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# Plebiscite pushed to 2002

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*Pacific Daily News*

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The island's political status plebiscite has been postponed until September 2002 by the interim Guam Election Commission board.

Board member Fred Jackson recommended the plebiscite coincide with the next primary election, saying the two-year delay will allow time to register eligible voters and to conduct an education campaign.

The island's indigenous people, as

defined by law, will be asked to choose statehood, independence or free association during the non-binding election. The results will set the course of any future status negotiations with the United States.

The plebiscite originally was scheduled to take place last July, but was postponed by lawmakers until Nov. 7. The election reform law gives the election commission board the authority to delay the plebiscite further, if necessary.

The board decided to take that option after hearing testimony that a registry of eligible voters has not been completed.

"Without a registry, a plebiscite cannot be conducted," Commission on Decolonization Vice Chairman Ron Rivera told the election commission before its vote.

Rivera said the commission has limited resources to conduct an education campaign in advance of the plebiscite, and said it is therefore im-

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portant to have the registry completed before beginning the education process.

Rivera said the plebiscite must be conducted properly in order for it to have any meaning. He said there is no reason to rush into a plebiscite.

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“The process of decolonization is exactly that. ... It’s a process,” he said.

Election commission Executive Director Gerald Taitano said the commission has registration forms for the plebiscite but has not prepared a manual for registrars or conducted training.

Taitano said the commission has not enlisted volunteer registrars to handle the process.

He said the commission started to register voters for the plebiscite at village mayors’ offices, but scrapped the plan out of concerns that the registrars were not trained and had not been sworn in.

Board legal counsel Cesar Cabot

was asked to research whether it would be legal for decolonization registration to take place at the polling places during the November general election. Jackson said he supports the idea of election day registration for the plebiscite, if possible.

In other business, Taitano told the board that 492 people have requested absentee ballots for the general election and 83 home-bound voters have asked to vote from home. He said commission staff plan to begin visiting homes Thursday to conduct voting after coordinating their efforts with the island’s political parties.

He said a test election will be conducted at the University of Guam at noon Nov. 4.