

# Activists quiet about lack of plebiscite

h, the sound of silence. There is more than a little puzzlement concerning what's *not* on the Nov. 7 ballot.

Oh sure, we can vote for our favorite senators, our congressional representative, our mayors, vice mayors and public officials. We can, I've been assured, even cast a vote for president of the United States, though it won't count.

But what happened to the Chamorro-only vote for the island's future political status?

The Chamorro activists, wonderful people, all of them, have never been known to hide their heads in the sand. They have never been shy about telling us how they feel. When they get upset, they always stand up for their rights.

They make noise.

But they are strangely silent right now. That isn't like them. Am I missing something here? Is there a reason for their mild acceptance of yet another postponement of the Chamorro-only vote?

The political status question will not appear on the general election ballot. The political status plebiscite, in which the island's indigenous people are to decide among statehood,

free association with the United States or independence, cannot be held because a voter registry has not yet been completed.

This is an outrage. If I were a Chamorro activist, I would be screaming to high heaven, to the president and to the United Nations. How can they take my vote away? It is enough to make a patriot cry.

The rest of the island — Micronesians, Filipinos, Chinese, haoles, Koreans and all the rest — deserve an election. They are all living in a state of uncertainty. They want to know if they should plan on leaving, or investing elsewhere. These people, who comprise just about half the island's population, are faced with a certain amount of unease.

But why postpone it? Why delay it? What is the reason for the stall?

Leland Bettis, director of the Commission on Decolonization put it clearly enough, when he said: "We're not going to vote until there's a (Chamorro) registry, and there's no registry."

Is there a problem with registration of Chamorros? There may be. The plebiscite was first postponed because election commission Executive Director Gerald Taitano said creating the registry stalled because there is no funding for the Decolonization Registry Advisory Board to create it.

They may start registering by the general election, Taitano said, explaining that voters could register when they go to the polls. But that election is less than two weeks away, and Chamorro-only registration at the polls doesn't seem likely or possible. Wouldn't such registration require identification and documentation showing that those registering are, in fact, eligible?

Bettis added that the Commission on Decolonization has not met since July and is unlikely to meet until an election date is set. Bettis also said that the commission has more than \$380,000 from this year's appropriation to conduct a voter education campaign.

Enough, enough already. This is a crucial vote for the Chamorro people.

They have waited for this opportunity for hundreds of years, since the Spanish seized the island. If resources are needed, let us provide them. If special laws are needed, let the Legislature and the governor get together to provide for those laws. If a Chamorro Registry is needed, let us get cracking on getting the names on a list.

I just don't understand why Chamorro activists have sat back so calmly and watched this comedy of errors.

*Joe Murphy is a former editor for the Pacific Daily News and writes his Pipe Dreams column daily.*



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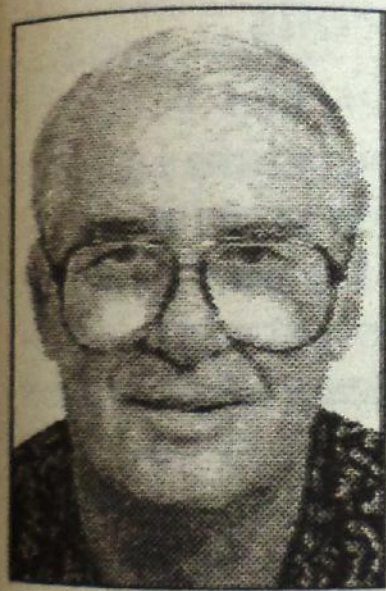
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