

HABA ADAI, IT'S THURSDAY

Plebiscite delay predicted

Funding, hiring issues hinder action on status vote

By **Steve Limtiaco**

Pacific Daily News

Holding the political-status plebiscite as scheduled on July 1 appears unrealistic due to funding delays, said Joe Borja, administrator of the Chamorro Registry Advisory Board.

Borja gave his opinion at a Guam Election Commission meeting yesterday during which commission members discussed funding and election staff needs for the plebiscite.

Qualified voters can choose statehood, independence or free association with the United States.

Borja said the registry advisory board is having a difficult time getting the Bureau of Budget and Management Research to release the money that was appropriated for new computers and for the ongoing information campaign for the plebiscite. He said it appears unlikely the money budgeted in Bill 391, which sets the rules for the July 1 political-status

plebiscite, would be released any sooner.

"I do not have much hope for the timely release of these funds," Borja said. He also pointed out that the plebiscite is scheduled to happen July 1, whether the commission is ready or not.

Election commission member Frederick Horecky asked about the budget bureau's process for releasing money, but commission Chairman Joseph Duenas said it is not the com-

mission's job to speculate on such matters. "These are questions that go beyond us, really," he said.

The election commission also has its own funding issues to deal with as the plebiscite approaches.

Specifically, commission members are uncertain whether the money budgeted in Bill 391 will be released in a timely manner, and whether the bill's provision to allow

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Vote: Hiring legality debated

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the commission to hire employees for this year's elections would violate the government's hiring freeze. The bill would allow the commission to spend more than \$98,000 to hire eight employees, through Sept. 30, which is the end of the fiscal year.

But election commission members said they cannot act on those concerns until the bill becomes law.

The bill, passed by lawmakers last week, currently is being considered by Gov. Carl Gutierrez.

"We'll just have to live with whatever decision is made by the powers that be," said Duenas.

Commission legal counsel Caesar Cabot said he believes the commission can legally hire the employees if the bill becomes law.

"My position is that this body is an administrative body. We don't have the right to pick and choose which statutes to implement," Cabot said. He said he believes any position the commission might take on

VOTER REGISTRY

▲ Who qualifies to vote in the July 1 political-status plebiscite?

▲ Every person, 18 years or older, who became a U.S. citizen by virtue of the authority and enactment of the 1950 Organic Act of Guam and descendants of those persons.

Source: Bill 391

WHAT IS IT?

▲ Voters will choose between

the government's hiring freeze would be irrelevant, and it can hire people under the provisions of Bill 391, if it is signed into law.

But Horecky said he still is concerned about the possibility of the commission violating the government's hiring freeze, and suggested asking for an attorney general's opinion on the matter.

Duenas agreed that the commis-

sion should ask for an opinion from the attorney general, but commission members eventually decided that such a request would be premature until the bill becomes law.

statehood, independence and free association with the United States. ▲ The plebiscite is a non-binding vote that will determine the course of Guam's future status negotiations with the United States.

▲ Identifying and registering qualified voters are the responsibilities of the Chamorro Registry Advisory Board, which reports to the Guam Election Commission.

Source: Pacific Daily News files

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In other business yesterday, commission members voted to accept a revised initiative petition by Luis S.N. Reyes that would increase the number of senators from 15 to 21 if approved by voters.