

## References

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## Disclaimer

Kristina E Stege is the First Secretary at the Embassy of the Republic of the Marshall Islands in Washington DC. Although this article was written with the knowledge of the government, the statements and opinions expressed are entirely those of the author and should not be construed as representing or expressing the views of the Government of the Republic of the Marshall Islands.

## NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS

Among social issues for attention in the coming year are attempts to smuggle Chinese into Guam, prostitution in western Garapan, and rising crime rates.

In mid-2001, two of at least three small boats trying to reach Guam with illegal Chinese migrants met with disaster. One, containing four Chinese, had mechanical problems trying to leave Rota. Another, carrying six Chinese, capsized in the waters off Tinian; three people were lost and three rescued by fishers. Several of those rescued were employees of Tan Holdings. The owner of the boat was arrested for illegally overstaying in the commonwealth for four years. In the third incident, involving a thirty-foot boat in Saipan lagoon, sixteen passengers were arrested by the authorities.

The problem of prostitution has arisen largely because of garment workers moonlighting at night. The governor formed a special task force to clean up western Garapan, but so far it has not been particularly successful.

The rising crime rate involves domestic violence, assault, burglary, and robbery, especially of poker palaces; many people have been injured, and at least one died. An apparent increase in rape cases has not been thoroughly documented. Recent cases involved two women from Thailand, a Japanese tourist who was raped twice, and a Korean tourist, who was apparently gang raped. The last either jumped or was pushed from her fourth-floor hotel room and was taken to hospital in serious condition. Her husband claimed he was not in the room when the incident occurred.

The issue of child molestation made front-page news. A mainland American elementary schoolteacher was arrested in Honolulu by the FBI for sexual molestation of up to nineteen of his third-grade students at a Saipan elementary school. He is awaiting trial. In a separate and unrelated case, a great public outcry was heard when a convicted local child molester was assigned to community service mowing the lawn at another Saipan elementary school. He had previously assaulted another child while on parole.

As reported last year, four teams of gubernatorial candidates and three sets of candidates for Washington representative will compete in the November elections. In addition, the people will vote on several constitutional amendments, the legislature, mayors'

offices, municipal councils, and miscellaneous other matters. Two constitutional issues will come up: First, a proposal to reduce the size of the House of Representatives to twelve, raise their salaries to \$60,000 a year, and increase their terms to four years instead of two. Second is a proposal to create municipal councils with law-making authority, wherein the mayor would be the senior approving official instead of the governor. Effectively, legislative delegations from island municipalities would no longer be able to pass local laws. A possible third proposal would raise the automatic allotments to the public school system from 15 to 25 percent of the annual budget. However, this initiative faces considerable opposition and may never make it out of the legislature.

As of 8 August 2001, there were 109 candidates running for office in November. None of the four official parties—the Covenant party, the Republican party, the Democratic party, or the Reform party—had fielded a complete list for all vacancies. In addition, it appeared that none of the initiatives being discussed in the legislature would move forward to the November ballots.

The *Marianas Variety* reported that a group of parents and teachers, possibly led by Senator Paul Magnolia, are planning to protest Rita Inos's failure to resign as commissioner of education while running for lieutenant governor (8 Aug 2001). There is considerable feeling that she should resign public office because she cannot carry out her responsibilities toward education. The same criticism has been leveled at Tony Pellegrino, chairman of the Board of Education.

Bickering over the estate of Larry Hillblom continued throughout the year. In August, the *Marianas Variety* reported that Commonwealth Judge Castro had ordered the Carlsmith law firm to return \$1 million in fees received as legal counsel to the Bank of Saipan, which was acting as executor of the Hillblom estate. Castro said that Carlsmith's representation of the executor was "conflicted."

The *Saipan Tribune* reported that the legislature may have payless paydays in the near future. Because legislators have not been paying their assessment to the retirement fund, their department of finance has been withholding legislative funds. As a result there may not be enough money to pay staff salaries.

Economic issues ahead include the formation of free trade zones, lawsuits against the garment industry, the World Trade Organization's deadlines, and efforts to revitalize the commonwealth economy. In addition, class-action lawsuits against garment retailers and manufacturers may have a substantial effect on the economy of the Northern Marianas.

Perhaps more important, efforts in the US Congress to federalize immigration and the setting of a minimum-wage remained on the front burner. Senator Edward Kennedy presented a bill to raise the minimum wage in the commonwealth to federal levels over about six years. Senator Murkowski had a bill in committee that would remove control of immigration from the commonwealth. Congressman George Miller introduced an omnibus takeover bill that was awaiting action in the House of Representatives. Meanwhile, pro-garment industry fac-

tions decided to continue to employ Jack Abramoff, lobbyist for the commonwealth, to try to block such legislation in Washington DC.

SAMUEL F MCPHETRES

## PALAU

Political events during the period under review were dominated by the change of executive leadership in the Republic of Palau. The eight-year tenure of President Kuniwo Nakamura came to an end. Nakamura's two-term vice president, Tommy E Remengesau Jr, a youthful forty-four, took on the mantle of leadership, making it clear that a new dynamism would be brought to the office of the president.

Palau's sixth national campaign and election 2000 were the most expensive, gaudy, and interesting in the young nation's history. Palau's local *Tia Belau News* (TBN) claimed the event was "excessive" and that some \$5 million had been spent in campaigning. Not only were the presidency and vice presidency contested, but the full slate of twenty-five seats (formerly thirty) in the Palau National Congress were open to challenge. Such legislative seats are highly valued by Palauans because of the prestige and business opportunities that seem to accompany the positions.

Presidential campaigning for a September primary contest occupied much of the midyear. With Nakamura retiring, the presidential race was wide open, and five qualified candidates emerged: Vice President Tommy E Remengesau Jr, Senator Peter Sugiyama, Minister of Education Billy

Kuartei, Senator Santos Olikong, and newcomer Ben Roberto, the former governor of Angaur State.

In July 2000, Nakamura finally announced that his "anointed one" was none other than Vice President Remengesau. This gave a significant boost to Remengesau's efforts, in addition to his vigorous campaigning, which involved a great deal of travel and grassroots contact. With 70 percent of the Palau electorate turning out for the primary, Remengesau came out on top, taking nearly 4,000 votes (43 percent) of the 9,221 cast. The second-place finisher, Senator Sugiyama, garnered 2,050 votes, or 22 percent of the total. Sugiyama had supported Nakamura throughout his tenure in office and was disappointed that the outgoing president had not thrown his political weight behind such a longtime, loyal supporter.

After his defeat in the primary, Sugiyama redoubled his efforts and gained the support of the other three losers, who signed a contract pledging mutual support. Sugiyama recognized that if he could get a major share of their supporters and a reasonable portion of the electorate who had not turned out for the primary election but would for the general, a November victory was possible. Sugiyama was the underdog and had several disadvantages compared to Remengesau, but he campaigned hard as the November general loomed. After all the ballots were counted, Sugiyama had done surprising well, with nearly 5,000 votes. His hard work and alliance with the other primary election losers nearly got him a win. As it turned out, Remengesau was able to stay ahead, defeating Sugiyama by