for submission
of letters of intent from prospective
candidates. After that, a decision will
be made on whether to hold a pri-
mary or not," said Fitial.

"But I have made it a target that by
August, we should have had a candi-
date sanctioned by the party, primary
or not," said the party chair-



Benigno R. Fitial

According to Fitial, there should be
enough time for party leaders to mend
"broken fences" should a primary be
resorted to.

The party chairman in an earlier
interview with the Variety admitted
that a primary may have divisive

effects on the party as it may create ill-
feelings among supporters of candi-
dates who fail to win the GOP nomi-
nation.

Thus, Fitial said it may be in the
party's interest to as much as possible
avoid a primary and choose a candi-
date by consensus.

During yesterday's interview, Fitial
said the GOP's candidates commit-
tee is currently finalizing a set of
criteria for selecting candidates and
will be making such guidelines known
to the general membership.

As of yesterday, only one candi-
date has officially declared his candi-
dacy — Washington Representative
Juan N. Babauta.

Former Governor Pedro P. Tenorio,
who earlier said he will again be
seeking the governorship with Sen-
ate President Jesus R. Sablan as
running mate, has yet to file a letter of
intent with the party.

Another possible candidate, former
Governor Larry I. Guerrero, previ-
ously disclosed plans of running again
but has yet to make a formal an-



Juan N. Babauta

nouncement.

According to Fitial, it may be pre-
mature for the party leadership to
decide whether to hold a primary or
not in as much as there is only one
candidate officially seeking the party
nomination.

He said he expects the committee
to be setting a deadline date soon.

Meanwhile, Fitial also announced
that the party is planning to launch a



Pedro P. Tenorio

registration drive among all current
and prospective members in an effort
to make an accurate headcount of the
party's membership.

"It is a good thing to have an orga-
nized roster of our members so we
can have something to base our moves
on," said Fitial, although he admits,
that is also one way to increase the
party's strength by enlisting more
members.

US agency runs after 30K defaulted loans

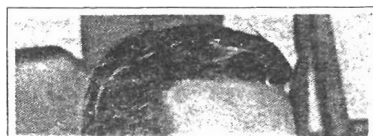
The U.S. government, in behalf of the Small Business Administra-
tion, has filed complaints against two couples who have allegedly
defaulted on their loan payments amounting to a total of \$30,199.19.
The named defendants were Pedro C. Sablan and Ignacia G. Sablan,
Saipan; and Miguel B. Evangelista and Alicia B. Evangelista, of
San Juan.

The two couples' disaster loans were made way back in 1987.
The Sablans were granted a \$4,600 loan, payable in \$59 monthly
installments.

The complaint claimed the Sablan couple failed to pay the out-
standing principal balance of \$2,060.04 plus an accrued inter-
est of \$2,222.36 as of Jan. 22.

Speaker seeks to discourage bills pushing 'pet projects'

By Mar-Vic C. Munar
Variety News Staff
SPEAKER Diego Benavente



has said he wanted to correct
the government's practice of
funding projects based on ap-
propriation bills filed in the
Legislature.

He said such practice "is
wrong," and had invited flood-
gates of appropriation bills

law.
"That's why we're having
members introduce appropria-
tion bills left and right,"
Benavente told the SPJ meet-
ing.

Last year, he said, the House
has received about 500 bills

March vote would not alter anti-casino stand

By Rafael H. Arroyo
Variety News Staff

EVEN IF voters disapproved the proposed constitutional amendment that seeks to prevent casino legalization by law, the move to bring in casino development on Saipan may still be facing a tough time.

According to Speaker of the House of Representatives Diego T. Benavente, he foresees the House leadership to continue opposing the concept of Commonwealth-wide casino gaming regardless of the fate of constitutional amendment No. 15 in the March special elections.

"The people will be voting on whether or not they want the Legislature to legalize casinos through legislation. They will decide on whether to continue the status quo which would leave the provision to allow casinos through legislation," said Benavente.

"This to me is not really a sign on whether the people want to support casinos. So I believe our opposition to casinos would not be against the people's will," the speaker said.

According to the House leader, he continues to be fed information that there are members in the leadership and in the whole House who will continue to oppose casino through legislative initiative.

The current Constitution outlaws gambling in the islands unless it is legalized by initiative in any senatorial district or through legislation approved by the legislative and executive branches.

Under the proposed amendment, the Legislature is being stripped of the authority to enact laws to allow casinos in the CNMI.

If approved, the only way casinos could get legalized in the CNMI will be through initiative by senatorial districts.

But according to Benavente, a vote against the amendment and for the status quo does not mean a mandate for the people in favor of casino legalization.

"The issue is whether we support a legislative or popular initiative. Passing of a legislative initiative is an endorsement by

to them if they opposed the idea of legalizing casinos. It's going to stay that way," said Benavente.

Benavente spearheaded moves by Democrats in the Ninth Legislature to enact legislation establishing casinos CNMI-wide.

With Benavente returning as speaker of the Tenth Legislature and with a 14-member Republican leadership at that, it is expected that the opposition on casinos is solid as ever.

Meanwhile, two private citizens on Wednesday came over to the Variety office to air their displeasure over the House's continued stonewalling of the casino move.

John Cabrera and John White both said the result of the March vote on the casino amendment should give the Legislature an indication of what the people want on this very issue.

"It is up to the people and the voice of the people in March should send a definite mandate to the Legislature to go and get on with what they should be doing," said White in an interview.

"This should be their mandate and they should act accordingly," White added.

Cabrera on the other hand, said casino legalization should be explored as a method of raising the revenue needed by government to fund the ever-growing demand for public services in the CNMI.

"We must bear in mind that casinos will not be for us indigenous people. It will only be for our tourists, gamblers from other countries and yet the benefits will be for the people of this Commonwealth," said Cabrera.

Cabrera expressed confidence that there is an increasing number of indigenous residents who have increasingly become aware of the benefits of casino gaming.

He also said even previous opponents to gambling have started to realize that the benefits could easily outweigh the disadvantages as long as efforts to strictly regulate gaming are maintained.



Private citizens John White (left) and John Cabrera: I move.

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PAYING
ACTUALLY
MORE OR
GETTING A
LOT LESS OF
YOUR
MONEY'S
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