March 03, 2018

OPINION MEMORANDUM

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 \textit{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.


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. \textit{See} 48 U.S.C.A. § 1423h (1950). Furthermore, Congress did not limit the number of calls the Governor is entitled to make.
OPINION MEMORANDUM
Subject: PCF GOV 18-0089
March 03, 2018
Page 2 of 2 Pages

The Legislature’s inference that there is a limitation on the Governor’s authority to call a special session is misplaced.\textsuperscript{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, \textit{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 \textit{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, \textit{shall} apply to Special Sessions to the extent that they \textit{do not} conflict with the Organic Act provision requiring the body \textit{only} address the legislation provided by \textit{I Maga’lahen Guåhan}.”).

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. . . .” \textit{Pangelinan v. Gutierrez}, 2000 Guam 11 ¶ 30, aff’d, 276 F.3d 539 (9th Cir. 2002) (Chief Justice Sigenza).

Respectfully,

\[Signature\]

ELIZABETH BARRETT-ANDERSON
Attorney General of Guam

\textit{cc:} All Senators, I Liheslaturan Guåhan

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\textsuperscript{1} As per the 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/).