

NMI voters say 'No'

By Mar-Vic C. Munar
 Variety News Staff

THE STATUS quo remains. CNMI voters rejected all of the 19 proposed Constitutional Amendments on Saturday's special election.

Voters' overall turnout registered at about 50 percent, but Constitutional Convention delegates said it was more than they expected.

Turnout in Tinian, however, was high at 70 percent, according to elections chief Juan M. Diaz.

The ConCon's proposals failed to get the votes required to ratify an amendment.

Under the present Constitution, an amendment proposed by constitutional convention or by popular initiative is ratified if approved by a majority of votes cast — which means a 50 percent plus one vote — and at least two-thirds of the votes cast in each of two senatorial districts

Most of the amendments got only an average of as low as 35 percent. Amendment No. 15, the item on gambling, got a vote percentage of 56.59 but failed to get the two-thirds of two senatorial

Status quo on Constitution provisions prevails

districts. (See unofficial results).

Legacy

Despite the failure of the ratification initiative, the Post Convention Committee believes the whole process was not futile, af-

ter all.

Committee members said the exercise was a learning experience and that the products of the Third ConCon would serve as a legacy that could provide options

in the solution of future problems in the Commonwealth.

"We considered problems that we believed were—and continue to be—of great importance to the Commonwealth," the committee said in a press statement.

The committee admitted to a flaw.

"The full list of what the Convention delegates wanted to do was a long one. Perhaps too long

to be digested and evaluated by the voters at any single time," the statement reads.

"But we hope that the even the opponents of the amendment will concede that these issues are real one that should be addressed by the Commonwealth in the near future.

"We hope that the legacy of the Third Convention will prove to be highlighting of the Commonwealth's problems, the

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How Saturday's votes went

(Unofficial election returns)

Amendment No. - Item	Yes	No	Percentage
1 - Personal Rights	1,693	2,517	40.25
2 - Legislative Branch	1,521	2,639	36.56
3 - Executive Branch	1,451	2,427	37.42
4 - Judicial Branch	1,914	2,222	46.26
5 - Washington Representative	2,136	1,851	53.57
6 - Local Government	1,536	2,596	37
7 - Eligibility to Vote and Hold Office	1,764	2,163	44.92
8 - Elections	1,603	2,539	38.70
9 - Initiative, Referendum and Recall	1,575	2,493	38.67
10 - Taxation and Public Finance	1,546	2,558	37.67
11 - Public Lands	1,581	2,524	38.51
12 - Restrictions on Alienation of Land	1,727	2,454	41.31
13 - Education	1,024	3,128	24.66
14 - Natural Resources	1,760	2,369	42.66
15 - Gambling	2,284	1,752	56.59
16 - Civil Service	1,560	2,507	38.36
17 - Ethics	1,610	2,479	39.37
18 - Constitutional Amendments	1,439	2,623	35.43
19 - Commonwealth Unity	1,717	2,319	42.54

ConCon elections a sleeper

By Rick Alberto
 Variety News Staff

"VERY slow."

This was the common observation of several poll supervisors and attendants on yesterday's referendum or ratification exercise. No hoopla attended the election, probably because issues, not personalities, were at stake.

But the issues to be decided on by the people were too important to be ignored. No less than the future of the residents would be affected.

In San Vicente Elementary School, one voting place registered less than 10 percent turnout of voters as of 11:35 a.m., according to a supervisor.

The school was like a ghost town. Poll attendants were idle, waiting for voters.

A Board of Election staffer, Patrick Tudela, commented: "I don't know what happened to the people. They're not com-

ing out to vote."

Eric Plinske, assistant director of the Business Development Center of the Northern Marianas College, voted at San Vicente.

He voted no on Constitutional Amendment 13, supporting the college's position that the passage of the amendment would put the college, and the primary and secondary school system for that matter, under the whims of the legislature.

In one voting place in Garapan Elementary School, voter turnout was 24 percent as of 12:40 p.m. Voters coming to vote would now and then perk up, said Rita U. Bailas, poll supervisor, and the poll aides.

"Here, they're coming," Bailas blurted as three voters came in at 12:45. She expected the voters would be coming continuously by late

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Thai firm poised to seize Hillblom's Vietnam asset

By Ferdie de la Torre
 Variety News Staff

A THAILAND-based construction firm is expected to seize one of the late multimillionaire Larry Lee Hillblom's assets in Vietnam.

This developed as Hillblom's Golf Course Co. Ltd. and Phan Thiet Club (P.T.C.) lost a lawsuit filed in Vietnam by Bangplee Golf Course Construction Co., Ltd.

In a seven-page decision issued last Jan. 29, the Binh Thuan Provincial People Court ordered

tract loss to Bangplee of Thailand.

In its ruling, a copy of which was obtained by the Variety, the Vietnam court also asked P.T.C. to refund Bangplee \$2,000 in legal fees and 38 million Dongs to the court.

The court gave the concerned parties to make an appeal in 15 days since the decision was announced.

The Variety gathered that since P.T.C. failed to appeal the case,

Bangplee was the same contractor of Hillblom's first successful Dalat Golf Course in the country which was completed in 1994.

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Yerxe (right) obliges for a photo with Rep. Rosiky Camacho at Executive Director Angie Guerrero.

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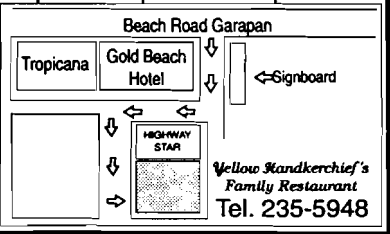
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spare every Wednesday morning. Also, she added, "I want to help the community."

charity. The organization relies on private donations as well as local and federal financial help.

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options for solving these problems, and the need to address them in the future."

That task, the committee members said, is now in the hands of the executive and legislative branches of the government.

"They and the voters who elected them will have to decide whether to build the legacy of the convention so that those portions of its work that have broad support in the community will become part of the Commonwealth's structure and policies. We are confident that they will rise the challenge in the months and years ahead."

Less exciting

Board of Elections executive director Juan M. Diaz said the low turnout of votes was expected because the election did not involve personalities.

"In regular political elections, candidates go on house-to-house campaigns and voters are eager to vote because they may have some relatives or friends running for positions," Diaz said.

The November 4 elections registered an 80-percent turnout.

Diaz recalled that the amendment ratification in 1985 had a heavy turnout because it coincided with the regular elections.

"Voters usually find the ratification election less exciting," Diaz

said. Post convention committee Herman T. Guerrero agreed.

"We were aware that elections that does not involve personalities do not entice people to come out and vote," Guerrero said. "Political elections also involve jobs at stake."

But still, Guerrero said the delegates were happy about the turnout as it was "more than what we have expected."

"We expected only something like 30 to 35 percent," he said.

But delegate Frances Borja was disappointed.

"It is sad that the people failed to acknowledge the importance of the Constitution to their lives," Borja said. "The decision of some people not to vote was a wrong move because in the next regular elections, they would not be able to exercise their duty unless they register again."

Poor campaign

Borja would not ascribe the low turnout to what critics called "poor campaign."

"We did our job," Borja said. "We went on a comprehensive campaign."

Guerrero, on the other hand, admitted that some of the proposals "were not clear to the voters."

He said, however, that even if a plan to postpone the schedule of the special election pushed through, results would not be any different.

"Those who came to vote, came

prepared," he said.

A senator's staff member who requested anonymity suggested that the delegates "yes" campaign was one factor that spelled the rejection of the amendments. "Their campaigns seemed to have turned off the voters because they felt like the proposals were mandated on them," the senator's aide said. "They should have presented the pros and the cons of the proposals."

Some voters interviewed by the *Variety* said they answered only questions that they understood.

Others said they rejected all of the amendments because they did not comprehend any them.

NMC sets registration

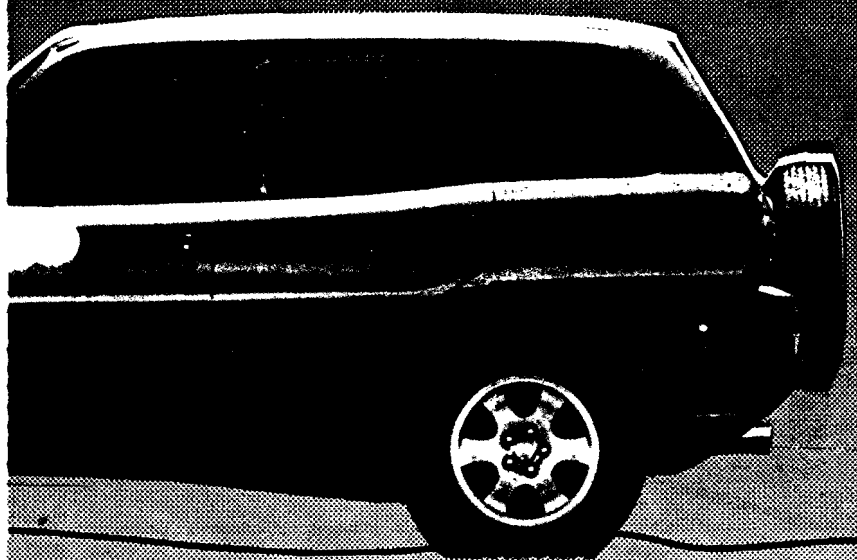
THE COMMUNITY Services Program at Northern Marianas College wishes to make clear to the local community that registration for its courses continues on-going through February, March and April.

There has been an erroneous impression that registration is only at the beginning of the current Spring semester. Registration runs for the next nine weeks.

Brochures may be picked up at the Office of Continuing Education, second floor of Sablan Building V at the College or by calling Melody Actouka at 234-5498 ext. 1803 or 1810.

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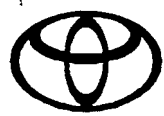
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afternoon. Last November elections, she said, the voting place where she was assigned, also in Garapan, registered an 80 percent turnout. Yesterday, she remained optimistic the turnout would, at closing time, be 75 percent.

Bailas thought many people were not aware of the referendum. She said she did not see any entity or group going around to urge people to go out and vote. The campaign was just in the media, and not all people read newspapers, she said. She also said some voters "just don't care (to vote)."

ConCon delegate Frances LG. Borja, who stationed herself with other yes proponents outside the Garapan gate, said the low voter turnout was to be expected because "this is not a general election."

Nevertheless, she thought it was "a good election. People turn out, although slowly, but they're coming, and hopefully would be in our favor." Borja said she didn't think there was a lack of information campaign. "I think the post-Con committee did an excellent job in putting up public education and all the delegates helped in that, too. Originally the legislature wanted it to be with the general election in November, but we were the ones that pushed for March. We were satisfied, and we did get the information out to the public," she said. She said a lot of public hearings were conducted.

At Oleai Elementary School, one of the two voting places had also a 24 percent voter turnout by 1 p.m. One of the voters, Juana San Nicolas, 53, who works at the Governor's Office, said she voted because she wanted "some changes."

"I want to change the past for the better," she said, specifically pointing out that she voted yes to Amendment 13 to rectify the Commonwealth's over-dependence on off-island teachers and nurses. She believes that with Amendment 13 more indigenous people would be given the opportunity to study to become teachers and nurses. People who did not care to vote, she said, probably did not want any change.