

# End the stalling and register plebiscite voters

**W**e've got a plebiscite coming up on Guam in November. And, as usual, we're not going to be ready for it. Who do we blame for that?

It is almost like there is a hidden plot, an agenda that dictates to the people of Guam whether they will be allowed to vote.



**Joe  
Murphy**

This plebiscite is supposed to be a "Chamorro-only" vote and should be cause for great celebration in the islands. For the first time ever, the indigenous people of Guam are going to be allowed to vote on the issue of their political future. They are going to be empowered to tell the world just what kind of political future they want for their island.

When you consider how important this could be, it seems to me that the Legislature, the administration, the Election Commission and, yes, the activists, are treating this elec-

tion very causally.

My take on all this is that the pro-independence people have run their own polls and, voila, discovered that there isn't much enthusiasm for independence on the island, and have decided — on their own — to stall the plebiscite. What other possible explanation could there be for the failure to have the plebiscite earlier? What other reason could there be for the very lame excuse for an education campaign describing all the possibilities? What other explanation for the failure to even register all of the Chamorros who are supposed to vote in this election?

Sometimes it seems we're actually drifting closer to

Washington than pulling apart. Last week, for example, Gov. Carl Gutierrez told the Rotary Club at the Onward Beach Resort, that Guam will donate about \$100,000 to presidential hopeful Al Gore. Don't you think this will make the activists, seeking independence, mad?

The governor said: "Guam's in the political mainstream!" He may have a point. At this meeting, the governor pointed out that Guam's political status needs to be settled quickly so Guam can move forward with plans to improve ties with the United States and develop the island's economy.

I seem to remember many years ago that we all voted for a commonwealth status. I seem to remember that the people of Guam, those who cast votes, voted for a "closer relationship with the United States," not separation.

This Chamorro-only vote, supposedly coming up in November, would allow registered Chamorro voters to vote for the options of statehood, independence or free association. The vote is non-binding. Some residents have criticized the lack of a status-quo option and others have claimed that not enough education on the choices has been made available.

I admit, I wasn't particularly thrilled with this "Chamorro-only" vote when it was first discussed. I figured I had made a contribution to the island. I figured that I have paid taxes to the government of Guam for 34 years, and thus, I should have something to say about its political future. I thought that it was a little strange that I couldn't vote in the plebiscite, but six of my grandchildren could.

But I have changed my mind. The people of Guam have been in a colonial status for close to 400 years, and it is time they had a chance to vote for or against that status. I want the people of this island to stand up and be counted. I will gladly

sit on the sidelines and cheer for this act of self-determination.

It may be that I feel this way because I can see pretty clearly what the sentiment of the island seems to be. It is not for independence. It is for keeping the American passport and citizenship, and working with the rest of the country to better our lives. We do want self-government. That makes sense. But don't we have self-government now? We elect our own leaders. We pass our own legislation. We even have a Supreme Court to rule on those laws.

My stand is positive. I think we should immediately register all those Chamorros and let them vote in the November plebiscite. No more stalling.

Even this isn't going to be all that easy. It is partly a matter of money. The Election Commission is in a bit of chaos. They really need major reforms in how we conduct elections on Guam.

But you know and I know that none of these reforms are going to take place in the two months that are left before any election or plebiscite.

They could declare an emergency and do the reforms, but there is opposition to that path. In the meantime, given the politics of the island, I'm not even sure we can have an election for mayors and the Legislature. And unless we move at supersonic speed, there is no way we can register real, honest-to-goodness Chamorros for that all-important plebiscite. That means the activists will have won again.

They want to stall and stall until the polls look a little brighter for them. I think that is wrong.

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