

Election

New rules, delay of plebiscite must be acted on soon

When lawmakers overrode the governor's veto of Bill 227 this week, they mandated something that had only gotten lip-service from elected officials in the past — specific ground rules on how to reform Guam's election process.

In addition, the override postponed the Chamorro-only plebiscite to decide the future political status of Guam just in the nick of time. The vote was scheduled for July 1.

Both adjustments are long overdue. But the

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problem is that the General Election, which is now the new deadline for each to take place, is only four months away. That is too soon to draw up a comprehensive set of rules and procedures for the election. And it doesn't allow time for Chamorro voters

to register and verify their ancestry, let alone participate in an education campaign that fully lays out the pros and cons of each status option.

Lawmakers must quickly make four key amendments to the law or the General Election and the plebiscite will be a bust:

- ▲ The election commission must be given the funding and staffing it needs to prepare for and conduct the election.

- ▲ Compare the existing election rules and the new procedures. Make only those adjustments that protect voter rights and the integrity of the voting process.

- ▲ Set a realistic timetable for the remaining election reforms to be implemented.

- ▲ Postpone the plebiscite and reschedule it after the registry of Chamorro voters is complete and after a thorough, responsible education campaign is conducted.

One provision of the new law, requiring proof of citizenship to register, is essential and must be instituted quickly to make sure that non-U.S. citizens won't be allowed to vote as was documented to have happened in the 1998 election.

There's clearly not enough time to ramrod through all of the mandated changes before November and still have an orderly election.

And to expect Chamorro voters to rush their decision on Guam's future political status with insufficient information is a disservice to them and makes a mockery of the democratic process.