

Options confuse voters



Terry Troxell/Pacific Daily News

Not enough information: Jose Rosario, right, and his wife, Liz, owners of the Chelu store at the

Chamorro Village in Hagåtña, talk about the issues surrounding the July 1 plebiscite.

**Chamorro
Plebiscite**
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By Adrienne Loerzel
Pacific Daily News

While government officials are trying to iron out ways to hold the Chamorro-only vote by the July 1 election date, some residents are worried they don't have enough information to vote. Some suggested that officials postpone the plebiscite.

Since the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in the Rice vs. Cayetano case, in which an election exclusive to native Hawaiians was deemed unconstitutional, local lawmakers and other officials

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have been scrambling to find the right definition of "Chamorro." Officials have repeatedly said they want to define a political group, not a racial one, so the election will withstand a court challenge.

Residents are less concerned with the constitutionality of the vote than with the lack of information on the plebiscite, which will allow Chamorros to choose among statehood, independence and free association.

"There's got to be more information out there that's readily available," said Joe Rosario, the owner of the Chelu Shop in Hagåtña's Chamorro Village. Rosario said he has been trying to follow the issue, but remains confused about what the status options will mean for Guam.

"I don't think it would be a bad idea to hold off," he said. "We've been under Spain, the U.S. ... for 300 years. I think putting it off another five months is not going to hurt a lot of people."

Ador Antolin said he doesn't know very much about the plebiscite and what it will mean for Guam.

The 45-year-old Dededo resident said he has lived on Guam for 25 years, but would not be able to vote in the plebiscite. He said he and other residents should have more information about the status vote and its implications for residents here.

Others said they feel the political status issue should not be addressed right now. "I think we need to concentrate on our government — let's deal with the government problems we have now before we go anywhere else," said 21-year-old Sheena Jennings, a Merizo resident. She said there are too many opinions, and not enough factual information, about the political status vote.

"I hardly know about it," added Jistine Babauta of Tamuning. The 19-year-old said she wanted to know why Guam's current status as a U.S. territory wasn't included as an option.

Rosario said the current state of the island also makes it a bad time to address such important issues as the future political status of Guam.

"There's a lot of people out there with no jobs," he said. "I don't think these families that are affected by job transfers (or layoffs) really care where the island's going ... 'How am I going to put food on the table?' is what they're thinking."

While Rosario said he feels the future political status of the island is a serious issue that should concern all the island's residents, he said it may not be getting the attention it deserves because of the problems people are facing in their daily lives. "My brother is going off island to further his career," he said. "If I were in his shoes the last thing on my mind would be, 'am I going to vote for statehood, free association or independence?'"