

Saipan delegation defeats gaming plan

Still another attempt to pass the Saipan gaming plan was defeated by the Saipan and Northern Islands Legislative Delegation yesterday.

Saipan lawmakers voted 10-5 to kill a fresh local bill that would have legalized certain forms of gaming on the island.

House Local Bill 15-21, sponsored by Representatives Jesus SN Lizama and Oscar M. Babauta, proposed mainly to appropriate over USD 900,000 for Precinct II projects.

But riding on the bill was a section to allow video lottery terminals, as well as Texas Hold'em poker, black jack and baccarat games, to be operated at the former La Fiesta shopping mall.

It was the third such measure to be introduced in the Legislature since Saipan voters rejected the casino initiative in the November 2007 elections.

The first one was brought to the Legislature in the form of a House bill. The House of Representatives passed the bill, but the Senate killed it.

The second bill was introduced as a Saipan local bill last week. But the House on Friday rejected it as a local matter, amid legal issues. The Constitution states that only Commonwealth law may allow any form of gambling in the CNMI. This means gambling must be established either by a public law passed by both houses of the Legislature or by initiative.

The House action brought the bill back to the full House.

In yesterday's session, Saipan lawmakers who voted against the H.L.B. 15-21 echoed the constitutional concerns raised last

Friday.

These lawmakers are SNILD Chairman Pete Reyes, Sen. Maria T. Pangelinan, Rep. Manuel Tenorio, Rep. Candido Taman, Rep. Justo Quitugua, Rep. Arnold Palacios, Rep. Joseph Deleon Guerrero, Rep. Cinta Kaipat, Rep. Ramon Tebuteb, and Rep. Benjamin Seman.

Meanwhile, SNILD members who voted in favor of the bill are Sen. Luis Crisostimo, Rep. Francisco Dela Cruz, Stanley T. Torres, and the two sponsors.