



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

TWENTY-SECOND NORTHERN MARIANAS COMMONWEALTH LEGISLATURE

SPECIAL SESSION, 2022

LEGISLATIVE JOURNAL

1st Day, Second Special Session

Wednesday, May 25, 2022

The House of Representatives of the Twenty-Second Northern Marianas Commonwealth Legislature convened its First Day, Second Special Session on Wednesday, May 25, 2022 at 10:47 a.m. in the Rota Courthouse, Sinapalo II, Rota, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.

The Honorable Edmund Joseph S. Villagomez, Speaker of the House, presided.

A moment of silence was observed.

ROLL CALL

The Clerk called the roll and eighteen members were present; Representatives Vicente C. Camacho and Angel A. Demapan were absent and excused.

Speaker Edmund Joseph S. Villagomez: Thank you, Clerk. With 18 members present and 2 members absent, this constitutes a quorum to move forward. Please note that the Representative Angel Demapan is hereby excused. I was informed that Representative Roy Ada will be joining us online. Does anybody know about that? He's connected. All right. Welcome Representative Ada. Any word on Representative Vicenta Camacho? Will he be joining us online as well? I have not received any communication on whether he'd be present in today's session. Anyone? Members? None. Okay. Thank you. Before we move forward to item II, Public Comments, I'd like to recognize the Floor Leader for the suspension of pertinent rules. Floor Leader.

The Floor Leader made a motion to suspend Rule IX, Sections 4(d) and 12.

RULE IX. BILLS, RESOLUTIONS AND AMENDMENTS

Section 4. Format of Bills and Resolutions

(d) Bills and resolutions for introduction may be pre-filed with the House Clerk for formal introduction at the next session, provided that it is pre-filed in sufficient time to appear on the session agenda as required under Rule III. The 72-hour notice and agenda requirements may be dispensed with for Special Emergency Sessions and Sessions called by the Governor in accordance with Rule III.

Section 12. Amendments.

Amendments to bills or resolutions may be offered on the Floor by any member; Provided, that the proposed amendment is in writing and is germane to the measure. Such amendment shall be read by the Clerk. If the Speaker, subject to appeal, deems it necessary, the Clerk shall reprint any portion of the measure affected by passage of any amendment, prior to a vote on passing the measure. No amendment proposing legislation shall be in order on an appropriations bill. Only two degrees of amendment are in order, except that a member may offer a substitute amendment embracing the same subject to one additional degree of amendment. If an amendment is defeated it shall not be in order again during the same reading of a measure.

The motion was seconded.

Under discussion; the Chair recognized Representative Sheila Therese J. Babauta.

Representative Sheila Therese J. Babauta: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So just for clarification, we are suspending rules to accept bills that were not given notice and we're also suspending rules to allow for any amendments?

Speaker Edmund Joseph S. Villagomez: Well, with the amendments, because we do not have a readily available printer and an ELMO and you know projector and whatnot. This is to suspend in the event that we need to have it handwritten.

Representative Sheila Therese J. Babauta: So, who will be tracking the language? Joe?

Speaker Edmund Joseph S. Villagomez: The Clerk and the Counsel.

Representative Sheila Therese J. Babauta: For reference?

Speaker Edmund Joseph S. Villagomez: Yeah.

Representative Sheila Therese J. Babauta: So then, all amendments being made, don't have to be written or shown in writing –

Speaker Edmund Joseph S. Villagomez: No, to allow for written like literally a written.

Representative Sheila Therese J. Babauta: I got it. Hand writing.

Speaker Edmund Joseph S. Villagomez: Yeah.

Representative Sheila Therese J. Babauta: A hand written amendment will be allowed for this session.

Speaker Edmund Joseph S. Villagomez: Yes, yes.

Representative Sheila Therese J. Babauta: Got it. Okay.

Speaker Edmund Joseph S. Villagomez: Just to make it more accessible for the members.

Representative Sheila Therese J. Babauta: I was just wondering like, how am I going to follow the amendment? Like, listen. Okay, so hand written amendment.

Speaker Edmund Joseph S. Villagomez: But yes, it's for literally handwritten written to allow for that.

Representative Sheila Therese J. Babauta: Okay. Got it. So, we're suspending the rules to allow for that and we're suspending the rules to allow for any bills that didn't meet OGA to be introduced?

Speaker Edmund Joseph S. Villagomez: Yeah and also communications. As you know, some of us have received a communication from the Public Auditor and other agencies that pertain to certain things on the agenda. So, that did not meet the 72-hours, but we are suspending the rules to accept those communications. And then also, that also opens it up if you have an unnumbered bill that you would like to introduce or even communications that you would like to submit, that's what the suspension is for.

Representative Sheila Therese J. Babauta: Thank you. So clarified, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

Speaker Edmund Joseph S. Villagomez: You're welcome. Any more discussions? Members?

Several members voiced "ready."

Speaker Edmund Joseph S. Villagomez: Ready? Clerk, please call the roll.

The Clerk called the roll on the motion to suspend Rule 9, Sections 4 (d) and 12 with the following results:

Representative Roy Christopher A. Ada	yes
Representative Blas Jonathan "BJ" T. Attao	yes
Representative Celina R. Babauta	yes
Representative Sheila Therese J. Babauta	yes
Representative Joel C. Camacho	yes
Representative Vicente C. Camacho	absent (<i>excused</i>)
Representative Angel A. Demapan	absent (<i>excused</i>)
Representative Joseph A. Flores	yes
Representative Joseph Leepan T. Guerrero	yes
Representative Richard T. Lizama	yes
Representative Corina L. Magofna	yes
Representative Donald M. Manglona	yes
Representative Edwin K. Propst	yes
Representative Christina Marie E. Sablan	yes
Representative John Paul P. Sablan	yes
Representative Patrick H. San Nicolas	yes
Representative Leila Haveia F. C. Staffler	yes
Representative Denita K. Yangetmai	yes
Representative Ralph N. Yumul	yes
Speaker Edmund Joseph S. Villagomez	yes

Acting House Clerk Venetia S. Rosario: Mr. Speaker, all 18 members present voted "yes."

Speaker Edmund Joseph S. Villagomez: Thank you, Clerk. With all 18 members voting “yes,” the motion here by passes. Thank you. We now move down to item II, Public Comments. The floor is open. Please limit your public comments to what's on the agenda. You have three-minute, in the event that we still have more time and you feel like you need to add to your public comment we can accommodate that.

The Chair directed the members to item II, Public Comments.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

The following individuals made comments:

Mr. Pete Reyes, Member of the Commonwealth Boards Authority
Mr. Aden Calvo, Student of the Rota High School
Ms. Denise King, Principal of the Rota High School

On behalf of Ms. Kina Peter, Public Auditor for the Office of the Public Auditor; Representative Sheila T.J. Babauta read her letter dated May 24, 2022, which became Dept. & Agcy. No. 22-57.

Ms. Charlene Manglona, Rota Ports Manager of the Commonwealth Ports Authority

The Chair directed the members to item III, Adoption of Journals and recognized the Clerk.

ADOPTION OF JOURNALS

The Clerk announced the following House Journals ready for adoption:

1st Day, First Special Session Journal – April 19, 2022

2nd Day, First Special Session Journal – April 27, 2022

The Chair recognized the Floor Leader.

The Floor Leader made a motion to adopt the following House Journals:

1st Day, First Special Session Journal – April 19, 2022

2nd Day, First Special Session Journal – April 27, 2022

The motion was seconded.

There was no discussion and the motion to adopt the First Day, First Special Session Journal – April 19, 2022 and the Second Day, First Special Session Journal – April 27, 2022 was carried by voice vote. There was no “nay” vote.

The Chair directed the members to item IV, Introduction of Bills.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

House Bills:

Speaker Edmund Joseph S. Villagomez officially introduced the following bill:

H. B. NO. 22-102

To exempt public corporations and autonomous agencies from paying the one percent (1%) Public Auditor Fee.

REP. EDMUND S. VILLAGOMEZ of Saipan, Precinct 3, (*for himself*, Representatives Blas Jonathan “BJ” T. Attao, Celina R. Babauta, Corina L. Magofna, Donald M. Manglona, Leila H.F.C. Staffler, and Ralph N. Yumul)

Speaker Edmund Joseph S. Villagomez: This bill, because of the time sensitivity that has been brought up by some of the communications and also during our public comments, will be referred to the Committee on Ways and Means. Chairman, I’d like to give that a two-week deadline. Thank you. I now recognize Representative Donald Manglona for an unnumbered bill.

Representative Donald M. Manglona: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In light of recent discovery, as well as the public comments that we've heard today, I am formally introducing what is now numbered as House Bill 22-103.

Representative Donald M. Manglona officially introduced the following bill:

H. B. NO. 22-103

To amend P.L. 16-10 section 2 to allow for the construction of a regulation basketball court and volleyball court.

REP. DONALD M. MANGLONA of Saipan, Precinct 7 (*for himself*)

Speaker Edmund Joseph S. Villagomez: Thank you, Chairman. House Bill 22-103 will also be referred to the Committee on Ways and Means.

The Chair directed the members to House Local Bills and recognized Representative Donald M. Manglona.

House Local Bills:

Representative Donald M. Manglona officially introduced the following House Local Bills:

H. L. B. NO. 22-33

To appropriate one hundred thousand dollars (\$100,000.00) from the poker licensing fee account (specifically under BU 3302); and for other purposes.

REP. DONALD M. MANGLONA of Rota, Precinct 7 (*for himself*)

H. L. B. NO. 22-34

To appropriate one hundred fifty thousand dollars (\$150,000.00) from the Rota Municipal Scholarship Foundation Reserve account (specifically under BU 2301); and for other purposes.

REP. DONALD M. MANGLONA of Rota, Precinct 7 (*for himself*)

House Legislative Initiatives: None

The Chair directed the members to item VI, Messages from the Governor and recognized the Clerk.

INTRODUCTION OF RESOLUTIONS

House Resolutions: None

House Joint Resolutions: None

House Commemorative Resolutions: None

House Concurrent Resolutions: None

MESSAGES FROM THE GOVERNOR

The Clerk announced the following Messages from the Governor:

GOV. COMM. 22-125: (4/20/2022) Certifying and granting approval for Mr. Henry Bautista, Highway Engineer III, at the Department of Public Works to receive an annual salary of \$70,000. [*For info*]

GOV. COMM. 22-126: (4/20/2022) Certifying and granting approval for Ms. Crystal C. Deleon Guerrero, Architect, at the Department of Public Works to receive an annual salary of \$70,000. [*For info*]

GOV. COMM. 22-127: (4/20/2022) Certifying and granting approval for Mr. Isagani C. Salazar, Highway Engineer III, at the Department of Public Works to receive an annual salary of \$70,000. [*For info*]

GOV. COMM. 22-128: (4/28/2022) Informing the House that he signed into law, H. B. No. 22-95, SS1, (*To amend the Appropriations Act of Fiscal Year 2022 (Public Law 22-08) to establish a business unit for Retirees' Bonus and to reappropriate personnel lapses within departments and line-item vetoes within Public Law 22-08 to fund the Retirees' Bonus; and for other purposes.*). Became **Public Law 22-17** [*For info*]

GOV. COMM. 22-129: (5/16/2022) Informing the House that he signed into law, H. L. B. No. 22- 30, S1, (*To make limited appropriations for personnel and operations of the Tinian Casino Gaming Control Commission, the Office of the Mayor of Tinian, the Tinian Municipal Council and the Tinian Municipal Treasury for Fiscal Year 2022 pursuant to 10 CMC §2581 [Tinian Local Law 21-9] and 1 CMC §1405(a) [Public Law 11-17].*). Became **Tinian Local Law 22-07** [*For info*]

Under discussion; the Chair recognized Representative Celina R. Babauta.

Representative Celina R. Babauta: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to state for the record with respect to Governor's Communication 22-128 that I have received messages and phone calls, this is with regard to the retiree bonus that – and we raised this issue at the time we deliberated on the bill. I have received concerns from various departments whose personnel actions are now being held up at the Office of Management and Budget for their merit increases or their within grade increases and that they are now – OMB is now waiting for Finance to tell them where to get the money to process these personnel actions, because it's now coming to an issue with respect to the funding. As you know, we received communication from the Secretary of Finance that there was no problem taking away from personnel lapses and OPM has also stated that there is no personnel lapses, technically because every anniversary is different. And that's why these funds have not been used up throughout the year and it will be used up eventually at the end of the fiscal year because of different anniversary dates for government employees. So, I just want to state for the record that we are now coming into issues with respect to the reprogramming of personnel lapses to fund the retiree bonus. As we all know, we voted for that and we agreed that the retirees should get their bonuses, but I just want to state for the record that we are now coming into issues with respect to the reprogramming of those “personnel lapses.” Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker Edmund Joseph S. Villagomez: Thank you, Representative Celina Babauta. Floor is still open under Governor's Communication for discussions. Ready? Recognize Representative Tina Sablan.

Representative Christina Marie E. Sablan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to thank Representative Celina Babauta for bringing up this issue. I think it also underscores the importance of having the Secretary of Finance come in to address the concerns of the body for it. Not just for this fiscal year, but also for the upcoming fiscal year. I know that he's been off island. There are still many questions on many issues that I'm sure our members, myself included would have for him. And this would be one of them. We, did pass the retiree bonus bill in part with the assurance from Finance that the WGI's for employees would not be affected and that funds had already been identified for that. And so, I would like some clarity on this issue as well. Thank you.

Speaker Edmund Joseph S. Villagomez: Thank you, Representative Tina Sablan. I recognize Representative Sheila Babauta. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Rep. Babauta and Rep. Sablan for just asking questions because I too, would like a clarification, you know, on our agenda. It does state that the Governor's informing us that he signed this into law in an appropriations act amendment to establish the business unit for the retirees bonus and to reappropriate personnel lapses within departments and line-item vetoes within Public Law 22-08 to fund the retirees bonus and so looking at this piece of communication and looking at where those line-item vetoes are, it looks like personnel budgets are reduced for many agencies from, you know, from Department of Fire and Emergency Services, Public Works, Public Safety, DLNR. And so, like if we're going to be taking money from all the agencies to fund the retiree bonus, I would just like a clear understanding as well, but you know, this is the right retirees bonus since Christmas. Right? So, I'm glad that we're moving forward, but I think it's also really important that we understand what the communications really does state so that we can go out into the community and say, yes, the reason why, you know, your department is experiencing like a reduction in budget is because we took it and we gave it to retirees and so at least there's understanding. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker Edmund Joseph S. Villagomez: Thank you, Representative Sheila Babauta. I now recognize the Vice Speaker.

Vice Speaker Blas Jonathan “BJ” T. Attao: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just to clarify the concerns that were brought up by a Rep. Sheila Babauta. The line-item veto monies that actually came from the House version. So, the line-item veto portion of 22-8 they were unobligated funds. We took those monies and we addressed it to the retiree’s bonuses. These line-item departments that you're looking at, that was the Senate version that was given by the Secretary of Finance. We brought up the concern that Rep. Celina Babauta brought up this morning then during that session, because we were worried about the WGI issues because of the anniversary dates of our employees, they’re spread throughout the year. The Secretary of Finance had a communication to the House that address actually those issues that's the reason why. It is important, that was a concern that we had and when it was addressed, we were with the understanding that it's taken care of pre whatever the date was. I think it was in April that we passed this bill. So, it was backwards to September, I mean October 1st. So, those individuals that were supposed to get their WGI’s after the date that we pass the bill, we're supposed to be able to address those WGI’s. Unfortunately, these concerns are still being brought up today because they encumbered into the budget even though their anniversary dates were after or within the fiscal year. So, it's included in the budget. So, that's where finance was saying that they're getting the money was pre those dates and post the date that we passed the bill and it being signed into law would be able to take care of the WGI’s of those.

Speaker Edmund Joseph S. Villagomez: Recognized.

Representative Sheila Therese J. Babauta: Thank you. Thank you, Rep. Attao. That really does help me understand it. So, they're unobligated funds from the agencies, right? Past the deadline. Past the date?

Vice Speaker Blas Jonathan “BJ” T. Attao: Not necessarily unobligated, but when they do proposal their budget. Right? And we adopt the budget before October 1st and signed into law that budget for the fiscal year. So, their WGI is already included, but their WGI effective date actually happens, let's say in July or August within the fiscal year. So, it's already been calculated into their salaries.

Representative Sheila Therese J. Babauta: So, do the department heads need to be concerned?

Representative Blas Jonathan “BJ” T. Attao: That was our concern when the Senate made the amendment to take away the personnel costs, I guess now they transferred out for the bonuses.

Representative Sheila Therese J. Babauta: Right.

Vice Speaker Blas Jonathan “BJ” T. Attao: That was a concern that we brought up and we actually reached out to OPM and OPM had the same concerns. We went to the Secretary of Finance, the Secretary of Finance said that has been taken care of, but one of the unfortunate things for us as members of the legislature in this fiscal year is OMB wasn’t even a part of the budget process. The submission of the budget to the legislature came directly from Finance. So, OMB, they have somebody under an acting capacity, I'm not saying that the individual doesn't

know what they're doing, but obviously not a lot of experience and in a very short period of time with the acting capacity, the budget was due to be submitted to the legislature. Therefore, the full budget submission came from the Department of Finance, which is unfortunate. We might be bringing in OMB into the budget process when we deliberate on the budget, but it's unfair to them because they did not prepare the budget that's been submitted to the legislature. That's why I believe Nadia is her name. Right?

Representative Sheila Therese J. Babauta: Yes.

Vice Speaker Blas Jonathan “BJ” T. Attao: Nadia had mentioned that they would be proposing a supplemental budget by July 1st. So, I'm hopeful that OMG is involved in that process so that when we call them in they can answer for them rather than bringing the Department of Finance in for a budget hearing and they're answering the budget process at the same time. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Representative Sheila Therese J. Babauta: Thank you, Rep. Attao. Thank you for sharing that information. I had no idea about the miscommunication and the delays with OMB and the budgeting process. I do know that yes, Nadia Pua is the acting and you know, all the chaos really did happen because of the movement sudden removals of certain people with experience in that position during this time. So, there are just definitely a lot to consider, but in regards to this retiree bonus then, just Mr. Speaker for clarity, I want to be able to speak on behalf of this information if asked by the secretaries of the various departments and so it's really for my understanding of how to communicate to them, if they say, “Hey, did you take money away from our department to fund the retiree bonus?” Is it a yes or no? And I would really just appreciate clarity on that and we can totally talk more offline. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker Edmund Joseph S. Villagomez: Thank you, Representative Sheila. Recognize Representative Donald.

Representative Donald M. Manglona: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And just to add onto this same communication. Fortunate that we've already scheduled Secretary of Finance to come before the committee twice. Unfortunately, he's been off-island those two times. And so, we have yet to call him in for a budget hearing. According to Ms. Nadia, we are also expecting a revised budget because as you see in the initial submission, even MVA was unfunded. And so, there are several irregularities in that initial submission and which is why, again, we're expecting a revised budget to address those concerns. And even upon inviting OMB to sit while we deliberate on the budget process I was informed that finance would be the best agency to call in to answer these concerns and I'm assuming this is what the Vice Speaker had mentioned that it was submitted by Finance as opposed to OMB. And so you know, as I've stated, we've already scheduled two hearings for Secretary of Finance and, you know, as we schedule the next one if there's no objections from the members, we'll include in the agenda, any subpoena motions in order to get the Secretary of Finance, as opposed to any Representative, should the Secretary of Finance not be available? And so, yeah. If any of the members have any communications with OPM as well as OMB we can address those when we call in the Secretary of Finance. Thank you.

Speaker Edmund Joseph S. Villagomez: Thank you, Representative Donald. Representative Sheila, you had your hands up.

Representative Sheila Therese J. Babauta: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Chairman Manglona that would be amazing if we can get the Secretary in for a third invitation, but also OMB, because OMB is really the lead agency during the budgeting process. So, the fact that it was submitted without them you know, that's really unconventional. Like it's not right. It's usually OMB that is submitting it.

Speaker Edmund Joseph S. Villagomez: I think they were trying to meet the deadline.

Representative Sheila Therese J. Babauta: Right, but you know, they need to be involved. So, if we can, Mr. Chairman Manglona, if the invitation is made maybe a last one to Secretary Atalig, because, you know, I understand he must travel for work. If a final invitation is made to him, I would really like to request that one is also made to OMB and that we're all there together. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker Edmund Joseph S. Villagomez: Thank you, Representative Sheila Babauta. Any further discussions under Governor's Communication? Ready? All right. We now move down to item VII; Senate Communications and I recognize the Clerk.

SENATE COMMUNICATIONS

The Clerk announced the following Senate Communications:

SEN. COMM. 22-94: (4/29/2022) Transmitting a certified copy of S. J. R. NO. 22-08, entitled, “*Requesting the Governor and the Secretary of Finance to provide financial assistance to meet the increased demand of fuel costs in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands by implementing a \$500.00 fuel voucher program.* [For info]

The Chair recognized the Floor Leader.

The Floor Leader made a motion to accept Senate Communication 22-94 so they may become property of the House.

The motion was seconded.

There was no discussion and the motion to accept Senate Communication 22-94 so it becomes property of the House was carried by voice vote. There was no “nay” vote.

The Chair directed the members to item VIII, House Communications and recognized the Clerk.

HOUSE COMMUNICATIONS

The Clerk announced the following House Communications:

HSE. COMM. 22-81: (4/22/2022) From Floor Leader Ralph N. Yumul, informing the Speaker that he will be out of the Commonwealth on personal business on April 25, 2022—May 1, 2022 and request to be excused from any and all scheduled meetings or sessions during his absence. [For info]

HSE. COMM. 22-82: (4/27/2022) From Representative Manglona, informing the Speaker that he will be out of the Commonwealth on personal matters on April 30, 2022—May 6, 2022 and request to be excused from any and all scheduled meetings or sessions during his absence. [*For info*]

HSE. COMM. 22-83: (5/2/2022) From Representative Joel C. Camacho, informing the Speaker that he will be out of the Commonwealth on personal matters on May 9, 2022—May 16, 2022 and request to be excused from any and all scheduled meetings or sessions during his absence. [*For info*]

HSE. COMM. 22-84: (5/9/2022) From Representative Sheila J. Babauta, informing the Speaker that she will be out of the Commonwealth on official business on May 7, 2022—May 13, 2022 and request to be excused from any and all scheduled meetings or sessions during her absence. [*For info*]

There was no discussion; the Chair directed the members to item X, Communications from Departments & Agencies and recognized the Clerk.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE JUDICIAL BRANCH

None

COMMUNICATIONS FROM DEPARTMENTS & AGENCIES

The Clerk announced the following Communications from Department & Agencies:

DEPT./AGCY. COMM. 22-51: (5/16/2022) From the Secretary, Department of Finance (DOF) re: *Fiscal Year 2022, Second Quarter Financial Report*. [*For info*]

DEPT./AGCY. COMM. 22-52: (5/10/2022) Resignation notice of Ms. Kina B. Peter, CNMI Public Auditor; and information of the calendar work plan for 2022 for the Office of the Public Auditor. [*For info*]

DEPT./AGCY. COMM. 22-53: (5/17/2022) From the Commonwealth Utilities Corporation (CUC) submitting *CUC's FY 2022—Second Quarter Expenditure Report*. [*For info*]

DEPT./AGCY. COMM. 22-54: (5/11/2022) From the Marianas Visitors Authority (MVA) submitting *FY 2021—Fourth Quarter Report*. [*For info*]

DEPT./AGCY. COMM. 22-55: (5/19/2022) From the Marianas Visitors Authority (MVA) submitting *FY 2022—First Quarter Report*. [*For info*]

DEPT./AGCY. COMM. 22-56: (5/19/2022) From the Marianas Visitors Authority (MVA) submitting *FY 2022—Second Quarter Report*. [*For info*]

DEPT./AGCY. COMM. 22-57: (5/24/2022) From the Office of the Public Auditor submitting comments on House Bill No. 22-102. [*For info*]

Under discussion; the Chair recognized Representative Christina Marie E. Sablan.

Representative Christina Marie E. Sablan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and colleagues. I wanted to comment on communication 22-51 from the Secretary of Finance regarding the 2nd Quarter Financial Report for this fiscal year. Over the course of the budget hearings that we've had thus far, I've been really struck by how many departments and agencies and municipal offices have reported to us that their allotments are delayed whether from the general fund or from American Rescue Plan Act funds and there are a few glaring omissions in the Secretary of Finance's report to the legislature in 22-51 and one that I wanted to highlight for us today is that there is no indication of transfers made to the Commonwealth Healthcare Corporation or specifically for Medical Referral and the Secretary's report mentions compliance with Public Law 22-08, our appropriations act for this fiscal year and specifically mentioned Section 201 of Public Law 22-08 and you know, just to remind the members if you recall one of the provisions in Section 201 was that the Commonwealth Healthcare Corporation shall receive advanced allotments for the Medical Referral Program and the budget that the Governor submitted, the appropriations act that we passed references both general funds and ARPA funds for CHCC and specifically for Medical Referral, which CHCC took over as a result of the Attorney General finding that Medical Referral – there was no legal authority for the Governor's Office to continue to operate it. So, CHCC assumed responsibility for it, but with the understanding that the resources would be made available to CHCC and for the record colleagues, my understanding is that the healthcare corporation has received zero in general funds since taking over Medical Referral and allotments from ARPA have also been very delayed. They still have not received their allocation for the third quarter and there is no mention, the Secretary of Finance mentions in his report. Some of the deficits that have already occurred with respect to the other agencies, but there is no discussion at all of what we may be incurring with regard to Medical Referral. There was no mention at all of Medical Referral period or the Commonwealth Healthcare Corporation and I'm very concerned about this. I think we all should be. We have one healthcare system, one public hospital, Medical Referral is in dire need of reform. There is a bill on our agenda today that would seek to address that legislatively, but really it comes down to where is the money and why are these promises to see CHCC and our Medical Referral program not being kept from both the general fund, as well as from ARPA. I would like to take this up with the Secretary of Finance when he does appear before the Ways and Means Committee. I think we need clarification on that as soon as possible. Thank you.

Speaker Edmund Joseph S. Villagomez: Thank you, Representative Tina. Recognize Representative Sheila Babauta.

Representative Sheila Therese J. Babauta: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and thank you Rep. Tina for bringing that up because in addition to that, many of our non-profit organizations didn't receive their ARPA response, like no response at all. A non-profit organizations have asked for ARPA funding and there's up to \$10 million and they haven't even gotten a response since December, like not even a yes or a no. So, you know, that's really important to me because our non-profit is at the community level. They have a really good pulse on the community. They do workshops and programs directly with the community and with the youth and so, I share the same concern that the ARPA funding, like where is it? And at least communicate with the non-profit organizations. So, in addition to what our next steps are, I would really like to just put out a call, everybody who hasn't received, like your transfers, you know, money that you're supposed to be getting like yes or no, you know, so that we also have their voice at the table to match what we ask the Secretary and OMB, because last we met, he said on the record, when I asked him about

responding to the non-profits, that in his mind he believes that they have responded to all of them. And so, there is just a disconnect that we have to work on and it's a communications thing. So, I would be happy to partake in the next steps Mr. Speaker, but there's \$10 million in ARPA funding that can my goodness make a huge difference to the nonprofit organizations and so I would gladly help move this along. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker Edmund Joseph S. Villagomez: Thank you, Representative Sheila Babauta. Any further discussions under Communications from the Department and Agencies? Ready. Okay. Members again, just for reference purposes, I would like to refer Department and Agency Communication 22-51, 22-53, 22-54, 22-55 and 22-56 to the Committee on Ways and Means just for informational purposes. And also, 22-57 as well to the Committee on Ways and Means. Thank you, members. We now move down to item XI, Miscellaneous Communications and I recognize the Clerk.

MISCELLANEOUS COMMUNICATIONS

The Clerk announced the following Miscellaneous Communications:

MISC. COMM. 22-116: (4/29/2022) OFF ISLAND NOTICE & DELEGATION OF AUTHORITY—of Senator Hofschneider, Presiding Hearing Officer delegating Senator Victor B. Hocog as Acting Presiding Hearing Officer from May 1, 2022—May 12, 2022. [For info]

MISC. COMM. 22-117: (5/4/2022) Transmitting a certified copy of TALD Commemorative Resolution No. 22-2, entitled, “*To memorialize the esteemed and honorable life of the late Jose Pangelinan San Nicolas and to acknowledge his years of honorable service to the people of the Tinian and his contributions to the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.*”, which was adopted by the Tinian and Aguiguan Legislative Delegation on April 27, 2022. [For info]

MISC. COMM. 22-118: (5/4/2022) Transmitting a certified copy of TALD Resolution No. 22-7, entitled, “*To commemorate the distinguished and honorable life of the late Jose Ada Hocog and to recognize his years of honorable service to the people of Tinian and his contributions to the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.*”, which was adopted by the Tinian and Aguiguan Legislative Delegation on April 27, 2022. [For info]

There was no discussion; the Chair directed the members to item XII, Reports of Standing Committees and recognized the Clerk.

REPORTS OF STANDING COMMITTEES

The Clerk announced that there are 3 Standing Committee Reports ready for House action.

The Chair recognized the Floor Leader.

The Floor Leader made a motion to adopt the following Standing Committee Report:

S. C. R. No. 22-47: Reporting on H. B. No. 22-77 entitled: “To establish the CNMI Qualified Medical Travel Assistance Program or MTAP; and for other purposes.” *Your Committee on Health and Welfare recommends that the House pass the bill in the form of H. B. No. 22-77, HSI.*

The motion was seconded.

Under discussion; the Chair recognized Representative Christina Marie E. Sablan.

Representative Christina Marie E. Sablan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and colleagues. For the record, this committee report and the substitute bill that's attached to it is the product of many months of extensive consultation and committee review with many stakeholders from the Commonwealth Healthcare Corporation to the Attorney General's Office, the CNMI Medicaid Agency, the Medical Referral Office, the Mayor's offices concerned citizens. As you may recall, we conducted a series of public hearings on Saipan, Tinian, and Rota last year, as well as multiple public committee meetings. We also reviewed the data and the analysis available from CHCC the Office of the Public Auditor, Medical Referral, and Finance. So, this report summarizes the findings of the committee and explains the basis for the substitute bill that is now being recommended for passage. What has long been known as Medical Referral is already operating under the umbrella of CHCC, but it is still in transition as a result of the AG finding in June last year that the Governor's office lacked legal authority to administer the program. So, this substitute bill would among other things provide for an orderly transition, protect CHCC from absorbing past liabilities and promissory notes that were accrued by the previous Medical Referral Office and establish a new health network program that would be fully integrated with the healthcare system function as part of the hospital and connect patients to CHCC's network of providers within the Commonwealth, as well as outside of the Commonwealth. My one technical correction that I'd like to request the Clerk's assistance with is to ensure that the signed versions of the committee meeting minutes and the roll call voting records be made part of this report. The unsigned versions are attached, but there were signed versions that were submitted to the Clerk for the record previous to this bill being submitted to the House. So, I'd like to ask for your support for this report and for the substitute bill, colleagues and I'm happy to answer any questions.

Speaker Edmund Joseph S. Villagomez: Thank you, Representative Tina Sablan. Counsel, Clerk so noted. Your technical amendments right? Rep. Tina? Okay, we're good. Thank you, Counsel. Thank you, Rep. Tina. I recognize the Floor Leader.

Floor Leader Ralph N. Yumul: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just for clarification, because I didn't read the second part, “To establish the healthcare network programs” did we change the title – I mean the – let me just read that out Mr. Speaker. After I read the word “and for other purposes” the corrected version now is “To establish the health network program HNP under the Commonwealth Healthcare Corporation to provide the orderly transitional Medical Referral service administration and operation to CHCC; and for other purposes.” Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker Edmund Joseph S. Villagomez: Thank you, Floor Leader for that. No, go ahead you're good.

Floor Leader Ralph N. Yumul: So, let me withdraw that if I didn't need to – I just saw that right now.

Speaker Edmund Joseph S. Villagomez: Thank you for that clarification, Floor Leader. Recognize Representative Sheila Babauta.

Representative Sheila Therese J. Babauta: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're still under discussion for the standing committee report. Yes. I just really as a committee member in the Health and Welfare Committee under Chairwoman Tina Sablan, I really want to just express my full support for this standing committee report. We've done so much work on it. The leadership of Rep. Tina Sablan, was really thorough and it was meaningful. We got a lot of public comments from patients and escorts, and we had public hearings on all three islands. We heard from Medical Referral, the Attorney General's Office, referral program when it comes to Medical Referral right services and so this was a great experience. Thank you, Rep. Sablan, like I got to hear a lot of stories. I learned a lot of stories too, from our Rep. Sablan has been on Medical Referral with her father so she has direct experience with the Medical Referral and so does Rep. Attao. You know, like, so this is a long standing issue that we've been wanting to address because Medical Referral to many leaders is like a black hole of funding and now we're addressing it. We're really addressing it. And so, I fully support this committee report. I'm very proud and honored to be a part of it. So, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Rep. Sablan for your leadership. Thank you, Representative Sheila Babauta. Any further discussions under committee report, standing committee report 22-47.

Speaker Edmund Joseph S. Villagomez: Thank you, Representative Sheila Babauta. Any further discussions under Standing Committee Report 22-47?

Several members voiced "ready."

There was no further discussion and the motion to adopt Standing Committee Report 22-47 was carried by voice vote. There was no "nay" vote.

Speaker Edmund Joseph S. Villagomez: Floor Leader.

Floor Leader Ralph N. Yumul: Mr. Speaker, can we take a quick recess?

Speaker Edmund Joseph S. Villagomez: Short recess.

The House recessed at 11:59 a.m.

RECESS

The House reconvened at 12:07 a.m.

Speaker Edmund Joseph S. Villagomez: We'll rise back to session. Before we went on recess, we were under Reports of Standing Committee and the Floor Leader had the floor. So, back to you.

The Floor Leader made a motion to adopt the following Standing Committee Report:

S. C. R. No. 22-45: Reporting on the appointment of Mr. Oscar Patrick Quitugua to serve as member of the Public Utilities Commission representing the First Senatorial District. *Your Committee on Public Utilities, Transportation, and Communications recommends confirmation of Mr. Quitugua’s appointment.*

The motion was seconded.

Under discussion; the Chair recognized Representative Christina Marie E. Sablan.

Representative Christina Marie E. Sablan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and colleagues. I wanted to make a comment that I guess would apply to both nominations that are on the table today because we do need a functioning public utilities commission and the PUC does need a quorum of qualified members, but they also need the resources and the capacity to exercise proper oversight on CUC. CUC’s rate structure, for example, needs serious review the fact that they can just adjust the fuel adjustment charge whenever they want, however they want, totally on their own without any independent oversight is a big problem. And we all hear it from our constituents, from the rate payers, we feel it ourselves you know and I want to also note that the rate structure as a whole also needs review. The fact that the government rate for utilities is far, far higher than the commercial rate, you know, maybe there is a time when this kind of structure made sense it was intended to be like a subsidy really for both commercial and residential rate payers, but when the government is also struggling to pay us utilities and either doesn't pay at all, or it goes for many, many months without paying that also affects CUC operations and it affects all rate payers. So, I do think that the rate structure among many other aspects of CUC operations really needs review and I would urge the PUC members once we confirm them and once they have a quorum and once we make sure that they also have the resources that they make this review of CUC an oversight on CUC, a priority in this term. Thank you. I'm ready to vote.

Speaker Edmund Joseph S. Villagomez: Thank you, Representative Tina Sablan. Any more discussions? Okay. We're ready. So just so we're clear the adoption of this committee report will signal the confirmation of the nominee. With no further discussions, I recognize the Clerk to please call the roll.

The Clerk called the roll on the motion to adopt Standing Committee Report 22-45 with the following results:

Representative Roy Christopher A. Ada	yes
Representative Blas Jonathan “BJ” T. Attao	yes
Representative Celina R. Babauta	yes
Representative Sheila Therese J. Babauta	yes
Representative Joel C. Camacho	yes
Representative Vicente C. Camacho	absent (<i>excused</i>)
Representative Angel A. Demapan	absent (<i>excused</i>)
Representative Joseph A. Flores	yes
Representative Joseph Leepan T. Guerrero	yes
Representative Richard T. Lizama	yes
Representative Corina L. Magofna	yes
Representative Donald M. Manglona	yes
Representative Edwin K. Propst	yes
Representative Christina Marie E. Sablan	yes
Representative John Paul P. Sablan	yes

Representative Patrick H. San Nicolas	yes
Representative Leila Haveia F. C. Staffler	yes
Representative Denita K. Yangetmai	yes
Representative Ralph N. Yumul	yes
Speaker Edmund Joseph S. Villagomez	yes

Acting House Clerk Venetia S. Rosario: Mr. Speaker, all 18 members present voted “yes.”

Speaker Edmund Joseph S. Villagomez: Thank you, Clerk. With 18 members voting “yes,” Standing Committee Report 22-45 is hereby adopted confirming Mr. Oscar Patrick Quitugua. Floor Leader.

The Floor Leader made a motion to adopt the following Standing Committee Report:

S. C. R. No. 22-46: Reporting on the appointment of Mr. Ramon S. Basa to serve as member of the Public Utilities Commission representing the Third Senatorial District. *Your Committee on Public Utilities, Transportation, and Communications recommends confirmation of Mr. Basa’s appointment.*

The motion was seconded.

Speaker Edmund Joseph S. Villagomez: Thank you, Floor Leader. A motion has been made to adopt Standing Committee Report 22-46 and has been seconded. Any discussion? Okay, ready? Again, just like a Standing Committee Report. 22-45, the adoption of this committee report will confirm Mr. Ramon S. Basa. I recognize the Clerk now to call the roll.

The Clerk called the roll on the motion to adopt Standing Committee Report 22-46 with the following results:

Representative Roy Christopher A. Ada	yes
Representative Blas Jonathan “BJ” T. Attao	yes
Representative Celina R. Babauta	yes
Representative Sheila Therese J. Babauta	yes
Representative Joel C. Camacho	yes
Representative Vicente C. Camacho	absent (<i>excused</i>)
Representative Angel A. Demapan	absent (<i>excused</i>)
Representative Joseph A. Flores	yes
Representative Joseph Leepan T. Guerrero	yes
Representative Richard T. Lizama	yes
Representative Corina L. Magofna	yes
Representative Donald M. Manglona	yes
Representative Edwin K. Propst	yes
Representative Christina Marie E. Sablan	yes
Representative John Paul P. Sablan	yes
Representative Patrick H. San Nicolas	yes
Representative Leila Haveia F. C. Staffler	yes
Representative Denita K. Yangetmai	yes
Representative Ralph N. Yumul	yes
Speaker Edmund Joseph S. Villagomez	yes

Acting House Clerk Venetia S. Rosario: Mr. Speaker, all 18 members present voted “yes.”

Speaker Edmund Joseph S. Villagomez: Thank you, Clerk. With 18 members voting “yes,” Standing Committee Report 22-46 is hereby adopted confirming Ramon Basa. Thank you members. There’s no further reports of standing committee.

The Chair directed the members to item XVI, Bill Calendar and recognized the Floor Leader.

REPORTS OF SPECIAL AND CONFERENCE COMMITTEES

None

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

None

RESOLUTION CALENDAR

None

BILL CALENDAR

The Floor Leader made a motion to pass the following legislation:

H. B. No. 22-77, HS1

To establish the CNMI Qualified Medical Travel Assistance Program or MTAP; and for other purposes.”

The motion was seconded.

Under discussion; the Chair recognized Representative Christina Marie E. Sablan.

Representative Christina Marie E. Sablan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So, just for some additional background for the record for the members benefit from the beginning of this term, the Health and Welfare Committee took on the initiative to review and reform the Medical Referral Program in light of these standing historical issues that have affected the program issues that are highlighted in the findings of the bill and that continue to this day. This includes the lack of any enabling statute that clearly sets forth the legal authority and parameters for services, the chronic underfunding of the Medical Referral Program and the difficulties that the office, the program has had in containing costs, minimizing patient's length of stay and ensuring effective communications record-keeping case management and coordination of care. So, this legislation House Bill 22-77, House Substitute 1 was drafted in close coordination with the Commonwealth Healthcare Corporation, taking into account the reports, comments, and recommendations that we receive from CHCC, from the Medical Referral staff from the Rota and Tinian Health Centers, the Attorney General's Office, Finance, Special Assistant for Administration, the Medicaid Agency, the Office of the Public Auditor and many concerned citizens and I just wanted to share some of the highlights of the bill. One, is to provide for the orderly transition of the off island medical referral services program from the Governor's Office to CHCC, to include

protecting CHCC from incurring outstanding debts and liabilities of the former Medical Referral Office and to clarify that outstanding promissory notes shall remain or receivable of the central government and not the responsibility of CHCC. This was a big issue for them and they wanted to make sure that those issues would be addressed in this bill. Two, is to establish a new health network program that was an integrated service of the Commonwealth Healthcare Corporation, whose role is to connect patients to CHCC's network of providers and provide patients with access to care outside of the CNMI services that would be beyond CHCC's capacity or availability. One important distinction of this network of providers as the CEO of CHCC noted in our meeting with her with the committee, is that patients who must travel outside of the CNMI for care would not be limited just to the locations where there is a referral office or a logistics service provider. So, this bill sets forth the duties and responsibilities of the health network program to include assisting eligible, CNMI patients in access and care. It also includes duties to maintain program data and report on that data to the legislature and the Governor. Coordinate medical records, identify and pursue opportunities to improve care in the CNMI and reduce the need for patients to travel outside of the Commonwealth and as well as the duty to operate the health network program within appropriated funding levels and to promulgate rules and regulations. So, again ask for your support colleagues and if anyone has any questions, I'm happy to answer them now.

Speaker Edmund Joseph S. Villagomez: Thank you, Representative Tina Sablan. Any further discussion? Ready. Alright, with no further discussion, I ask the Clerk to please call the roll.

The Clerk called the roll on the motion for the passage of House Bill 22-77, House Substitute 1 on First and Final Reading with the following results:

Representative Roy Christopher A. Ada	yes
Representative Blas Jonathan “BJ” T. Attao	yes
Representative Celina R. Babauta	yes
Representative Sheila Therese J. Babauta	yes
Representative Joel C. Camacho	yes
Representative Vicente C. Camacho	absent (<i>excused</i>)
Representative Angel A. Demapan	absent (<i>excused</i>)
Representative Joseph A. Flores	yes
Representative Joseph Leepan T. Guerrero	yes
Representative Richard T. Lizama	yes
Representative Corina L. Magofna	yes
Representative Donald M. Manglona	yes
Representative Edwin K. Propst	yes
Representative Christina Marie E. Sablan	yes
Representative John Paul P. Sablan	yes
Representative Patrick H. San Nicolas	yes
Representative Leila Haveia F. C. Staffler	yes
Representative Denita K. Yangetmai	yes
Representative Ralph N. Yumul	yes
Speaker Edmund Joseph S. Villagomez	yes

Acting House Clerk Venetia S. Rosario: Mr. Speaker, all 18 members present voted “yes.”

Speaker Edmund Joseph S. Villagomez: Thank you, Clerk. With 18 members voting “yes,” House Bill 22-77, House Substitute hereby passes the House. Thank you, members. With now other bills under Bill Calendar, we now move down to item XVII, Miscellaneous Business and the floor is open. Recognize Representative Joel Camacho.

MISCELLANEOUS BUSINESS

Representative Joel C. Camacho: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm just going to make this brief. It has been continuously brought to my attention that some of our government employees have been receiving some termination letters and sorry, it's kind of a touchy issue for me because some of these people are actually family members of mine. So, I want to make the public understand and know that I'm going to be really looking into this issue. I will be bringing it up to the Attorney General's Office and please reach out to my office and Rep. Celina Babauta's office, if you feel political intimidation or any of that sort. Thank you.

Speaker Edmund Joseph S. Villagomez: Thank you, Representative Joel Camacho. Before we move forward. Clerk, can you note, I did receive a message from a Representative Vicente Camacho so you know, mark him excuse for this this session. Thank you. Representative Celina, you had something.

Representative Celina R. Babauta: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I want to commend Representative Joel Camacho for being on the record. I also want to state for the record that I have been communicating with officials and attorneys who are ready and stand ready to assist government employees who are receiving their termination letters out of political retaliation and just as I predicted several weeks ago that termination letters will begin to be issued after the impeachment hearing at the Senate, as we all know that Senate hearing has concluded and immediately upon conclusion of that hearing the notices for termination have been issued as of that date. I know of at least six people who have received their letters already. In fact, just this morning, before we headed up here to conduct this session, I received another phone call this morning from Saipan from a family member who is seeking my assistance to assist them with their family member's termination letter. So, I will be getting that termination letter as well as others who have reached out to me will be receiving the notices of their termination soon. And as soon as I get back to Saipan, I will be working on assisting these people. To those government employees who have received their notices to be terminated by the Administration, my advice to you is, do not resign. You have every right under the law, not to be intimidated or terminated for political reasons, and we are willing to assist you. Please reach out to Representative Joel Camacho and my office or anybody you're comfortable with so that we can help you. Thank you.

Speaker Edmund Joseph S. Villagomez: Thank you, Representative Celina Babauta. I now recognize Representative Ed Propst.

Representative Edwin K. Propst: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and colleagues. I just want to thank the wonderful people of Rota once again, for outstanding, amazing hospitality. It's such a joy and such a pleasure to come to the beautiful island of Rota and just enjoy just so much that they have to offer. So once again, we are most grateful to the wonderful, beautiful people of Rota, thank you. Mr. Speaker and colleagues, I do want to of course echo the sentiments of Rep. Joel Camacho and Rep. Celina Babauta on this political intimidation and the notices or proverbial pink slips that are going out. I also want to remind them that yes, they do have rights, but also please do reach out to the Office of the Public Auditor, reach out to the Attorney General and of course, reach out to your representatives in this matter so that we can assist you to the best we can. It's very sad that politics always has – it was expected and it's just a sad time. I also want to add Mr. Speaker, something that has really been troublesome and disheartening, and I hope this august body can find out what exactly is going on when it comes to the payout for those who lost a loved one from the government. And I'm going to tell you from personal experience, my father

passed away on March 22, the life insurance payout that was supposed to go to my mother, Juanita Propst until this day has not been paid. And I went and I talked to IAC it's because the government has not put in their share, but I also shared that on Facebook and of course, a lot of constituents reach out to me. Some who had a loved one pass away in January and didn't get paid or haven't gotten paid. We're talking about a four-month delay. Where is the money? Where is the money? You mean to tell me that you can give out \$257,000 in no problems in paying in advance, but you cannot pay for life insurance for those that are depending on this? It is very frustrating. It is very disheartening that this is happening, especially to those who really need the money. Why is this happening? We need to find out, we need to call in the Secretary of Finance and find out exactly why is this huge delay waiting four months, five months for a life insurance payout that's supposed to be paid out normally when money was good, when money was flowing, sometimes two day turnaround. Some people wait two weeks, but four months? Come on. This is ridiculous. These families need help. Those that lost a loved one need help and I'm very, just sad to see these long delays because the government is not paying their share. I'm asking you colleagues, Mr. Speaker to please find out and fight for our constituents. Fight for me too, for my mom, who is dementia, who is bedridden, who has chronic health issues, so that we can help assist our loved ones to the best we can. Thank you, Mr. Speaker and colleagues

Speaker Edmund Joseph S. Villagomez: Thank you, Representative Propst. Recognize Representative Sheila Babauta.

Representative Sheila Therese J. Babauta: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to comment on the pink slip situation because that's really disappointing. That's embarrassing. And I can't believe our government or like we experienced that here in the CNMI. You know, we live in a beautiful place and the fact that people are receiving like retaliation and I know it's a standing issue, but it's just embarrassing. And it's a reality that I share when I travel. Like these are realities for us. We have political turmoil. We have, you know, symptoms of colonialism. We have climate change, but I know that we can be better and we can do better and I just wanted to drive in the idea that OPA is going to play a pivotal role in things like this, when you receive a pink slip, you know, and when you feel like it's retaliation OPA's role is to address that. So, Rep. Joel, Rep. Celina, thank you for taking the lead on giving people a place to go because I've been there and it's scary. Good thing. I don't have kids, you know, so I know how they feel. So anyway. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker Edmund Joseph S. Villagomez: Thank you, Representative. Sheila Babauta. I now recognize Representative Leila Staffler.

Representative Leila Haveia F.C. Staffler: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I just want to also reiterate how unfortunate it is that our community is going through. The pink slip situation and reiterate how important updating our whistleblower laws could be right now, 22-83, I believe is in the Senate and is just waiting for some action or no, it's not, it's still in our committee right here. Sorry. I forgot what I was talking about, my bad. I wish it was in the Senate, but I would like to urge our JGO colleagues to act on that update, but also for our community. There is already an existing whistleblower compensation act bill on our law, on the books and if you feel that you might be able to avail, might be able to contribute by seeing how your issue might fit into that current standing law I urge you to look into it. It is Public Law 14-60 and it is enacted as we speak and I hope that the JGO will consider the updates that I've offered. Thank you.

Speaker Edmund Joseph S. Villagomez: Thank you, Representative Leila Staffler. I now recognize Representative Donald Manglona.

Representative Donald M. Manglona: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and colleagues. I was hoping board member Reyes was still here, but with the two week deadline on the committees deliberation on House Bill 22-102, we will be scheduling a committee meeting on the 8th I know we're trying to get all agencies done. In regards to the budget hearings the right now on calendar, the last budget, the last agency will be on the 7th and so I want to move directly into getting the clarification we need in order to act on 102 and so if CPA and OPA are currently watching and we'll reach out as well we hope that all parties can reserve that day to come in before the committee and answer any questions of the members may have. So, members please reserve that day and invite any stakeholders that would love to comment and provide their inputs on House Bill 22-102. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker Edmund Joseph S. Villagomez: Thank you, Representative Donald. Floor's still open for miscellaneous. I recognize the Floor Leader. Thank you, Mr. Speaker and in line with the budget talk, this is also to request the Ways and Means to do a follow-up on ARPA spending with the CNMI. What was posted during the NCSL the CNMI has only accounted for \$117 Million Dollars, which still remains \$364 Million Dollars that still hasn't been decided on. Jurisdiction like American Samoa, they're spending their ARPA, \$370 Million Dollar on healthcare and we haven't seen any of that going to our healthcare or even as far as the utilities, which is going to be a big issue during the summer. Our other neighboring jurisdiction like Guam spending over \$20 Million in a Small Business Pandemic Assistant Grant Program we haven't seen any of that here in the CNMI yet. So, that's something that we need to really look at and look at our other neighboring jurisdiction and how they are spending their ARPA funds and that's something that we should be really pushing for. From the last meeting with the OMB it sounded like they have all expanded the amount, but we don't know where in our local jurisdiction, the CNMI has spent over \$75 Million on governmental services, which is salaries of staff and other jurisdictions have not spent that much. So that's something that we need to look at because when the fiscal cliff ends, we have the ARPA funds, where is the CNMI going to be at after this pandemic, it's going to be the same or even worse as what we're going to be going to be experienced in the next couple of years. So, that's something Ways and Means Committee should look at again. I know I'm not a member of the Ways and Means anymore unless someone is stepping down, but anyways that's it. That's just friendly remark to the Ways and Means. Thank you.

Speaker Edmund Joseph S. Villagomez: Thank you, Floor Leader. Recognize Representative Sheila Babauta.

Representative Sheila Therese J. Babauta: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Rep. Yumul. That was all very helpful, valuable information. ARPA is a never before once in a lifetime, opportunity for the CNMI and it's really important to see how other jurisdictions are spending it and how we're spending it. This is never going to happen again, I'm usually an optimist, but \$500 almost a billion dollars. When are we going to get a billion dollars on our lap? And what are we doing with it? If our nonprofits aren't getting it, our small businesses, the hospital, what are we doing with it? It's been a year and there's a timeline it's 2024. Like, what is the plan? Where are we at? Like, everybody's wondering. And so you know, I really look forward to what we believe our next step should be. Whether that's and who is going to be involved, OMB, finance who is at

the helm of ARPA. We would really like, and we would like updates, we would like engagement, we would like communication because a lot of people are worried that we are wasting this opportunity that we are wasting it, and we're not a community of waste. We're resourceful, you know? And that's what happens when you grow up on an island. You're resourceful, you're at the farm. You're fishing at the beach and you're hunting. We make use, we make good use of our resources and ARPA is once in a lifetime. So, thank you Rep. Yumul for that information it was really valuable.

Speaker Edmund Joseph S. Villagomez: Thank you, Representative Sheila Babauta. Please bring us to your farm and take us fishing too. Recognize Representative Tina.

Representative Christina Marie E. Sablan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and colleagues and thanks to our colleagues who brought up the issue, one of the GHLI and the government's obligation to payout life insurance and also to report on American Rescue Plan Act spending. These are two more things to add to the list Chairman Manglona for questions we have for the Secretary of Finance that we need him to come in and answer on the subject of the political termination notices and all the political intimidation and retaliation that we've been seeing, especially since the Senate impeachment trial concluded, but even before that thank you for calling attention to that colleagues, Rep. Camacho, Rep. Babauta, Rep. Staffler, Rep. Sheila Babauta, Rep. Propst thank you for raising that. And in addition to reaching out to representatives, I wanted to encourage people who are the victims of this retaliation to also reach out to federal authorities. A lot of these jobs may or may not be of interest to federal authorities. There may be federal funds implicated as well. So, I think reach out to the reps, reach out to OPA, the Attorney General's office, as well as federal investigators and share your story because this kind of intimidation and these tactics are just, it's more than embarrassing. It is embarrassing. It's shameful. It's outrageous and it's totally unacceptable. This is really no way to run a government and public servants should not have fear of losing their jobs because of their politics their political views. It's totally an offense to our democracy and it needs to end. Thank you.

Speaker Edmund Joseph S. Villagomez: Thank you, Representative Tina. Any further under miscellaneous. Ready? All right. We now move down to item XVIII, Announcement. Recognize Representative Donald Manglona.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Representative Donald M. Manglona: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just a reminder, tomorrow we have our public hearing on the minimum wage bill authored by Rep. Tina Sablan. I have been getting some calls and messages in regards to this bill. Interested individuals on Rota are wanting to comment on it, but I invite if any of the members are still here or aren't leaving yet, you're more than welcome to sit in and listen, as you know, when it comes time to addressing this you know, in front of the full body a lot of these comments could help you in making that decision and so non-members and this goes to any budget hearing as well on Rota as well as when we call into the Department of Finance you're always welcome to sit in and you know as a guest and you know, even just as a member of the House. So, I invite all of you to participate and listen to any of the comments that will be brought up on the committee tomorrow. And so with that again, just a reminder, and then we also have our budget hearing for Rota starting tomorrow at 10:00 a.m. all the way to 2:30 p.m. on Friday with the last agency being called. Thank you.

Speaker Edmund Joseph S. Villagomez: Thank you, Representative Manglona. Any further under announcements recognized Representative Sheila Babauta.

Representative Sheila Therese J. Babauta: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Members, great session today. My announcement is that Rota is delicious and we're going to have lunch at Puesto Grill. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Everyone here is invited including Legislative Bureau and staff, thank you for being here with us on the beautiful island of Luta. It is Italian and Filipino food, thank you Rep. Propst for making pre-orders that you're going to share and thank you Rep. Denita for bringing her staff. Thank you for bringing your staff, your team, they're helping prep right now. And congratulations to Puesto Grill, I'm excited to try it. It's Italian and Filipino food. I'm not sure who the local owners are, but this is one way for us to support local. So, let's go and spend our per diem. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker Edmund Joseph S. Villagomez: Thank you, recognize Representative Celina Babauta.

Representative Celina R. Babauta: *Si Yu'us ma'ase*, Mr. Speaker. I just want to announce to the community of Rota and to the members, you're welcome to join the JGO public hearing this afternoon at 2:30 p.m., where we will be addressing four legislative initiatives on the agenda. Thank you. *Si Yu'us ma'ase*.

Speaker Edmund Joseph S. Villagomez: Thank you, Rep. Celina. Will there be food?

Representative Celina R. Babauta: No.

Speaker Edmund Joseph S. Villagomez: I'm just kidding. Floor's still open, announcement. Ready? Okay, now we move down to adjournment and I recognize the Floor Leader.

ADJOURNMENT

Floor Leader Ralph N. Yumul: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And with that, I offer a motion to adjourn subject to the call of the Chair. So move.

The motion was seconded and carried by voice vote. There was no “nay” vote.

The House adjourned at 12:42 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Venetia S. Rosario
House Journal Clerk

APPEARANCE OF LOCAL BILLS

FIRST LEGISLATIVE DAY: 1st Legislative appearance of a local bill is on the day it is introduced.

SECOND LEGISLATIVE DAY: NONE

THIRD LEGISLATIVE DAY: NONE

Appearance of Measures introduced on the House Floor during the House Session on April 27, 2022:

H. B. NO. 22-99: To amend 1 CMC, Division 6. Elections specifically §§6213, 6222, 6521(a), 6524(a) and 6528(f) of the Commonwealth Code; and for other purposes. Introduced by REP. BLAS JONATHAN “BJ” T. ATTAO of Saipan, Precinct 3 (*for himself*, Representatives Joel C. Camacho, Richard T. Lizama, Christina M.E. Sablan, Leila H.F.C. Staffler, Edmund S. Villagomez, and Ralph N. Yumul) on April 27, 2022; subsequently referred to the House Committee on Judiciary and Governmental Operations.

H. B. NO. 22-100: To further enable recruitment, retention, and appropriate classification and compensation of Medicaid personnel; and for other purposes. Introduced by REP. LEILA H.F.C. STAFFLER of Saipan, Precinct 5 (*for herself*, Representatives Celina R. Babauta, Corina L. Magofna, Donald M. Manglona, Christina M.E. Sablan, and Ralph N. Yumul) on April 27, 2022; subsequently referred to the House Committee on Health and Welfare.

H. B. NO. 22-101: To provide a tax incentive for business entities that hire qualified ex-offenders; and for other purposes. Introduced by REP. ANGEL A. DEMAPAN of Saipan, Precinct 1 (*for himself, and Representative Roy C.A. Ada*) on April 27, 2022; subsequently referred to House Committee on Ways and Means.

H. L. B. NO. 22-32: To re-appropriate One Thousand, Sixteen Dollars (\$1,016.00) allotted under Saipan Local Law 19-2, specifically under Business Unit 3400X; Twelve Dollars (\$12.00) allotted under Saipan Local Law 19-2, specifically under Business Unit 3500A; Sixteen Thousand Dollars (\$16,000.00) allotted under Saipan Local Law 19-24, specifically under Business Unit 71771; Thirteen Thousand, One Hundred Seventy-Three Dollars (\$13,173.00) allotted under Saipan Local Law 20-04, specifically under Business Unit 3754; Forty-Two Thousand, Fifty-Nine Dollars (\$42,059.00) allotted under Saipan Local Law 20-26, specifically under Business Unit 7190B; and Seventy-Nine Thousand, One Hundred Seventy-One Dollars (\$79,171.00) allotted under Saipan Local Law 20-26, specifically under Business Unit 7186X; and for other purposes. Introduced by REP. ANGEL A. DEMAPAN of Saipan, Precinct 1 (*for himself*, Representatives Joseph A. Flores, and Joseph Leepan T. Guerrero) on April 27, 2022.

H. RES. NO. 22-18: To recognize Community College Month in the month of April and to commend the Northern Marianas College for the reaffirmation of its accreditation for a historic eight-year term and its contributions to the workforce development needs of the Commonwealth. Introduced by REP. LEILA H.F.C. STAFFLER of Saipan, Precinct 5 (*for herself, Representatives Roy C.A. Ada, Blas Jonathan “BJ” T. Attao, Celina R. Babauta, Joel C. Camacho, Vicente C. Camacho, Angel A. Demapan, Joseph A. Flores, Joseph Leepan T. Guerrero, Richard T. Lizama, Corina L. Magofna, Donald M. Manglona, Edwin K. Propst, Christina M.E. Sablan, Patrick H. San Nicolas, Edmund S. Villagomez, Denita Kaipat Yangetmai, and Ralph N. Yumul*) on April 27, 2022; subsequently placed on the Resolution Calendar.

H. RES. NO. 22-19: To honor Mrs. Aiko Mihara for reaching the delightful age of 100 years old. Introduced by REP. LEILA H.F.C. STAFFLER of Saipan, Precinct 5 (*for herself, Representatives Roy C.A. Ada, Blas Jonathan “BJ” T. Attao, Celina R. Babauta, Joel C. Camacho, Vicente C. Camacho, Angel A. Demapan, Joseph A. Flores, Joseph Leepan T. Guerrero, Richard T. Lizama, Corina L. Magofna, Donald M. Manglona, Edwin K. Propst, Christina M.E. Sablan, Patrick H. San Nicolas, Edmund S. Villagomez, Denita Kaipat Yangetmai, and Ralph N. Yumul*) on April 27, 2022; subsequently placed on the Resolution Calendar.

House information on deadlines for override: None