

Saipan Voters reject, Rota accepts Casinos

Saipan, CNMI (Marianas Variety) – Saipan, which rejected casino gaming overwhelmingly in 1979, has once again said „no“ to it, but the same proposal finally got the required two-thirds support of Rota’s voters.

The Saipan Casino Act initiative, which also required two-thirds of the total votes cast, received only 3,492 votes with 4,721, or 57 percent, voting „no.“

Saipan has 866 absentee voters.

But on Rota, the casino initiative received 788 votes, or 84.5 percent, with only 144 voting against it.

Prior to Saturday’s election, only Tinian, among the CNMI’s three islands, had legalized casino gaming.

On Saipan, according to teacher Ambrose Bennett, „private citizens just don’t want gambling here.“

The election results, he added, send a „clear message“ that the people of Saipan are not for gambling, and will boost the morale of those who are against poker machines on island.

He said he and other citizens will be passing around a petition calling for the removal of poker parlors from the villages.

The island’s Roman Catholic Church, for its part, said the rejection of the casino initiative was „God’s will.“

„Praise the Lord! We’re very happy about it,“ Father Rey Rosal of the San Vicente Church said.

He reiterated Chalan Kanoa Bishop Tomas Camacho’s earlier

statement that the casino proposal's promise of an „economic jackpot“ was only an „illusion,“

Gambling, he added, leads to covetousness and greed.

Press Secretary Charles P. Reyes Jr. said it is not surprising that the initiative was defeated, considering that „the constitutional threshold for a popular initiative to succeed is very high.“

He also noted that the casino proposal was opposed by the influential Catholic church and a large group of ordinary citizens.

Reyes said as far as the administration is concerned, the Saipan casino initiative had a number of legal flaws, including „discriminatory“ provisions.

One of the leading casino proponents, former Speaker Pedro R. Guerrero, said he wished they had had more time to educate voters about the initiative.

He said many people told him they did not fully understand the initiative.

But he said he respects the election results.

„We did what we had to do to help provide the commonwealth a road to economic recovery,“ Guerrero said.

On behalf of the members of the CNMI Indigenous Entrepreneurs Inc., which spearheaded the initiative, Guerrero said he wanted to thank those who voted „yes.“