



Office of the Attorney General of Guam

590 S. Marine Corps Dr., Ste. 901, Tamuning, Guam 96913



Elizabeth Barrett-Anderson
Attorney General
Phone: (671) 475-3324
ext. 5015/ 5030
Fax: 477-4703
law@guamag.org

Jacqueline Z. Cruz
Chief of Staff
Administration
ext. 5010
izcruz@guamag.org

Joseph B. McDonald
Chief Prosecutor
Prosecution
ext. 2410
jmcdonald@guamag.org

Karl P. Espaldon
Deputy AG
Solicitors
ext. 3115
kespaldon@guamag.org

Kenneth D. Orcutt
Deputy AG
Litigation
ext. 3225
korcutt@guamag.org

Fred S. Nishihira
Deputy AG
Consumer Protection
ext. 3250
fnishihira@guamag.org

Rebecca M. Perez
Deputy AG
Child Support
ext. 1610
rebecca.perez@guamcse.net

Carol M. Hinkle-Sanchez
Deputy AG
Family
ext. 4040
csanchez@guamag.org

Pauline I. Untalan
Administrator
Victim Service Center
& Notary Unit
ext. 5030
puntalan@guamag.org

March 03, 2018

OPINION MEMORADUM

PCF: GOV 18-0089

Honorable Eddie Baza Calvo
Governor of Guam
Ricardo J. Bordallo Governor's Complex
Adelup, Guam 96910

Hafa Adai Governor:

This opinion is issued on an emergency request from your office regarding your authority under the Organic Act of Guam to call *I Liheslaturan Guahan* (Legislature) into special session, and whether the Legislature can refuse. The question at hand is whether the Governor can call a new or additional special session(s) while the Legislature is recessed in a special session. The answer is yes.

The Governor's authority to call a special session is rooted in the Organic Act of Guam. Title 48 U.S.C.A., Section 1423h provides, in relevant part:

The Governor may call special sessions of the legislature **at any time** when, in his opinion, the **public interest** may require it. No legislation shall be considered at any special session other than that specified in the call therefor or in any special message by the Governor to the legislature while in such session. All sessions of the legislature shall be open to the public.

48 U.S.C.A. § 1423h (1950) (emphasis added). Statutory construction begins with a plain reading of a statute. *See Pangelinan v. Gutierrez*, 2000 Guam 11 ¶ 23 (quoting *American Tobacco Co. v. Patterson*, 456 U.S. 63, 68, 102 S.Ct. 1534, 1537, 71 L.Ed.2d 748 (1982)). A plain reading is appropriate where the statute lays out specific requirements and indicates exactly what is necessary for compliance. *See Castino v. G.C. Corp.*, 2010 Guam 3 ¶ 29. The Organic Act clearly provides that the Governor has plenary authority to call a special session "at any time" when the "public interest may require it." 48 U.S.C.A. § 1423h (1950).

Congress placed no limitation or restriction on the Governor's power to call a special session. Congress has afforded the Governor with discretion in calling the Legislature into special sessions based on a broad arena of public interest circumstances. *See* 48 U.S.C.A. § 1423h (1950). Furthermore, Congress did not limit the number of calls the Governor is entitled to make.

The Legislature's inference that there is a limitation on the Governor's authority to call a special session is misplaced.¹ Although there is no expressed power for the Governor to revoke a special session that has convened, the power to call additional special sessions, *at any time*, is clear. The Governor may call a special session regardless of whether the Legislature is currently in a special session, recessed or adjourned therefrom. It is foreseeable that in certain emergencies, such as natural disasters which, our island often faces, multiple or simultaneous calls might be required. The Governor has expressed his opinion that there is a financial crisis affecting the public interest necessitating immediate legislative attention via a special session.

The Organic Act is the ultimate local constitutional authority on Guam. *See Underwood v. Guam Election Comm'n*, 2006 Guam 17 ¶ 21 (Dec. 19, 2006) (“[T]he Legislature’s powers are broad, but are constrained by the provisions of Organic Act of Guam. . . .”). Therefore, the 34th Guam Legislature Standing Rules, Mason’s Manual, which is referenced as a source of Legislative Procedure, and any authority from other jurisdictions are only persuasive and not binding on Guam. The 34th Guam Legislature made such a concession in its adoption of its current standing Rules. *See* 34th Guam Standing Rule, Part A § 1.02(c)(XX)(2)(A) (“The rules, which apply to Regular Sessions, *shall* apply to Special Sessions to the extent that they *do not* conflict with the Organic Act provision requiring the body *only* address the legislation provided by *I Maga’lahen Guahan*.”).

The Governor has express authority to call multiple special sessions at any time. It is the opinion of our Office that the Legislature did not have the authority to refuse to hear the call of the Governor’s special session on March 2, 2018.

“The three branches of government should work together smoothly, harmoniously, and respectful of each other’s authority. Dialogue between the Executive and the Legislative Branches should be conducted in an orderly manner to better serve the People of Guam. . . .” *Pangelinan v. Gutierrez*, 2000 Guam 11 ¶ 30, *aff’d*, 276 F.3d 539 (9th Cir. 2002) (Chief Justice Siguenza).

Respectfully,



ELIZABETH BARRETT-ANDERSON
Attorney General of Guam

cc: All Senators, *I Liheslaturan Guahan*

¹ As per the [guampdn.com](http://www.guampdn.com), a legal opinion released by the Legislature stated that the Governor “may not have authority to revoke his previous call to session and simultaneously call the Legislature into another special session.” March 2, 2018. (<http://www.guampdn.com/story/news/2018/03/02/guam-governor-calvo-submits-new-tax-increase-bill-after-32-hour-workweek-postponed/387535002/>).