

# Opposing lawyers agree: ConCon not a waste

BY DAN PHILLIPS

In the aftermath of Saturday's special election, which resulted in Commonwealth voters rejecting 19 proposed amendments to the CNMI Constitution, many residents have said the Third Northern Mariana Islands Constitutional Convention ended up being a colossal waste of time and money.

This view certainly isn't shared, however, by some of the leading advocates and opponents of the proposed amendments.

While Convention President Herman T. Guerrero blamed the Legislature for creating confusion and causing a low voter turnout on Saipan, he also said he respected the decision made by CNMI voters.

"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," he said in a news release.

Guerrero added that he hoped that "even the opponents of the amendments will concede that these issues are real ones that should be addressed by the Commonwealth in the near future. We hope that the legacy of the Third Constitutional Convention will prove to be the highlighting of the Commonwealth's problems, the options for solving the problems, and the need to address them in the future."

"The task is now in the hands of the executive and legislative branches of the Commonwealth government. They and the voters who elected them will have to de-



Guerrero

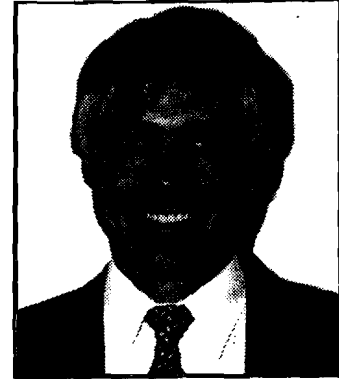
cide whether to build on the legacy of the Convention so that those portions of its work that have broad support in the community will become part of the Commonwealth's structures and policies. We are confident that they will rise to the challenge in the months and years ahead," Guerrero said.

Deanne Siemer, one of the Convention's legal counsels, said yesterday that although around \$700,000 has been spent on the entire constitutional convention process, she didn't consider the money, time and effort spent a waste.

"It was not a waste. It was a healthy process. The ideas gained some momentum and, hopefully, will bear some fruit.

Senate legal counsel Steve Woodruff, who actively opposed most of the proposed amendments before the election, agreed that the process was not a waste.

"It was a healthy exercise of democracy. Spending money in a democratic exercise is never a waste. We still have the information the convention collected and



Woodruff

the Legislature is expected to make use of whatever there is to be learned from the work of the convention," he said.

"As far as people who say the money spent was a waste because all of the amendments were rejected, it is like going to the store, picking out a piece of meat that looks good and finding out later, when you get it home, that the meat is spoiled. Do you eat it just because you paid for it?" Woodruff asked.

"The process and the results showed that the democratic process in the Northern Marianas is still among the healthiest in the world," he said.

The Senate legal counsel said he believed that in the weeks before the election, CNMI voters "saw that the proposed amendments would weaken local government and strengthen central government, change Article 12, and dramatically change the balance of power by weakening the legislature and strengthening the executive branch. The people have spoken that this is not what they wanted."

TRIBUNE 3/7/94