

Who is Chamorro?

By Adrienne Loerzel

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Lawmakers struggled to define the meaning of "Chamorro" yesterday, spending most of the day's session debating who should be allowed to vote in the July 1 political status plebiscite.

The rules and regulations for registering voters for the Chamorro-only election were amended several times yesterday, but senators failed to act on the bill and will return to continue discussions today.

The July 1 plebiscite will be limited to Chamorros, who are currently defined as people who can trace their ancestry to an individual living on Guam in 1899. However, Chamorro voters cannot yet register for the non-binding political status vote because the registry's rules and regulations have yet to be approved.

Among the issues that were raised during yesterday's legislative

session were the question of adopted children and the requirement for documents to establish Chamorro ancestry.

"That's fine if you're aristocracy," said Sen. John Salas, R-Dededo. "But what if I can't prove I'm Chamorro?"

Salas said the burden of providing documentation back to 1899 is too much to ask for some families that are clearly Chamorro, but lack the paperwork to prove it, according to the proposed standards.

"Somebody's going to fall through the cracks and be seriously hurt," he said.

Sen. Mark Forbes, R-Sinajana, agreed that the matter needs to be studied because the law that is set for this year's plebiscite could have far-reaching consequences.

Lawmakers also wrestled with the question of adopted children. An amendment by Sen. Simon Sanchez would allow children

adopted by Chamorro parents to vote in the plebiscite.

However, senators could not agree on what "adopted" should mean. The original amendment specifies that children must be adopted by "court order," but many families raised children who were never formally adopted, lawmakers said.

"The issue of poksai has not been addressed," Forbes said. Poksai is the Chamorro term for adopting and raising a child.

Sen. Joanne Brown, R-Chalan Pago/Ordot, said the registry rules and regulations also should consider the complexities of Chamorro families because many include a mix of many cultures.

"We look at ourselves as descendants of the indigenous inhabitants of Guam," she said. "That's where it gets complicated — who and what do we define as Chamorro?"