

McPhetres fears proposal may politicize education



Agnes M. McPhetres

By Flick Alberto
Variety News Staff

THE president of the Commonwealth's government-run and only college yesterday aired her strong opposition to Constitutional Amendment No. 13, saying it would place the Northern Marianas College and public elementary and high schools under the "whims" of politicians.

"If that measure (amendment) is passed," Agnes M. McPhetres said in an interview, "it will challenge the autonomy and the integrity of the college."

She said the NMC is "the only college in the Western Pacific, including Hawaii...that never received a warning or a probation because of the provision in the Constitution protecting higher education from political intrusion and giving the board the full autonomy to administer."

She cited the case of the Guam Community College which was on probation last year precisely because of this lack of protection.

When a college is on probation, it does not have full accreditation. Thus, when a student of this college transfers to another school, the credits earned by the student will not be accepted his or her new school.

The new amendment, McPhetres claimed, puts the NMC "in the hands of politicians which is very dangerous."

Earlier, the NMC board of regents expressed its opposition to the proposed Constitutional amendment since it would accordingly eliminate the same autonomy it now enjoys.

McPhetres said the college, under the proposed amendment, may be run differently depending on who are in power.

Amendment 13 provides that boards of regents in postsecondary schools shall be appointed by the governor with the advice and consent of the Senate.

"Education is a sacred thing. We don't play with human knowledge. (It should not be) taken away from the hands of the people and put into the politicians," she said.

Also, under the amendment, the NMC was deleted and replaced with postsecondary educational institutions.

McPhetres said it would have been all right if only one institution was intended to be established.

She cited Guam which has two separate institutions. "These two institutions are not even articulating their program. So if you go to GCC (Guam Community College), your credit doesn't even transfer to UOG (University of Guam)."

She said even if the new amendment states that the higher institutions of learning will have autonomy, it will be "as provided by law." She thinks this "opens up a can of worms depending on how the law provides."

"This legislature may be pro-education, they would give the board (autonomy); next legislature would be anti-education, they would amend," she said.

"So we would be at the whim of the politicians, and politicians may not necessarily be in favor of education," she added.

The composition of the boards of regents, matters pertaining to their responsibilities, and the operation of the colleges shall also be as provided by law.

McPhetres said even the elementary and secondary education would be at the mercy of politicians.

For example, she said, the secretary of education (a new post under Amendment 13) "will be serving under the pleasure of the governor."

The secretary will be appointed by the governor with the advice and consent of the Senate.

The amendment provides for three boards of education, one for each senatorial district, that shall administer the public elementary and secondary education system. The board shall also be responsible for the instruction in the school system.

McPhetres said she had "never heard" of this kind of setup "in my years of studies, of management, of education administration."

She said if this should be the case, the board members should work full time.

Even then, she continued, "five board members can't run a ship."

McPhetres also said the setup may give rise to differences between the education secretary and the board members.

"If the secretary who sets policies and standards says one thing and the board feels differently, what happens then? There will be a chaotic situation. There will be lawsuits," she explained.

McPhetres also said the amendment will create "four central offices" (Office of the Secretary, Saipan office, Tinian, and Rota) instead of the current one.

This, she feels, would create more layers of bureaucracies whereas at present there is only one.

Consequently precious money is siphoned to four offices, with its complements of officials and staffs, instead of to only one, she said.

Concon critics on Govendo Live

IT WOULD be an understatement that everyone has been in agreement on the work that was completed during the 3rd Constitutional Convention last year. But few would suspect the amount of criticism that has arisen since the start of the informational campaign by the Post-Con-Con committee.

Local newspapers have been a battleground of pro and con articles fighting for the election of the voting public. Has this criticism damaged

the credibility of the Con-Con delegates? Is the criticism valid? And just whose best interests are really at heart and stake? The people of the CNMI or a select few? What do the voters need to know to make the best decision on Saturday, March 2nd?

It's back to the Con-Con tonight's Govendo Live. Joining Ken on the program tonight are guests Ruth Tlight, a local journalist, and Senate Legal Council Steve Woodruff. Both guests have thoroughly studied the proposed

amendments and have arguably been among to most vocal against certain elements of the new amendments. Both will give their reasons why tonight. Be sure to get your phone calls and questions in for tonight's Govendo Live.

Govendo Live is still in talk show that explores issues of deep concern for people living in the CNMI. Govendo Live airs tonight and every Thursday night 10:00pm on KMCV Channel 7.

Court orders DPS to return seized truck

By Ferdie de la Torre
Variety News Staff

THE SUPERIOR Court ordered the Department of Public Safety yesterday to return a confiscated truck in 1992 to its real owner.

Presiding Judge Alejandro Castro dismissed the forfeiture case filed by the government against a 1988 Toyota Truck owned by Francisco M. Cabrera.

In an affidavit, Cabrera said since his vehicle was taken by DPS personnel on May 20, 1992, it has been in the police custody.

The government filed an action to forfeit the vehicle on March 29, 1993 in connection with a criminal case.

Cabrera claimed that DPS personnel used the vehicle in 1995.

"Since the filing of this action, the government has done nothing to prosecute it," he said.

Douglas F. Custnie, attorney for Cabrera, said his client is being punished by the government through its conduct and therefore suffering prejudice by the continued pendency of this action and retention of the property.

There is no excuse for the government not to take final steps to resolve this case, he said.

The government agreed to dismiss the case for some other reasons.

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on

Amendment

13

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