



TWENTY-FOURTH NORTHERN MARIANAS COMMONWEALTH LEGISLATURE

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

FIRST REGULAR SESSION, 2025

LEGISLATIVE JOURNAL

2nd Day, First Regular Session

Friday, February 14, 2025

CLERK'S NOTE: *The main publicly available audio feed experienced a complete outage from the time the session convened, continuing through Public Comments, Adoption of Journals, Introduction of Bills and Resolutions, and the House's move to the Resolution Calendar. Parts of the discussion under the Bill Calendar were also affected by the outage. Consequently, these proceedings were not captured in the official audio record. The following is a summary of those events.*

The House of Representatives of the Seventeenth Northern Marianas Commonwealth Legislature convened its Second Day, First Regular Session on Friday, February 14, 2025, at 11:12 a.m., in the House Chamber on Capitol Hill, Saipan, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.

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

A moment of silence was observed.

ROLL CALL

The Clerk called the roll for attendance with the following results:

Representative Roy Christopher A. Ada	Present
Representative Vincent Raymond Aldan	Present
Representative Daniel Iwashita Aquino Jr.	Present
Representative Blas Jonathan "BJ" Tenorio Attao	Present
Representative Roman Cepeda Benavente	Present
Representative Angelo Atalig Camacho	Present
Representative Diego Vincent Fejeran Camacho	Present
Representative Joel Castro Camacho	Present
Representative Joseph Arriola Flores	Present
Representative Marissa Renee Flores	Present
Representative Thomas John Dela Cruz Manglona	Absent (Excused)
Representative Julie Marie Atalig Ogo	Present
Representative Malcolm Jason Omar	Present
Representative Raymond Ulloa Palacios	Present
Representative Elias Jerome Malite Rangamar	Absent (Excused)

Representative John Paul Palacios Sablan	Absent (Excused)
Representative Patrick Hofschneider San Nicolas	Present
Representative Edmund Joseph Sablan Villagomez	Present
Representative Denita Kaipat Yangetmai	Present
Representative Ralph Naraja Yumul	Present

Clerk Linda Muña: Mr. Speaker, seventeen members are present and three members are absent.

Speaker Edmund Joseph Sablan Villagomez: With seventeen members present, a quorum is duly established. Let the record reflect that Representatives Thomas John Manglona, John Paul Sablan, and Elias Rangamar are excused for today's session. We will now proceed to Item No. 2, Public Comments. The podium is open to receive any comments. Please state your name and the entity you represent, you have five minutes. If you have prepared statements, please submit them to the Sergeant-at-Arms for forwarding to the Clerk's office.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Public Comments was presented by one individual regarding the following item:

H.B. No. 24-6: To amend the Appropriations and Budget Authority Act of Fiscal Year 2025, Public Law 23-26, to appropriate the balance of funds allocated for the Minimum Annual Payment to the Settlement Fund and to return government employees subject to austerity to 100% work hours; and for other purposes.

There being no further public comments, the Chair moved down to Item 3, Adoption of Journals, and recognized the Clerk.

ADOPTION OF JOURNALS

The Clerk announced the following House Journal:

First Day, First Regular Session Journal – February 14, 2025

The Chair recognized the Floor Leader.

The Floor Leader moved for the adoption of First Day, First Regular Session Journal – February 14, 2025; the motion was seconded. There was no discussion on the floor and the motion to adopt First Day, First Regular Session Journal – February 14, 2025 was carried by voice vote. There was no “nay” vote.

The Chair moved down to Item 4, Introduction of Bills, and recognized the Floor Leader under House Bills.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

House Bills:

Representative Marissa Renee Flores officially introduced the following bill:

H. B. NO. 24-1: To amend provisions in Title 6, Chapter 3, Sexual Offenses, Article 1. General Provisions, relating to sexual abuse/assault of minors. Prefiled by: REP. MARISSA R. FLORES of Saipan, Precinct 3 (*for herself*) on February 14, 2025; subsequently referred to the House Committee on Judiciary and Governmental Operations.

Speaker Edmund Joseph Sablan Villagomez: Thank you, Floor Leader. House Bill 24-1 will be referred to the committee on JGO. I recognize Representative Ralph Yumul.

Representative Ralph Naraja Yumul officially introduced the following bill:

H. B. NO. 24-2: To establish a process for the delivery of a State of the Commonwealth Address to the Legislature by the Governor. **Prefiled by: REP. RALPH N. YUMUL** of Saipan, Precinct 3 (*for himself*, Representative Joel C. Camacho, and Marissa R. Flores) on February 14, 2025; subsequently referred to the House Committee on Judiciary and Governmental Operations.

The Chair referred House Bill No. 24-2 to the House Committee on Judiciary and Governmental Operations, and recognized Representative Vincent Raymond Aldan.

Representative Vincent Raymond Aldan officially introduced the following bill:

H. B. NO. 24-3: To eliminate the 10% distribution to the Commonwealth Utilities Corporation, and redistribute those funds equally between the Bureau of Motor Vehicles and the Department of Public Works to enhance their operational capacities; and for other purposes. **Prefiled by: REP. VINCENT S. ALDAN** of Saipan, Precinct 1 (*for himself*) on February 14, 2025; subsequently referred to the House Committee on Public Utilities, Transportation, and Communications.

The Chair referred House Bill No. 24-3 to the House Committee on Public Utilities, Transportation, and Communication, and recognized Representative Julie Marie Atalig Ogo.

Representative Julie Marie Atalig Ogo officially introduced the following bill:

H. B. NO. 24-4: To amend the Investment Incentive Act of 2000 by refining eligibility criteria for Qualifying Certificates, strengthening procedural safeguards, mandating detailed reporting on investments and performance, and enhancing oversight mechanisms. **Prefiled by: REP. JULIE M. A. OGO** of Rota, Precinct 7 (*for herself*) on February 14, 2025; subsequently referred to the House Committee on Commerce.

The Chair referred House Bill No. 24-4 to the House Committee on Commerce, and recognized Representative Joseph Arriola Flores.

Representative Joseph Arriola Flores officially introduced the following bill:

H. B. NO. 24-5: To establish provisions for jaywalking; and for other purposes.
Prefiled by: REP. JOSEPH A. FLORES of Saipan, Precinct 1 (*for himself*) on February 14, 2025; subsequently referred to the House Committee on Judiciary and Governmental Operations.

The Chair referred House Bill No. 24-5 to the House Committee on Judiciary and Governmental Operations, and recognized Representative Blas Jonathan “BJ” Tenorio Attao.

Representative Blas Jonathan “BJ” Tenorio Attao officially introduced the following bill:

H. B. NO. 24-6: To amend the Appropriations and Budget Authority Act of Fiscal Year 2025, Public Law 23-26, to appropriate the balance of funds allocated for the Minimum Annual Payment to the Settlement Fund and to return government employees subject to austerity to 100% work hours; and for other purposes.
Prefiled by: REP. BLAS JONATHAN “BJ” T. ATTAO of Saipan, Precinct 3 (*for himself*, Representatives Roman C. Benavente, Diego V. F. Camacho, Joel C. Camacho, Marissa R. Flores, Joseph A. Flores, Edmund S. Villagomez, and Ralph N. Yumul) on February 14, 2025; subsequently moved and placed on the Bill Calendar. [*Public comments were received in an open and public meeting when the legislation appeared on the House Agenda of 2/14/2025*]

The Chair recognized the Floor Leader.

The Floor Leader moved to suspend Rule IX, Section 8 to place House Bill No. 24-6 on the Bill Calendar.

RULE IX. BILLS, RESOLUTIONS AND AMENDMENTS.

Section 8. Referral of Bills and Resolutions.

(a) Bills and resolutions shall be read by title upon introduction and (except as provided in subsection (b), the Speaker shall refer such measures to an appropriate committee or to more than one committee, jointly or sequentially. The Clerk shall endorse such reference on the measure before duplication and shall enter such reference upon the journal. In the case of error of reference, correction may be made by the House, with debate, immediately after the reading and approval of the Journal, by unanimous consent, or upon motion of either committee claiming jurisdiction or the committee to which the measure has been erroneously referred. (b) The Speaker may place a resolution directly on the Resolution Calendar, rather than refer it to a committee, subject to appeal to the House.

The motion was seconded.

The floor was opened for discussion and there was none. The motion to suspend Rule IX, Section 8 was carried by voice vote. There was no “nay” vote.

The Chair moved down to House Local Bills and recognized Representative Patrick Hofschneider San Nicolas.

House Local Bills:

Representative Patrick Hofschneider San Nicolas officially introduced the following bill:

H. L. B. NO. 24-1: To appropriate \$11,877.00 for the operations of the Mayor Tinian and Aguiguan pursuant to 10 CMC § 2581 and 1 CMC § 1405. **Prefiled by: REP. PATRICK H. SAN NICOLAS** of Tinian, Precinct 6 *(for himself)* on February 14, 2025.

House Legislative Initiatives:

None

Speaker Edmund Joseph Sablan Villagomez: With nothing further under Introduction of Bills, we move down to item number five, Introduction of Resolutions, and I recognize the Chairperson of the Ad Hoc Committee. Recess.

The House recessed at 11:22 a.m.

Recess

The House reconvened at 11:22 a.m.

Speaker Edmund Joseph Sablan Villagomez: Thank you, colleagues. We will now reconvene. Before we recessed, we had just moved to Item No. 5, Introduction of Resolutions. At this time, I recognize the Floor Leader.

INTRODUCTION OF RESOLUTIONS

House Resolutions:

Representative Marissa Renee Flores officially introduced the following resolution:

H. RES. NO. 24-2: To amend the House of Representatives Rules of Procedure that were appended to House Resolution 24-1. **Prefiled by the Ad Hoc Committee on Rules:** Representatives Marissa R. Flores, Blas Jonathan “BJ” T. Attao, and Diego V.F. Camacho on February 14, 2025; subsequently moved and placed on the Resolution Calendar.

Speaker Edmund Joseph Sablan Villagomez: Thank you for the introduction, Floor Leader. House Resolution 24-2 is hereby placed on the Resolution Calendar for action. However, under House Rule XVI, it must lie over for one legislative day. Representative Julie Ogo, you are recognized.

Representative Julie Marie Atalig Ogo officially introduced the following resolution:

H. RES. NO. 24-3: Expressing profound gratitude to Paul Atalig Manglona, his wife, Lydia Manibusan Manglona, and their children, Deanna, Paul Jr., Denn, Pauline, Marla, and Amelia, for unselfishly sharing their husband and father with the people of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and extending best wishes to him and his family on the occasion of his retirement. **Prefiled by: REP. JULIE M. A. OGO** of Rota, Precinct 7 (*for herself, Representatives Roy C.A. Ada, Vincent R.S. Aldan, Daniel I. Aquino Jr., Blas Jonathan “BJ” T. Attao, Roman C. Benavente, Angelo A. Camacho, Diego V. F. Camacho, Joel C. Camacho, Joseph A. Flores, Marissa R. Flores, Malcolm J. Omar, Raymond U. Palacios, Patrick H. San Nicolas, Edmund S. Villagomez, Denita Kaipat Yangetmai, and Ralph N. Yumul*) on February 14, 2025; subsequently moved and placed on the Resolution Calendar.

The Chair placed House Resolution No. 24-3 on the resolution calendar, and recognized the Floor Leader.

Representative Marissa Renee Flores officially introduced the following resolution:

H. RES. NO. 24-4: Objecting to the acquittal of Shayne Blanco Villanueva on charges of legislative contempt; urging the CNMI Attorney General and the U.S. Attorney to investigate and prosecute any and all CNMI and federal crimes related to the BOOST program; condemning the demonstrated bias against CNMI Assistant Attorney General James Kingman; denouncing the denial of due process with respect to the Commonwealth's ability to effectively prosecute its case; and urging the Judiciary and the CNMI Bar Association to review and investigate Judge Kenneth L. Govendo's in-court comments made in Criminal Case No. 24-0028, as said comments undermine public confidence in the judiciary's impartiality and reflect a personal bias that was unbecoming of a member of the CNMI Judiciary. **Prefiled by: REP. MARISSA R. FLORES** of Saipan, Precinct 3 (*for herself, Representatives Vincent R. Aldan, Blas Jonathan “BJ” T. Attao, Roman C. Benavente, Joseph A. Flores, Julie M. A. Ogo, Malcolm J. Omar, Raymond U. Palacios, Elias J.M. Rangamar, Edmund S. Villagomez, Denita Kaipat Yangetmai, and Ralph N. Yumul*) on February 14, 2025; subsequently moved and placed on the Resolution Calendar.

The Chair placed House Resolution No. 24-4 on the Resolution Calendar.

There being none under House Joint Resolutions, the Chair recognized Representative Roy Christopher Aldan Ada under House Commemorative Resolutions.

House Joint Resolutions:

None

House Commemorative Resolutions:

Representative Roy Christopher Aldan Ada officially introduced the following resolution:

C. RES. NO. 24-1: To recognize and commend Dr. David S. Grauman and Dr. Elizabeth A. Kohnen for their exemplary service and selfless dedication to the Commonwealth Healthcare Corporation in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. **Prefiled by: REP. ROY C. A. ADA** of Saipan, Precinct 1 (for himself, Representatives Blas Jonathan “BJ” T. Attao, Roman C. Benavente, Angelo A. Camacho, Diego V. F. Camacho, Joel C. Camacho, Joseph A. Flores, Marissa R. Flores, Malcolm J. Omar, Raymond U. Palacios, and Elias J.M. Rangamar, Vincent R.S. Aldan, Daniel I. Aquino Jr., Roman C. Benavente, Julie M. A. Ogo, Patrick H. San Nicolas, Edmund S. Villagomez, Denita Kaipat Yangetmai, and Ralph N. Yumul) on February 14, 2025; subsequently moved and placed on the Resolution Calendar.

Commemorative Resolution No. 24-1 was introduced by the Committee of the Whole; and the Chair subsequently placed the resolution on the Resolution Calendar.

The Chair moved down to House Concurrent Resolution and recognized Representative Blas Jonathan “BJ” Tenorio Attao.

House Concurrent Resolutions:

Representative Blas Jonathan “BJ” Tenorio Attao officially introduced the following resolution:

H. C. R. NO. 24-1: To approve revenues and resources of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, as identified pursuant to Article III, Section 9(a) of the Constitution, as amended, and 1 CMC, Division 7, for Fiscal Year 2025, beginning October 1, 2024, and ending on September 30, 2025. Introduced by **REP. BLAS JONATHAN “BJ” T. ATTAO** of Saipan, Precinct 3 (for himself, Representatives Joel C. Camacho, Roy C.A. Ada, Vincent R.S. Aldan, Daniel I. Aquino Jr., Roman C. Benavente, Angelo A. Camacho, Diego V. F. Camacho, Joseph A. Flores, Marissa R. Flores, Thomas J. DiC. Manglona, Julie M. A. Ogo, Malcolm J. Omar, Raymond U. Palacios, Patrick H. San Nicolas, Edmund S.

Villagomez, Denita Kaipat Yangetmai, and Ralph N. Yumul) on February 14, 2025; subsequently moved and placed on the Resolution Calendar.

House Concurrent Resolution No. 24-1 was introduced by the Committee of the Whole and was placed on the Resolution Calendar.

Speaker Edmund Joseph Sablan Villagomez: Colleagues, due to the urgency of the matter regarding the revised budget, I would like to skip the other items of the agenda and go directly to the resolution calendar to first act on House Concurrent Resolution 24-1, and afterwards we will proceed to the Bill Calendar to act on House Bill 24-6. And after that, we will go back and proceed with the agenda. Everyone good with that?

There was no objections on the floor, the House then proceeded to the Resolution Calendar and recognized the Floor Leader.

RESOLUTION CALENDAR

Representative Marissa Renee Flores moved for the adoption of H. C. R. No. 24-1:

H. C. R. NO. 24-1: To approve revenues and resources of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, as identified pursuant to Article III, Section 9(a) of the Constitution, as amended, and 1 CMC, Division 7, for Fiscal Year 2025, beginning October 1, 2024, and ending on September 30, 2025. Introduced by **REP. BLAS JONATHAN “BJ” T. ATTAO** of Saipan, Precinct 3 (*for himself, Representatives Joel C. Camacho, Roy C.A. Ada, Vincent R.S. Aldan, Daniel I. Aquino Jr., Roman C. Benavente, Angelo A. Camacho, Diego V. F. Camacho, Joseph A. Flores, Marissa R. Flores, Thomas J. Dlc. Manglona, Julie M. A. Ogo, Malcolm J. Omar, Raymond U. Palacios, Patrick H. San Nicolas, Edmund S. Villagomez, Denita Kaipat Yangetmai, and Ralph N. Yumul*) on February 14, 2025; subsequently moved and placed on the Resolution Calendar.

The motion was seconded; the Chair opened the floor for discussion. There being no discussion on the floor, the Chair recognized the Clerk to call the roll for the adoption of H. C. R. No. 24-1 with the following results:

Representative Roy Christopher A. Ada	Yes
Representative Vincent Raymond Aldan	Yes
Representative Daniel Iwashita Aquino Jr.	Yes
Representative Blas Jonathan “BJ” Tenorio Attao	Yes
Representative Roman Cepeda Benavente	Yes
Representative Angelo Atalig Camacho	Yes
Representative Diego Vincent Fejeran Camacho	Yes
Representative Joel Castro Camacho	Yes
Representative Joseph Arriola Flores	Yes
Representative Marissa Renee Flores	Yes
Representative Thomas John Dela Cruz Manglona	Absent (Excused)

Representative Julie Marie Atalig Ogo	Yes
Representative Malcolm Jason Omar	Yes
Representative Raymond Ulloa Palacios	Yes
Representative Elias Jerome Malite Rangamar	Absent (Excused)
Representative John Paul Palacios Sablan	Absent (Excused)
Representative Patrick Hofschneider San Nicolas	Yes
Representative Edmund Joseph Sablan Villagomez	Yes
Representative Denita Kaipat Yangetmai	Yes
Representative Ralph Naraja Yumul	Yes

Clerk Linda Muña: Mr. Speaker, all seventeen members present voted “yes.”

Speaker Edmund Joseph Sablan Villagomez: Thank you, Clerk. With all seventeen members present voting “yes,” House Concurrent Resolution 24-1 is hereby adopted. And with that, we move down to item number sixteen. I would like to recognize the Floor Leader.

BILL CALENDAR

The Floor Leader moved to suspend Rule VII, Section 9 and Rule IX, Sections 9 and 10.

The motion was seconded.

Speaker Edmund Joseph Sablan Villagomez: Thank you, Floor Leader. The Floor Leader has moved to suspend Rule 7, Section 9, and Rule 9, Sections 9 and 10, and the motion has been seconded. Are there any questions or comments? Representative San Nicolas, I see your hand raised. This pertains to the motion for suspension of the rules. I recognize you at this time. We will take a brief recess.

The House recessed at 11:31 a.m.

Recess

The House reconvened at 11:32 a.m.

Speaker Edmund Joseph Sablan Villagomez: Prior to our recess, the Floor Leader moved to suspend Rule 7, Section 9, and Rule 9, Sections 9 and 10, and that motion was seconded. The floor remains open for discussion. Are there any further discussions?

Members of the House voiced “ready.”

The motion to suspend Rule VII, Section 9 and Rule IX, Section 9 and 10 was carried by voice vote. There was no “nay” vote, and the Chair recognized the Floor Leader.

The Floor Leader moved for the passage of First and Final Reading H. B. No. 24-6:

H. B. NO. 24-6: A Bill for an Act to amend the Appropriations and Budget Authority Act of Fiscal Year 2025, Public Law 23-26, to appropriate the balance of funds allocated for the Minimum Annual Payment to the Settlement Fund and to return government employees subject to austerity to 100% work hours; and for other purposes.

The motion was seconded; the Chair called for recess.

The House recessed at 11:33 a.m.

Recess

The House reconvened at 11:36 a.m.

Speaker Edmund Joseph Sablan Villagomez: We are now back in session. Thank you, colleagues. Before we recessed, the floor was open for discussion on the motion to pass House Bill 24-6. The floor is open for discussion. Representative Patrick San Nicolas, you are recognized.

Representative Patrick San Nicolas: Mr. Speaker and colleagues, I would like to offer an amendment to House Bill 24-6, on page 8, line 10, to read as follows:

“Of the funds appropriated under ORG 11881100, \$300,000 shall be reserved for travel and lodging accommodations within the CNMI for students participating in the PSS interscholastic sports leagues and academic competitions for School Year 2024–2025. Provided further, the expenditure authority shall submit a detailed expense report, in writing, to the Presiding Officers of the Legislature, the Chairperson of the House Standing Committee on Ways and Means, and the Chairperson of the Senate Standing Committee on Fiscal Affairs, within 30 days after the end of Fiscal Year 2025.”

Mr. Speaker, I move for the adoption of this amendment, if there is no objection.

Speaker Edmund Joseph Sablan Villagomez: Thank you, Representative San Nicolas. A floor amendment has been offered by Representative San Nicolas, in the form of a House Draft 1 and it has been seconded. Any discussions? I recognize Representative Yumul.

Representative Ralph Naraja Yumul: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I support the amendment. However, during a recent meeting with the Public School System (PSS) Commissioner a couple of days ago, the amount of **\$600,000** was supposed to be returned back. Originally, **\$600,000** was originally given to NMC, now it is **\$300,000**. Where did over **\$325,000** go?

Speaker Edmund Joseph Sablan Villagomez: Thank you, Representative Yumul. I recognize Representative Attao.

Representative Blas Jonathan “BJ” Tenorio Attao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you for that question, Representative Yumul. That three hundred—I think it is **\$350,000** that is left, right? It will revert back to PSS, and then these **\$300,000** does not go anywhere; it will stay within PSS. Provided that the interscholastic sports leagues and academic competitions that happened between the islands when there is travel needed and the lodging for the students, these **\$300,000** will be utilized for that. The remaining **\$350,000** will go to PSS for its functions.

Representative Ralph Naraja Yumul: Thank you, Chairman Attao. Does that mean that the—well, because, as per our meeting, PSS has appropriated those funds to fund certain, I believe, if I am not mistaken, operations or personnel. So, that would affect their current fiscal year budget if this one is going to be strictly for travel for sports and lodging. That is my only concern, Chairman. I have no objection to Representative San Nicolas’ amendment.

Representative Blas Jonathan “BJ” Tenorio Attao: Unless PSS has remitted some of those **\$650,000** to NMC already, then there is an issue there. But my understanding is that there is no money that has been remitted to NMC yet. Therefore, the **\$650,000** is still whole at PSS. What we are saying here is that out of the **\$650,000** that are going to PSS, **\$300,000** will be utilized for the remaining of FY 2024-2025 for these competitions. Because these are competitions created by PSS; should be obligated by PSS. We have a lot of our Delegation, whether it is the First, Second, or Third Senatorial District, that have to fork out through their local appropriations to address programs that were created at PSS. Therefore, PSS should be forking out some of this money and obligating some of their funds towards these types of programs that they are creating themselves. The **\$350,000** that is open, that will go back to their general obligations. They can use that as they so need it. But as for now, **\$300,000** will be utilized for the remainder of the fiscal year as per this amendment. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker Edmund Joseph Sablan Villagomez: Thank you, Representative Attao. I recognize Representative Aquino.

Representative Daniel Iwashita Aquino, Jr.: Thank you, Speaker. You know, I have no objections. But I just also like to state for the record, and to the general public, that as a former athlete myself, I like to see sports organizations like schools and families come collectively together to do individual private fundraising. You know, rather than to just dish out a big chunk of change, because I have seen schools right now. They are doing car washes right at Shell gas stations. And we already know the season for sports. They got ample time to start fundraising, where they can minimize some of the overall costs associated with the expense for these sports games. That is all. Thank you.

Speaker Edmund Joseph Sablan Villagomez: Thank you, Representative Aquino. I recognize Representative Yangetmai.

Representative Denita Kaipat Yangetmai: I would like to include cultural competitions because that is — They are doing these fundraisers for their cultural competition. This one is within the CNMI, so I think they also go down to Rota and Tinian. So, I would like to ask if that can be included in this one. Not only the sports and academics. For cultural preservation. Thank you.

Speaker Edmund Joseph Sablan Villagomez: Thank you, Representative Yangetmai. I recognize Representative Attao under point of clarification.

Representative Blas Jonathan “BJ” Tenorio Attao: Just a point of clarification in regards to the culture, if it is a PSS program, then we can include it. And that should not be a problem. But if it is outside a PSS program, this is — We are trying to get the money back to PSS, that **\$650,000**. So if it is a PSS program, maybe you can offer a subsidiary motion to include it in this amendment, and then we can just move on from there.

Members of the House voiced “no objection.”

Speaker Edmund Joseph Sablan Villagomez: Representative San Nicolas, did you have something to say?

Representative Patrick Hofschneider San Nicolas: I yield my time.

Speaker Edmund Joseph Sablan Villagomez: Okay, thank you. I recognize Representative Benavente.

Representative Roman Cepeda Benavente: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With regards to the meeting a few days ago with the commissioner, we have highlighted that issue, with regards to the community and cultural type of effort within the school system. And he is working, based on our conversation, he was working on it to try to make it as flexible as possible that he could do. And then, in time, he will—maybe in a few weeks from now—he will do a presentation for the ~~whole~~ entire legislature in the house. To give us the complete highlights of everything, what is going on in PSS. That is all. Thank you.

Speaker Edmund Joseph Sablan Villagomez: Thank you, Representative Benavente. I recognize Representative Yangetmai.

Representative Denita Kaipat Yangetmai: Sorry. Was I supposed to offer a substitute for this?

Speaker Edmund Joseph Sablan Villagomez: Yes, let us take a quick recess.

The House recessed at 11:44 a.m.

Recess

The House reconvened at 11:49 a.m.

Speaker Edmund Joseph Sablan Villagomez: Before we went on recess, we were still under discussion on the amendment offered by Representative Patrick San Nicolas, and Representative Yangetmai has the floor. Representative Yangetmai, you are recognized.

Representative Denita Kaipat Yangetmai: Thank you, Speaker. I would like to offer a subsidiary motion to include after the word “leagues” on the floor amendment. After the word “leagues,” a

comma, then “cultural competitions,” a comma, and then the rest and “academic competitions.” Thank you.

Speaker Edmund Joseph Sablan Villagomez: Thank you. A subsidiary motion has been offered by Representative Yangetmai, and it has been seconded. Any discussions on the floor?

Several members voiced ready; there being no further discussion on subsidiary motion; the motion was carried by voice vote; there were no “nay” votes.

Speaker Edmund Joseph Sablan Villagomez: We now move back to the motion of the floor amendment offered by Representative San Nicolas. Are there any discussion? I recognize the Floor Leader.

Floor Leader Marissa Renee Flores: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While I commend the amendments made by our representative from Tinian and the inclusion of language made by the representative from precinct three, I would be remiss to say that I wish these budgets could be piecemeal, but they cannot. So, I want to thank those responsible for crafting this piece. We know that the governor needs this so that he can bring those in the executive branch up to one hundred hours and remove the austerity that was in place last fiscal year. So thank you, Representative San Nicolas. I love having my speaker around because he keeps me in check here. So it is a very commendable amendment. Yes, students first is always important. And thank you, Representative Denita, for including native and cultural practices and competitions. Our students are very much involved and love their culture. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I yield.

Speaker Edmund Joseph Sablan Villagomez: Thank you, Floor Leader. Floor is still open for discussions. Ready?

Several members voiced ready; there being no discussion on the floor amendment offered by Representative San Nicolas; the motion was carried by voice vote; there was no “nay” votes.

Speaker Edmund Joseph Sablan Villagomez: We now move back to the main motion. The motion to pass House Bill 24-6, HD1. The floor is still open for discussion. I recognize the Floor Leader.

Floor Leader Marissa Renee Flores: This is the right time for me to make my comments. And I will go back again. I do know, and the sentiment of the Twenty-Fourth Legislature is that this is time sensitive and that the governor needs this revised budget passed to bring back the executive branch to full eighty-hours. Removing austerity and full one hundred “percent” work hours. I would like to commend those who negotiated this budget proposal. It is not an easy job. I would like to, in light of the Chairman, Representative Sablan, who is off-island for family reasons, I would like to thank the Vice Chairman for strongly advocating for negotiating terms in this bicameral legislature. Although I have reservations, it is unfortunate that I cannot vote on this budget in piece and pieces. But I need to make it very clear that we cannot hold anyone hostage because of this. And this must be passed for its urgency for all of us. However, I would like to make it clear that the lines of communication should always be open in all branches. So, I would hope that the executive branch would be more in tune to keeping us abreast on such actions before the fact. And I say that in light of his authority to exercise his executive orders. But when there is

an imbalance, there is an injustice. So, with that said, I would like to thank Representative Attao for once again negotiating the bill for all people. Regardless of the sacrifices that many of us will be making, especially those that are listed. Thank you, Representative Attao, for making yourself, again, available to negotiate these terms. As I mentioned to you, it is unfortunate that we cannot pass this in piecemeal. But today we have to vote because of its urgency for all people. Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker Edmund Joseph Sablan Villagomez: Thank you, Floor Leader. The floor is still open for discussion. I recognize Representative Benavente.

Representative Roman Cepeda Benavente: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can I speak in Chamorro?

Speaker Edmund Joseph Sablan Villagomez: Yes.

Representative Roman Cepeda Benavente: Ok. *Ti klaru yu lokkue nu este na bill. Honestly, ti klaru yu, sa hafa? Anai ma chogui este na bill ginen i Senate magi, mana fan dañá todo, ma lump halom ya ti sina ta bokbok huyong hafa etyi malago-hit para ta supota yan ti malago-hit para ta supota. Lao, very unfortunate sa estague na bill kumo tita chogui lokkue nai, kumo tita chogui man mama desi siempre i man empleao siha, empleao i gobietno ni man ma cho'cho'cho. Ya dinanche ha si Representative BJ, i yona anai ha sangan earlier gi halom naman mama desi empleao ni man ma cho'cho'cho sa siempre tumunok papa suetdo-niha gi 72 hours, manma ma'dedesi siha i familia, tododo nai ya meggai empleao gobietno manma cho'cho'cho para gobietnamento. Fuera di eano lokkue, fuera di enao nai debidi ta atan klaru mano nai gaige maas i pressure ya dinanche lokkue si Representative Marissa Flores ni hafa ha sangan. Sa debi lokkue i Senate hu komprendi ya una guaha etyu balance ya instead of ta uyu, siña ta floor amendment yanggen siña lao mana fan dañá este todo gi gurupu ya mana halom. Pues estague pago i satbasiñ-ña este na bill, taya para uma susedi nu este, ta sota ya ta pasa guini sa ti baihu sakrifisiu etyo siha na taotao i manma cho'cho'cho', ni manma cho'cho'cho para gobietno. Lao, ta sota ya i gobietno hu fatinas decision-ña kao mano para hu veto na provision pat hafa parahu chogui. Enao ha siña pago ta chogui. Pues, enao ha, Mr. Speaker. Lao baihu register halom i siniente-ku na ti klaru este na bill i ma chogui-ña sa mana fan dana todo manma mix kintodo basula mana fan halom. Si yu'us ma'ase.*

Speaker Edmund Joseph Sablan Villagomez: *Si yu'us ma'asi*, Representative Benavente. Floor is still open for discussion. I recognize Representative Aquino.

Representative Daniel Iwashita Aquino, Jr.: I, too, would like to share the same sentiment with Representative Flores and Representative Benavente, that a lot of these things for me are not clear. Right now, I just look at the overall picture of the government. I look at the legislative body as a separate but equal branch. And, honestly, when I look, I hear the governor just does remote work. He approves for remote work for somebody at the military affairs to go to Guam and do remote work there. I see people running around. And it is like the concerns are always brought here about the lack of money, but then I see the waste that is out there. The people see it. So, for me, I just do not know what exactly this whole thing is about. I am only new; I just came in. But I can tell you right now that the people out there are pretty pissed off. And I agree— there needs to be more transparency as to who, what, when, where, and why. The five W's. Who is it going to benefit? Why is it going to be done? I just do not want something that is going to be rammed here with

urgency. I think there needs to be more discussions; we need to be more involved. Minorities, and these committees, also, I attended, and I just listened. They increased the number of members in the committees for like Ways and Means; there are fifteen, but the majority that are in there, there is not an equal representation, I think. We have our opinions, also. I just like to see more transparency right now from the executive branch and everybody involved. Thank you.

Speaker Edmund Joseph Sablan Villagomez: Thank you, Representative Aquino. Any further discussion? I recognize Representative Vincent S. Aldan.

Representative Vincent Raymond Aldan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and colleagues. Even I had doubts on getting this thing through. But at the end of the day, sacrifices have to be made. You know, wish on one hand and crap in the other, and then see which one you are going to get first. But at the end of the day, that is where I am begging, and I am asking for the public to educate themselves on understanding on why we need to pass this bill. When people are out there talking about a subject that they do not understand, it makes us look like we are the bad guys. And be it may, that the sacrifices that have to be made, and the horse pill that we were forced to swallow because someone is playing politics. That is the thing that we, as legislators and representatives, have to do. As much as we do not want to do it, because it is not benefitting the right agencies or the right people. We have to swallow horse pills for the betterment of the whole. And that is where the public has to educate themselves so they can understand what we go through in order to fix the whole. Yes, we might have one or two bad apples, but that does not mean you are going to throw away the whole bucket. But sooner or later, the public has to make a decision on their representative, who is actually doing something that is right for everyone and not playing politics. And, yes, you will be pissed off when you realize what is in this budget. Believe me, you will. But we have to do it. We have to make amends, and we just had to make a deal. And here we are. As much as I do not want to support it, I have to, because we need it for the whole. But at the same time, educate yourself. Understand what is on the bill and why we had to support it. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker Edmund Joseph Sablan Villagomez: Thank you, Representative Aldan. The floor is still open for discussions.

Members of the House voiced "ready."

There being no further discussions on the floor, the Chair recognized the Clerk to call the roll on the motion of H. B. No. 24-6, HD1 with the following results:

Representative Roy Christopher A. Ada	Yes
Representative Vincent Raymond Aldan	Yes
Representative Daniel Iwashita Aquino Jr.	Yes
Representative Blas Jonathan "BJ" Tenorio Attao	Yes
Representative Roman Cepeda Benavente	Yes
Representative Angelo Atalig Camacho	Yes
Representative Diego Vincent Fejeran Camacho	Yes
Representative Joel Castro Camacho	Yes
Representative Joseph Arriola Flores	Yes

Representative Marissa Renee Flores	No
Representative Thomas John Dela Cruz Manglona	Absent (Excused)
Representative Julie Marie Atalig Ogo	Yes
Representative Malcolm Jason Omar	Yes
Representative Raymond Ulloa Palacios	Yes
Representative Elias Jerome Malite Rangamar	Absent (Excused)
Representative John Paul Palacios Sablan	Absent (Excused)
Representative Patrick Hofschneider San Nicolas	Yes
Representative Edmund Joseph Sablan Villagomez	Yes
Representative Denita Kaipat Yangetmai	Yes
Representative Ralph Naraja Yumul	Yes

Clerk Linda Muña: Mr. Speaker, sixteen members voted “yes,” and one member voted “no.”

Speaker Edmund Joseph Sablan Villagomez: Thank you, Clerk. With sixteen members voting in favor, House Bill 24-6, House Draft 1 hereby passes the House. Thank you, colleagues. We will take a quick recess for the clerk to prepare the transmittal. Quick recess.

The House recessed at 12:06 p.m.

Recess

The House reconvened at 12:33 p.m.

Speaker Edmund Joseph Sablan Villagomez: Before we went on recess, we were under the Bill Calendar, and we passed House Bill 24-6, House Draft 1. And as discussed earlier, after that that we will be moving back to the agenda. So, now we are on item six— messages from the governor. And I recognize the clerk.

MESSAGES FROM THE GOVERNOR

The Clerk announced the following Messages from the Governor:

GOV. COMM. 24-1: (1/10/2025) Informing the House that he signed into law, H. B. No. 23-120, HD1, SS1, SD1, *(To impose a 3% surtax on gross revenues derived from non-residential construction projects that cost three hundred fifty thousand dollars or more.)*. Became **Public Law 23-31** [For info]

GOV. COMM. 24-2: (1/10/2025) Informing the House that he signed into law, S. B. No. 23-54 *(To regulate afok or bweesch (lime) under the Pure Food and Drug Control Act; and for other purposes.)*. Became **Public Law 23-32** [For info]

GOV. COMM. 24-3: (1/10/2025) Informing the House that he signed into law, S. B. No. 23-67, SS1 *(To allow the Health Care Professions Licensing Board to promulgate regulations for the licensing of physicians licensed to practice in a foreign country; and for other purposes.)*. Became **Public Law 23-33** [For info]

GOV. COMM. 24-4: (1/10/2025) Informing the House that he signed into law, S. B. No. 23-17, HD1 (*To amend the provisions pertaining to village and agricultural homesteads in Rota, Tinian and Saipan, and to specifically prohibit the Department of Public Lands from revoking a village or agricultural homestead permit after it is approved and issued because the applicant met all the requirements, including that the applicant has no interest in land at the time the permit was approved; and for other purposes.*). Became **Public Law 23-34** [For info]

GOV. COMM. 24-5: (1/10/2025) Informing the House that he signed into law, H. L. B. No. 23-60, D2, (*To impose an additional 1% tax on the yearly gross revenue of constructions activities in excess of Three Hundred Fifty Thousand Dollars (\$350,000.00).*). Became **Saipan Local Law 23-24** [For info]

GOV. COMM. 24-6: (1/16/2025) Informing the Senate re: Senate Appointment to the CNMI America250 Commission. [For info]

GOV. COMM. 24-7: (1/16/2025) Informing the House re: House Appointment to the CNMI America250 Commission. [For info]

GOV. COMM. 24-8: (1/17/2025) Informing the House re: Completion of Pension Obligation Bond Issuance and Request for Legislative Action on Workforce Hours Restoration and Budget Reallocation. [For info-consideration]

GOV. COMM. 24-9: (1/17/2025) Informing the House that he signed into law, H. L. B. No. 23-71, D1, (*To appropriate \$18,000.00 from revenues collected from poker fees in the Second Senatorial District; and for other purposes.*). Became **Tinian Local Law 23-21** [For info]

GOV. COMM. 24-10: (2/7/2025) Informing the House that he signed into law, H. L. B. No. 23-54, D2, (*To impose a 0.5% ad valorem local excise surtax for the privilege of imposing construction materials from outside the Commonwealth by licensed construction contractors into the Second Senatorial District.*). Became **Tinian Local Law 23-22** [For info]

Speaker Edmund Joseph Sablan Villagomez: Thank you, Clerk. Any discussion under Messages from the Governor? I recognize Representative Patrick San Nicolas.

Representative Patrick Hofschneider San Nicolas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to thank the governor for signing House Local Bill 23-71, D1: To appropriate \$18,000.00 from revenues collected from poker fees in the Second Senatorial District; and for other purposes. And it became Tinian Local Law 23-21. If I may continue, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the Governor, also, for signing House Local Law 23-54, D1: To impose a 0.5% ad valorem local excise surtax for the privilege of imposing construction materials from outside the Commonwealth by licensed construction contractors into the Second Senatorial District. And it became Tinian Local 23-22. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker Edmund Joseph Sablan Villagomez: Thank you, Representative San Nicolas. Any further under Messages from the Governor?

Members of the House voiced “ready.”

Speaker Edmund Joseph Sablan Villagomez: All right, we will move down to item number seven, Senate Communications, and I recognize the Clerk.

SENATE COMMUNICATIONS

The Clerk announced the following Senate Communications:

SEN. COMM. 24-1: (1/13/2025) From the Senate Clerk informing the House that the 24th Senate of the NMCL is duly organized and formally conveys the following officers:

- **President:** Senator Dennis C. Mendiola
- **Vice President:** Senator Karl R. King-Nabors
- **Floor Leader:** Senator Donald M. Manglona
- **Legislative Secretary:** Senator Francisco Q. Cruz [*For info*]

SEN. COMM. 24-2: (1/22/2025) Transmitting a certified copy of Senate Resolution No. 24-01, entitled, “*To adopt the Interim Rules of the Senate for the Twenty-Fourth Northern Marianas Commonwealth Legislature.*”. [*For info*]

Speaker Edmund Joseph Sablan Villagomez: Thank you, Clerk. And with that, I would like to recognize the Floor Leader for the motion to accept Senate Communications. Floor Leader.

The Floor Leader moved to accept Senate Communications 24-1 through 24-2.

The motion was seconded. There being no discussions on the floor, the motion to accept Senate Communications 24-1 through 24-2 was carried by voice vote. There was no “nay” vote.

The Chair moved down to Item 8, House Communications, and recognized the Clerk.

HOUSE COMMUNICATIONS

The Clerk announced the following House Communications:

HSE. COMM. 24-1: (1/14/2025) From Speaker Villagomez, appointing members to the Ad Hoc Committee pursuant to H. Res 24-1. The appointments are as follows:

- **Chair:** Floor Leader Marissa R. Flores
- **Members:**
Vice Speaker Diego Vincent F. Camacho
Representative Blas Jonathan “BJ” T. Attao

HSE. COMM. 24-2: (1/15/2025) From Representative John Paul P. Sablan, WM Chair, appointing members to the House Standing Committee on Ways & Means. [*For info*]

HSE. COMM. 24-3: (1/15/2025) From Representative Julie M. A. Ogo, Tourism Chair, appointing members to the House Standing Committee on Tourism. [*For info*]

HSE. COMM. 24-4: (1/16/2025) From Representative Vincent R. Aldan, PUTC Chair, appointing members to the House Standing Committee on Public Utilities, Transportation, and Communications. [*For info*]

HSE. COMM. 24-5: (1/15/2025) From Representative Ralph N. Yumul, Gaming Chair, appointing members to the House Committee on Gaming. [*For info*]

HSE. COMM. 24-6: (1/15/2025) From Representative Blas Jonathan “BJ” T. Attao, F&FA Chair, appointing members to the House Committee on Federal and Foreign Affairs. [*For info*]

HSE. COMM. 24-7: (1/17/2025) From Representative Denita Kaipat Yangetmai, Cannabis Chair, appointing members to the House Committee on Cannabis. [*For info*]

HSE. COMM. 24-8: (1/21/2024) From Representative Malcolm J. Omar, H&W Chair, appointing members to the House Committee on Health and Welfare. [*For info*]

HSE. COMM. 24-9: (1/21/2025) From Representative John Paul P. Sablan informing the Speaker that he will be out of the Commonwealth on personal matters beginning January 22, 2025—February 22, 2025 and request to be excused from any legislative sessions, committee meetings, or official functions during his absence.

During his absence, he designates Vice Chair Celina R. Babauta, as Acting Chair for the Saipan and Northern Islands Legislative Delegation (SNILD). [*For info*]

HSE. COMM. 24-10: (1/15/2025) From Representative Joel C. Camacho, JGO Chair, appointing members to the House Committee on Judiciary and Governmental Operations. [*For info*]

HSE. COMM. 24-11: (1/24/2025) From Representative Thomas John DLC. Manglona, Commerce Chair, appointing members to the House Standing Committee on Commerce. [*For info*]

HSE. COMM. 24-12: (1/22/2025) From Representative Roman C. Benavente, Education Chair, appointing members to the House Committee on Education. [*For info*]

HSE. COMM. 24-13: (1/27/2025) From Representative Angelo A. Camacho, NR Chair, appointing members to the House Committee on Natural Resources. [*For info*]

HSE. COMM. 24-14: (2/4/2025) From Representative Thomas John DLC. Manglona informing the Speaker that he will be out of the Commonwealth on medical leave beginning February 10, 2025—February 18, 2025 and request to be excused from all legislative sessions, SNILD sessions, committee meetings, and any official functions. [*For info*]

Speaker Edmund Joseph Sablan Villagomez: Thank you, Clerk. Any discussion under House Communication? I recognize Representative Joel Camacho.

Representative Joel Castro Camacho: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to ask for some clarity under House Communication. This is in reference to House Communication 24-10 and the proposed rules for the House. I know that there are pending amendments to raise the level of leadership for each respective committee. I am just wondering if it is possible that we can start appointing now or should we wait until the rules have been adopted by the House?

Speaker Edmund Joseph Sablan Villagomez: Thank you. Thank you. My understanding is, until the rules are officially adopted, that is when you can add the members. As for now, though, if you feel that you should call a committee meeting, you are pretty much ready for business to go ahead and conduct JGO business. And then when the rules pass, that is when you can add more members.

Representative Joel Castro Camacho: Alright. Thank you for that clarification. Thank you.

Speaker Edmund Joseph Sablan Villagomez: Any more discussions under House Communications?

Members of the House voiced “ready.”

Speaker Edmund Joseph Sablan Villagomez: Alright, we now move down to item number nine, Communications from the Judicial Branch, and we have none. Item number ten, Communications from Departments and Agencies, and I recognize the Clerk.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE JUDICIAL BRANCH

None

COMMUNICATIONS FROM DEPARTMENTS & AGENCIES

The Clerk announced the following Communications from Departments & Agencies:

DEPT./AGCY. COMM. 24-1: (1/29/2025) From the Department of Public Lands (DPL), requesting legislative review and approval of a new long-term lease with “Mariana Eland Corporation” for the former Marianas Resort & Spa property in Marpi, Saipan.

Note: See DEPT./AGCY. COMM. 23-21 & DEPT./AGCY. COMM. 24-4 for all supporting documents under the 24th House of Representatives network folder. [For info-consideration] Referred to the House Committee on Natural Resources on February 14, 2025.

DEPT./AGCY. COMM. 24-2: (1/29/2025) From the Commonwealth Ports Authority (CPA) Board of Directors re: *Funding Request for FY 2025—FY 2026*. [For info]

DEPT./AGCY. COMM. 24-3: (1/31/2025) From the Secretary, Department of Finance (DOF) submitting *FY 2024—First Quarter Financial Report ending December 31, 2024*. [For info]

DEPT./AGCY. COMM. 24-4: (2/3/2025) From the Department of Public Lands (DPL) submitting packet for a new lease for Mariana Eland Corporation (“Eland”) for the Legislature’s review and consideration re: *Mariana Eland Corporation New Lease for former Mariana Resort & Spa Property*, in accordance to Article XI, Section 5(d) of the NMI Constitution. [For info-consideration] Referred to the House Committee on Natural Resources on February 14, 2025.

Speaker Edmund Joseph Sablan Villagomez: Thank you, Clerk. Any discussions under Communications from Departments and Agencies?

Members of the House voiced “ready.”

Speaker Edmund Joseph Sablan Villagomez: Alright. For Department & Agency Communication 24-1 will be referred to the committee on Natural Resources. And Department & Agency Communication 24-4 as well will be referred to the committee on Natural Resources. Alright, with nothing further, we move down to Miscellaneous Communications. Clerk.

MISCELLANEOUS COMMUNICATIONS

The Clerk announced the following Miscellaneous Communications:

MISC. COMM. 24-1: (1/13/2025) Congresswoman Kimberlyn King-Hinds, Delegate to the U.S. House of Representatives, congratulates the 24th House of Representatives, NMCL, on its inauguration. She expresses her readiness to collaborate with the Speaker of the House and the designated Committee on Federal Relations. [For info]

MISC. COMM. 24-2: (1/17/2025) From the Chairman of the 24th Saipan and Northern Islands Legislative Delegation (SNILD) informing the House that it is duly organized and formally conveys the following officers:

- **Chairman:** Representative John Paul P. Sablan
- **Vice Chair:** Senator Celina R. Babauta
- **Floor Leader:** Representative Joel C. Camacho

MISC. COMM. 24-3: (1/21/2025) From the Chairman of the 24th Tinian and Aguiguan Legislative Delegation (TALD) informing the House that it is duly organized and formally conveys the following officers:

- **Chairman:** Senator Jude U. Hofschneider
- **Vice Chair:** Senator Francisco Q. Cruz
- **Floor Leader:** Representative Patrick H. San Nicolas
- **Legislative Secretary:** Senator Karl R. King-Nabors

MISC. COMM. 24-4: (1/22/2025) Transmitting a certified copy of TALD Resolution No. 24-01, entitled, *“To adopt the Official Rules of Procedures of the Tinian and Aguiguan Legislative Delegation for the Twenty-Fourth Northern Marianas Commonwealth Legislature.”*. [For info]

MISC. COMM. 24-5: (1/14/2025) From the President of the Senate and Speaker of the House of the Chuuk State Legislature, congratulating the 24th House of Representatives and Senate, NMCL, and its newly elected officers. [For info]

MISC. COMM. 24-6: (1/28/2025) From the Mayor of Saipan, requesting legislative support to reinstate six full-time equivalent (FTE) positions in the Saipan Mayor’s Office. [For info] *Referred to the House Committee on Ways and Means on February 14, 2025.*

MISC. COMM. 24-7: (1/29/2025) From the Chairman of the 24th Rota Legislative Delegation (RLD) informing the House that it is duly organized and formally conveys the following officers:

- **Chairman:** Senator Donald M. Manglona
- **Vice Chair:** Senator Ronnie M. Calvo
- **Floor Leader:** Representative Julie M.A. Ogo
- **Legislative Secretary:** Senator Dennis J. C. Mendiola

MISC. COMM. 24-8: (1/30/2025) Transmitting a certified copy of RLD Resolution No. 24-01, entitled, *“To adopt the Official Rules of Procedures of the Rota Legislative Delegation for the Twenty-Fourth Northern Marianas Commonwealth Legislature.”*. [For info]

MISC. COMM. 24-9: (1/22/2025) Transmitting a certified copy of Youth Congress Resolution No. 19-31, entitled, *“Congratulating Kelly Zheng, Mai Peters, YuLing Chai, and Jedric Aniciete for winning the 2024 Congressional App Challenge and*

representing the Northern Marianas Islands Youth in the 2025 #HOUSEOFCODE event in Washington, D.C.”. [For info]

Speaker Edmund Joseph Sablan Villagomez: Thank you, Clerk. Any discussions under Miscellaneous Communications?

Members of the House voiced “ready.”

Speaker Edmund Joseph Sablan Villagomez: Alright, for Miscellaneous Communication, just for reference purposes, 24-6, we refer to Ways and Means. And with nothing further, we move down to item twelve, Reports of Standing Committee. We have none. Item thirteen, Reports of Special and Conference Committees, we have none. Item fourteen, Unfinished Business, we have none. We now move down to item fifteen, Resolution Calendar, and I recognize the Floor Leader.

REPORTS OF STANDING COMMITTEES

None

REPORTS OF SPECIAL AND CONFERENCE COMMITTEES

None

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

None

RESOLUTION CALENDAR

The Floor Leader moved for the adoption of H. Res. No. 24-3:

H. RES. NO. 24-3: Expressing profound gratitude to Paul Atalig Manglona, his wife, Lydia Manibusan Manglona, and their children, Deanna, Paul Jr., Denn, Pauline, Marla, and Amelia, for unselfishly sharing their husband and father with the people of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and extending best wishes to him and his family on the occasion of his retirement. Prefiled by: REP. JULIE M. A. OGO of Rota, Precinct 7 (*for herself, Representatives Roy C.A. Ada, Vincent R.S. Aldan, Daniel I. Aquino Jr., Blas Jonathan “BJ” T. Attao, Roman C. Benavente, Angelo A. Camacho, Diego V. F. Camacho, Joel C. Camacho, Joseph A. Flores, Marissa R. Flores, Malcolm J. Omar, Raymond U. Palacios, Patrick H. San Nicolas, Edmund S. Villagomez, Denita Kaipat Yangetmai, and Ralph N. Yumul*) on February 14, 2025; subsequently moved and placed on the Resolution Calendar.

The motion was seconded; the Chair opened the floor for discussion. There being no discussion on the floor, the motion to adopt H. Res. No. 24-4 was carried by voice vote. There was no “nay” vote.

The Chair recognized the Floor Leader.

The Floor Leader moved for the adoption of H. Res. No. 24-4:

H. RES. NO. 24-4: Objecting to the acquittal of Shayne Blanco Villanueva on charges of legislative contempt; urging the CNMI Attorney General and the U.S. Attorney to investigate and prosecute any and all CNMI and federal crimes related to the BOOST program; condemning the demonstrated bias against CNMI Assistant Attorney General James Kingman; denouncing the denial of due process with respect to the Commonwealth's ability to effectively prosecute its case; and urging the Judiciary and the CNMI Bar Association to review and investigate Judge Kenneth L. Govendo's in-court comments made in Criminal Case No. 24-0028, as said comments undermine public confidence in the judiciary's impartiality and reflect a personal bias that was unbecoming of a member of the CNMI Judiciary. Prefiled by: REP. MARISSA R. FLORES of Saipan, Precinct 3 (*for herself*, Representatives Vincent R. Aldan, Blas Jonathan “BJ” T. Attao, Roman C. Benavente, Joseph A. Flores, Julie M. A. Ogo, Malcolm J. Omar, Raymond U. Palacios, Elias J.M. Rangamar, Edmund S. Villagomez, Denita Kaipat Yangetmai, and Ralph N. Yumul) on February 14, 2025; subsequently moved and placed on the Resolution Calendar.

The motion was seconded; the Chair opened the floor for discussion and recognized Representative Roy Christopher A. Ada.

Representative Roy Christopher Aldan Ada: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just stating my opinion for the record, I am opposing House Resolution 24-4. I think that the legislative body had already exercised their right to conduct the investigation and move forward with the case against Shane Villanueva of legislative contempt. It was already brought before the court and was heard. And, in that case, I feel that it is not in the public interest at this time for such actions and resources to be given for this resolution. I know that these are statements by the body, the investigating committee in the legislature, that had gone through the proceedings, and so be it. But I feel that the case has already been heard. The judge had rendered a decision, and I feel like we should respect the Judicial Branch's decision on the matter. So for that, I would like to state for the record that I would be opposing and voting nay on this House Resolution. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker Edmund Joseph Sablan Villagomez: Thank you, Representative Roy Ada. I recognize Representative Aquino.

Representative Daniel Iwashita Aquino, Jr.: Thank you, Speaker. I, too, will be voting nay on this. I share my colleagues' sentiments that while this thing happened prior to me coming on board, the court has already adjudicated this thing. It is up to the AG now what they want to do. But I feel that much money, time, and exposure have been spent on this particular case. But if we are going

to go forward with everything that happens out of the court, I think we are going to be wasting a lot of time. I respect Representative Flores's resolution and everyone that supported it. However, I think that, again, I go back to the theory that we have three separate but equal branches. And there are other people that are in that boosting, but we are singling out main people for this program. If we are going after everybody, then the AG or everybody needs to go. Everyone, collectively as a whole. Rather than select individuals. It has already been more than two years. There have been no convictions to date; there has been a lot of money spent, I am pretty sure, from the AG's side on this thing. We are talking about the budget; we are talking about the shortfall. At what point, as stewards of the public, are we going to keep going into this thing? For every case, are we going to keep on doing this? Are we going to keep investing time, money, and effort to try to get a conviction? So when does it end? I just think that we have other things to focus on, like how to generate revenue. And I think that courts have already spoken. And I respect the court's decision. Thank you.

Speaker Edmund Joseph Sablan Villagomez: Thank you, Representative Aquino. I recognize Representative Yumul.

Representative Ralph Naraja Yumul: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am in support of the resolution. It is true, we are equal branches, but the courts also have to determine; I know they made a decision. We respect that, and that is final. But the court also has to define the difference between contempt of court versus contempt of legislature. So, what the court did to the committee is it tied our hands. So that means we cannot investigate anymore because everyone has seen what happened. And that is not fair. It is equal branches. They should respect our rules. With regards to the acquittal, that is all up to the judge, and he made his ruling on that. We respect that. But I do not believe they went over in detail as to what is contempt of that legislature, and that is what needs to be defined. It is very important because it is interfering with our powers. Powers to investigate. So, if we do plan to investigate anyone, they are already going to say no. I do not think that is fair. They need to go back, and that is why I am supporting this resolution.

Speaker Edmund Joseph Sablan Villagomez: Thank you, Representative Yumul. The floor is still open for discussion. I recognize Representative Attao.

Representative Blas Jonathan "BJ" Tenorio Attao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, like Representative Yumul, am in support of this resolution. Because the old issue here is the contempt of the legislative process, and I believe that the decision was in those proceedings in the Judicial Branch. Although I respect the decision of Judge Govendo, during that hearing, it seemed more like a criminal case in regards to stealing. Shane Villanueva was not handpicked out of the individuals. Shane Villanueva's name popped up towards the end of the original investigation in the Twenty-Second Legislature. That is the reason why Shane Villanueva was called in. And his name popped up from Bank of Saipan as the person reviewing the Fisheries, Farmers, Ranchers Program. It was not that Shane Villanueva was handpicked. There is a list of individuals that were going to be brought in and questioned regarding the BOOST Program. I know one of the arguments in court was that we cannot appropriate federal or ARPA monies. But there is legislation that was produced to allow the legislative body to be a part of that appropriate authority. But what they did not answer in that specific question is if we misspent federal money at the end of the day, it is going to be the central government that is going to have to pay back those monies to the federal government. And

this body is going to be obligated to find the money to pay back the federal government. So, if you are going to trip our authority in regards to contempt, and Representative Yumul is right, any future investigation when they are mispending funds or there is some type of corruption within the government, nobody is going to respect the legislative branch and its authority to investigate how the monies are being spent. There is not going to be a true transparency. We might as well call ourselves just a body because we are not going to be a true, equal branch of any part of the government. This decision, in my opinion, kind of strips our authority in regards to pursuing a contempt case in the legislative process. So if the title reflects that it is an individual or a specific judge, it is not. It is really about our authority in investigating individuals or entities within our government and how they spend money. If we do not at least hold that part on our end, then we might as well not be introducing legislation or even the budget for that matter. Why do we not just give it to the administration? Let them decide how the money is going to be spent and move on. Skip this branch of government because we seem to not exist with any authority. So, this resolution is, at the very least, is going to show that this branch is doing something to make sure that our abilities to investigate and our Speaker's authority through our rules to push for a contempt of an investigative body within this branch are there. It is not acceptable outside of the legislative branch. Unfortunately, we are not going to be the ones that are going to hear their case. We investigate, we hold them in contempt, we send it to the AG's office, and then it goes out to the court system. If there is anything, it is this body's authority to investigate and hold anybody in contempt that has to go through all the other branches of government, just to get to that point. So, what authority do we have as a body if the decision was rendered, which kind of strips our authority, our ability to hold people in contempt. They are not going to respect this body. There is not going to be any belief in strength. Like Representative Yumul said, people are not going to come up here and enter or come in here to answer questions from this body. Because now it seems like we are not holding any water. But I think it needs to be clear of the decision made by courts of what is the authority of a legislative contempt and a judicial contempt. Because we were not investigating Shane Villanueva or any of the individuals that were a part of the BOOST Program. We were investigating the BOOST Program. Not the individual. And it seemed that that case was rendered—a decision was based on an individual. It was not the individual. The overall picture is about the BOOST case, and I think that we should support this resolution for the fact that there is respect for this body. And if the members are not going to—I respect your vote on the resolution, but you are also giving up on the authority of this body to be part of the equal branch of the government of the CNMI. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker Edmund Joseph Sablan Villagomez: Thank you, Representative Attao. Floor is still open. Recognize Representative Patrick San Nicolas.

Representative Patrick Hofschneider San Nicolas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is—I respect our good Floor Leader's resolution on this. But for me, this is an intrusion of the executive authority urging the CNMI Attorney General to investigate the former BOOST Program, implies to a directive to the Executive Branch. Which must remain free to exercise his prosecutorial discretion without legislative interference. And the other thing is, the interference with the judicial independence caused to investigate a city judge's comments during a trial undermines judicial independence. Judges must be free. Judges must be free to perform their duties without undue influence from the Legislative Branch. This is equal power of equal branches in the government.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I am not voting for this resolution. With that, thank you, Mr. Speaker. With that, I yield.

Speaker Edmund Joseph Sablan Villagomez: Thank you, Representative San Nicolas. Representative Aquino, you rose your hand? Representative Aldan.

Representative Vincent Raymond Aldan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I support the resolution. And just to make it clear, no? Yes, we are all equal branches of government. But the legislature, under the constitution, has the power to conduct oversight. Okay. We have the power of the purse to control that purse to make sure that it does not get squandered, all right? Now, we also have the power to oversight, to make sure that we can investigate those funds, to make sure that it is going to where the purpose of those funds was collected to begin with. Now, let me just read something: Lawmakers have a unique power and responsibility to conduct legislative oversight. Our constitutional system grants Congress and the fifty state legislatures a unique power to conduct far-reaching public investigations into important issues and, when necessary, to compel people to share documents and provide testimonies. Lawmakers examine a sweeping array of societal concerns—which is, the majority of the time, always about the money—existing government programs—BOOST—private sector abuse—whoever it is that was contracted to do that is a private sector, right—disasters, crises, and scandals; armed with facts gained from legislative oversight, they can establish new or improve existing government programs, better allocate taxpayer dollars, address abuses, and provide needed checks and balances across the government. That is the purpose of oversight. It has nothing to do because what one individual did with that taxpayer money. And it is our job, as lawmakers, to conduct oversight. Whether we like it or not. It is not the individual. It is about where the taxpayer dollars are being spent and how they are being spent. And for somebody to say that, “Oh no, you should not...” No, we have every right. We have every right to question everybody. We have every right to question the governor. We have the right to question the Judiciary Branch. That is the power of being in the legislature. So, I do support this resolution. And I highly recommend—I am not a constitutional lawyer by any means, but I do read my responsibilities. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker Edmund Joseph Sablan Villagomez: Thank you, Representative Aldan. Representative Aquino.

Representative Daniel Iwashita Aquino, Jr.: Thank you for your comments. But like I said, everyone is afforded their Fifth Amendment right. That is their constitutional right—whether they want to answer your questions or whether they do not want to answer your questions. That is their right. From here, it went to the court. The court adjudicated. This is no different than what happened in the United States with those people that were sent to prison for not answering the questions while they pled their fifth amendment right. It is no different. Peter Navarro went to jail. There are others that went to jail. But if a person exercises a fifth amendment, that is his God-given right. That is what I am saying. It has been adjudicated. The court already gave their own ruling. It is time for us to respect that ruling. If the AG is going to invest to pursue this, then I do not think he needs us to do it. The AG has common sense. If he does not accept the loss, then he is going to file an appeal, or he is going to go after or refer to the FBI. But I think as far as our job, it has already been done. We have already rendered our jobs. And the people cannot say that we neglected to do our job. We have respected taxpayer funds; this is federal money. And if we are

going to look at other things, then we should also look at every single thing where the federal monies that are given to local government programs are being spent. I agree with Congressman Aldan. We should look at and have oversight of every little thing. The fifty-five people that went to Hawaii, you know. No one here—I was from the executive branch. I know what was being said. Fifty-five people went under the grants funding indirect costs. The Governor made it clear, when you guys come back, you have to write grants. Did we have oversight? How many people wrote grants? How much was spent? It was over two hundred thousand. What was benefited out of it? A free trip. Shopping. Are we going to investigate that? I am just saying. Guys, at what point do we say, “Man. Let us cut our losses. And let us move on to the next one.” But to just criticize the courts, I do not think that is good, and it is not right. Thank you.

Speaker Edmund Joseph Sablan Villagomez: Thank you, Representative Aquino. Floor is still open. Floor Leader.

Floor Leader Marissa Renee Flores: Thank you. You know, this is the beauty of where we sit. We can debate on issues that are critical to the needs of the public. But also critical to our powers as legislative elected officials. For the record, for those who were not there, for those who do not understand why this resolution is now in place—Mr. Speaker, if there is no objection, I would like to play the audio that was actually said in court. So that everybody can hear it for the record.

Speaker Edmund Joseph Sablan Villagomez: I have no objection.

Members of the House voiced “no objection.”

Speaker Edmund Joseph Sablan Villagomez: Proceed.

Floor Leader Marissa Renee Flores: Thank you. And this was the day of the court.

Clerk’s Note: An audio recording pertinent to the discussion was played at this point.

“Judge Kenneth Govendo: Please be seated. Today is January 29th, 2025, and this is the afternoon calendar. And this is Criminal Case 2428, CNMI versus Shane Blanco Villanueva. Alright. Good afternoon, gentlemen. First of all, I would like to compliment both councils. We have had a lot of spirited discussions. Some interesting issues regarding the law, well argued. And, my hat is off to both councils for being up to date on the law and advising the court of what their opinion is of the law. So, my compliments to both of you. To all council. Hoffman versus the United States is a case cited by both councils regarding using the fifth Amendment. In Hoffman versus the United States, the US Supreme Court reversed the defendant’s conviction, holding that under all of the circumstances, the defendant had a reasonable concern that answering the questions might subject him to federal criminal liability. And the defendant was therefore entitled to the protection afforded by the fifth Amendment against testimonial self-incrimination and shall not have been held in contempt for failing to answer. That is the Hoffman case. In this case, Mr. Villanueva appeared in front of the legislature on February 20th thinking that there was going to be a hearing, and it was put off or canceled or put

off to another time. And later that afternoon, he was told by his attorney, for the first time, that he was under criminal investigation. That was his testimony. And I believe him when he said that was his first time that he heard about it. Contrary to what Mr. Kingman said about, he should have known he was being investigated by everyone. I find that to be exceptionally arrogant. Along with a lot of other things that Mr. Kingman testified to. Because of that, his attorney advised him to plead the fifth. And he did. He answered a couple questions and then pled the fifth amendment. His attorney was there with him at that legislative hearing. I find that the defendant was alarmed and scared at the time that he was at that legislative hearing. That he was going to be prosecuted for something. Although his attorney did not tell him what it was going to be, because he probably did not know what is going to be. The way you find out that you are going to be prosecuted is that an information is filed. Just like it was in this case, saying he is being prosecuted for contempt of the legislature. But no information had been filed. So, his attorney could not tell him what it was. But it was enough to frighten Mr. Villanueva to the point where he pled the fifth amendment. Was that reasonable? Well, the prosecution thinks not. He still should have answered some questions. But when somebody is put in that position and they are advised by their attorney that they are going to be prosecuted for something, you cannot blame him for being a little bit scared and weary. And the attorney says, plead the fifth amendment, and that is exactly what Mr. Villanueva did. He exercised the right to plead the fifth amendment. And for that reason, I find Mr. Villanueva not guilty of contempt of the legislature. Now, let me add a few other things to this. Because we have gotten into a lot of things. One of the things the defense was arguing is that the legislature had no right to do any of this stuff that they were doing. Wrong. The legislature had every right to do that. And Mr. Villanueva, no doubt, absolutely no doubt in my mind, that this legislature that is in session right now is going to call you again. I have no doubt about it. None whatsoever. Although I do not have any information, it is just common sense to me. So bring your attorney with you the next time. And when you are asked certain questions, if it is not going to affect your criminal liability, answer the questions. Answer the question. Otherwise, you are going to go through this again, and again, and again. And we have all got better things to do than to have contempt of the legislature charges in this court. This is the first one that I know of. This is the first time, and I have been a judge for almost twenty-two years, that the whole fifth Amendment comes up as a defense. It is just not something that happens all the time, because usually in a criminal case, the defendant is not required to testify. And most criminal defendants do not testify, and the burden is on the prosecution. When there is a jury, the jury is told, just because the defendant did not testify, he exercised his right to not testify. And therefore, you members of the jury cannot hold it against the defendant. So, that is basic criminal law that I think we all should be aware of. I find Mr. Kingman to be a liability to this government. He is arrogant; he thinks he is omnipotent, and maybe it is time for him to head back to Texas. But I want to point out, once again, defense counsel, that if he is subpoenaed in front of the legislature again, there better be more forthcoming from him; otherwise, I do not know if it is going to end up before

me or another judge. But it might not end up in a not guilty verdict. Do you follow what I am saying? All right. ”

Thank you, colleagues, for just allowing that voice audio transcript. Now the case was open to the public. But it was not open to the legislators. We were there. We were told to not be present in there, and we were not sure why. But we respected the court. The question now, as I will say, I am not going to pose a question, but I would have to support this bill. And I would like to thank my colleagues, Representative Yumul and Representative Attao, for eloquently stating the reason and the importance of this resolution. Now, do I think it is okay for a sitting judge to make such slanderous remarks and racist remarks? Absolutely not. And that is part of this resolution. Now just like a budget, right? We cannot vote in part, nor can we vote for this resolution in part. But that does not represent the Judicial Branch. They have canon laws that they are to abide to, and that is one of them. To uphold that—your place and that bench—in a respectful manner that is upholding of such a prestigious seat. So, with that, Mr. Speaker, I hope, and I ask my colleagues to please support this resolution. Because at the end of any day, this will now determine after us, *manaigi hami teniki*, we are all here on borrowed time. So, if anybody out there might have a child that is going to run for political office or what, what is the standard that you are setting for this branch? This branch is just as important and just as responsible. And we have an obligation. So, Representative Attao and Representative Yumul, thank you so much for indulging us, and you are correct. And I stand with you in support of this bill, in support of this resolution. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker Edmund Joseph Sablan Villagomez: Thank you, Floor Leader. Representative Roy Ada.

Representative Roy Christopher A. Ada: Thank you for the audio, Floor Leader. I would like to move to end debate and go on roll call vote. Thank you.

The motion was seconded.

Speaker Edmund Joseph Sablan Villagomez: Alright. Any objection to that?

Several members of the House voiced “no objection.”

Speaker Edmund Joseph Sablan Villagomez: Any further discussions? I will do last two discussions, and then we will go ahead and proceed for the vote. Representative Benavente.

Representative Ralph Naraja Yumul: Point of order. I think we already decided to vote.

Speaker Edmund Joseph Sablan Villagomez: Okay. Yes, you are right. Thank you for that. I apologize, Representative Aquino and Representative Benavente. Yes, we had no objection to end debate. So, debate is closed and we are calling for roll. We had no objection to that. So, Clerk, please call the roll for House Resolution 24-4.

The Clerk called the roll for the motion to adopt H. Res. No. 24-4 with the following results:

Representative Roy Christopher A. Ada

No

Representative Vincent Raymond Aldan	Yes
Representative Daniel Iwashita Aquino Jr.	No
Representative Blas Jonathan “BJ” Tenorio Attao	Yes
Representative Roman Cepeda Benavente	Yes
Representative Angelo Atalig Camacho	Yes
Representative Diego Vincent Fejeran Camacho	Yes
Representative Joel Castro Camacho	Yes
Representative Joseph Arriola Flores	Yes
Representative Marissa Renee Flores	Yes
Representative Thomas John Dela Cruz Manglona	Absent (Excused)
Representative Julie Marie Atalig Ogo	Yes
Representative Malcolm Jason Omar	Yes
Representative Raymond Ulloa Palacios	Yes
Representative Elias Jerome Malite Rangamar	Absent (Excused)
Representative John Paul Palacios Sablan	Absent (Excused)
Representative Patrick Hofschneider San Nicolas	No
Representative Edmund Joseph Sablan Villagomez	Yes
Representative Denita Kaipat Yangetmai	Yes
Representative Ralph Naraja Yumul	Yes

Journal Clerk Brenalyn T. Santos: Mr. Speaker, we have fourteen “yes,” and three “no.”

Speaker Edmund Joseph Sablan Villagomez: Thank you, Clerk. With fourteen in favor, House Resolution 24-4 is hereby adopted. Thank you. Floor Leader.

The Floor Leader moved for the adoption of C. Res. No. 24-1:

C. RES. NO. 24-1: To recognize and commend Dr. David S. Grauman and Dr. Elizabeth A. Kohnen for their exemplary service and selfless dedication to the Commonwealth Healthcare Corporation in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. Prefiled by: REP. ROY C. A. ADA of Saipan, Precinct 1 (*for himself*, Representatives Blas Jonathan “BJ” T. Attao, Roman C. Benavente, Angelo A. Camacho, Diego V. F. Camacho, Joel C. Camacho, Joseph A. Flores, Marissa R. Flores, Malcolm J. Omar, Raymond U. Palacios, and Elias J.M. Rangamar, *Vincent R.S. Aldan, Daniel I. Aquino Jr., Roman C. Benavente, Julie M. A. Ogo, Patrick H. San Nicolas, Edmund S. Villagomez, Denita Kaipat Yangetmai, and Ralph N. Yumul*) on February 14, 2025; subsequently moved and placed on the Resolution Calendar.

The motion was seconded; the Chair opened the floor for discussion. There being no discussion on the floor, the motion to adopt C. Res. No. 24-1 was carried by voice vote. There was no “nay” vote.

The Chair moved down to Item 17, Miscellaneous Business, and recognized Representative Roman Cepeda Benavente.

MISCELLANEOUS BUSINESS

Representative Roman Cepeda Benavente: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With regards to the arguments, well, not the arguments, but the resolution that was highlighted by Ms. Marissa Flores, regards to the court's behavior or the judge's behavior in court, I am not concerned basically of what really transpired. I am just concerned of the powers and duties of the three branches of government. With the executive, judicial, and legislative. What the judicial did was trying to infringe their territory into our turf. And I do not think that is the way it is supposed to be. Because they try to tell us what to do. And that is the main argument over here. It is a matter of protocol; it is a matter of powers and duties; and it is a matter of separation of power. Thank you.

Speaker Edmund Joseph Sablan Villagomez: Thank you, Representative Benavente. Representative Attao.

Representative Blas Jonathan "BJ" Tenorio Attao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First and foremost, I would like to thank the members for supporting the concurrent resolution on the budget bill as it makes its way up to the Senate, and hopefully within the hour or so, it makes its way to the Governor. So, the Governor can have the opportunity to review it and hopefully sign it into law so we can move forward and avert some of the issues that we may be facing, should the budget not have been passed by this body or this branch of the government. And to the members, it is a nice first session. Very healthy debate. And it is great that we are already starting off in a very good mood right now. With this debate, it is important that we do this now. We leave it out here, and we respect each other. So, when we exit this chamber, the respect is still and always will be there for each other. We are going to be going home after this, hopefully, and wishing you and your families a happy Valentine's Day. And to the Bureau family, thank you, guys. Happy Valentine's Day to all of you guys. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker Edmund Joseph Sablan Villagomez: Thank you, Representative Attao. Representative Aquino.

Representative Daniel Iwashita Aquino, Jr.: I just want to thank everyone also. This was my first actual experience, and it was a lesson learned. I just wanted to add that the penalty for contempt of the legislature is five hundred dollars and six months in jail. Or six months in jail. That is for our legal counsel. So five hundred dollars or six months in jail. Second, to answer the question of why the members of the legislature were not allowed in, the reason was because you guys may be called in as potential witnesses for the prosecution. That is why. Thank you.

Speaker Edmund Joseph Sablan Villagomez: Thank you, Representative Aquino. Recognize the Floor Leader.

Floor Leader Marissa Renee Flores: I can yield my time, unless the members of the House would like to go before me, I can go last.

Speaker Edmund Joseph Sablan Villagomez: Okay. Anybody else under Miscellaneous Business? Recognize Representative Aldan.

Representative Vincent Raymond Aldan: I know we killed this, not debate, but you know. I just wanted to make it clear, and it is not because it is not so much of an individual that I am concerned about. It is the taxpayer dollar. Because at the end of the day, nobody in the whole CNMI or in the world, for that matter, that are paying into this tax dollar should be squandered. Because everybody, people sweat to earn that money. And the government takes it, and then when the government is sleeping with somebody, or whatever it is that they are doing, and then they are misappropriating those funds. That is in no way, in any shape or form, beneficial or fair to people that are paying those dollars. That is all that I am trying to say. But we do have—it is useless to even have an oversight when, at the very beginning, you are pleading the fifth. We did not even present or show the evidence that we have had, but we already know their game plan was to plead the fifth on everything. Not even looking at the evidence yet, you are already—We ask you what school you are going to or whatever; I plead the fifth. On advice of counsel, I plead the fifth. Those are not incriminating. But you are already going to plead the fifth. And we did not even show the evidence yet. So can this investigation move forward? Yes, it can. And that way we can bring out all the evidence we have and actually show it to the public. And I know that not everybody read or looked at all the evidence that was gathered. But if you see what was gathered—and I hope that everybody gets the chance to go get it and read it—because you are going to question marking everything. It is ridiculous. That is all that I am saying. It is our due diligence in the legislature, especially as the Congress, is to figure out where is the best way to appropriate these funds and to investigate. To make sure that when we do appropriate it and we give it to whatever agency or whatever branch, that it is being spent in the way that it should be spent. That is the reason why we appropriate the funds. Because at the end of the day, it is public money, and nobody should be self-enriching themselves because we are friends or whatever and we have under-the-table dealings. And when you look at the evidence, that is pretty much what is happening. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker Edmund Joseph Sablan Villagomez: Thank you, Representative Aldan. Recognize Representative Yumul.

Representative Ralph Naraja Yumul: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to air out, I guess, the passage of House Bill 24-6 under the communications of finance to the legislature. Revenue shortfall. And I have been monitoring the shortfall, and the excise tax, which is the tax that we collect for any importation of goods, has decreased close to fifty percent shortfall. So it is a trend. I know the administration is doing its best to cut expenditures as far as what was allocated to them versus what the actual expenditure is. So, they are curbing the amount being expended. Now, if the trend continues, then we are looking close to fifteen million, maybe, that will be lost by the third quarter. So that is something that we need to look at with the passage of House Bill 24-6. I hope that the administration looks at the schedules carefully and makes adjustments accordingly, because the trend does not look good for us moving forward. I just wanted to point that out. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker Edmund Joseph Sablan Villagomez: Thank you, Representative Yumul. Vice Speaker.

Vice-Speaker Diego Vincent Fejeran Camacho: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Going back to House Bill 24-6, I was poised to vote no initially. However, understanding the importance of the time sensitivity regarding the restoration of eighty hours to government employees at funding the

healthcare network program and to PSS. With that said, just for the record, the next time this comes to our table, I think it would be more appropriate to refer it to committee for the next round, should there be fund balances. If it indeed was urgent, we have the authority to call for an emergency session. If it was an emergency. But I guess that good outweighed the bad or the negative, something we do not agree with. And that is pretty obvious. But just for the record, for the next, I will not support such immediate passage and should be referred to committee.

Speaker Edmund Joseph Sablan Villagomez: Thank you, Vice Speaker. Okay, Floor Leader.

Floor Leader Marissa Renee Flores: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, colleagues, and the people of the Commonwealth. In good conscience, I could not, and I did not, support the revised Fiscal Year Twenty-Twenty-Five budget in HB 24-6. And as I mentioned, if only we can approve in parts, I would have done so. But my conscience could not and will not allow me. Although I understand the importance of putting money back into our people, there is also a time where we need to, as our Vice Speaker said, practice good conscience and take it to committee. But because the livelihood of our people is at risk, we chose and decided as a group to pass. Although I voted no for the record, because I cannot vote in part. But because now it is public record, I urge the CNMI Commonwealth to look at the budget and go back to page seven and read it. And if you get it—and when you read it—you will understand why I voted no. Our economy is collapsing, and we are at a historically low level of investment and revenue. We have obligations such as the Pacific Mini Games and COVID programs that were approved POs—that were given POs—but have yet to be reconciled. This pamphlet I am holding is still owed fifteen thousand three hundred and eleven dollars and ninety-three cents for COVID services performed. For Pacific Mini Games, over one million have yet to be paid. People and businesses who have provided services and done work for the Commonwealth have yet to be paid. Now more than ever, we need to be prudent with our money. Responsible and honest with our spending. This is about our integrity and my promise to my constituents and our Commonwealth. We are elected to the office on a platform advocating for change, anti-corruption, accountability, and transparency. Our community has spoken, and these actions maintain the status quo our voters have condemned. I sincerely hope that the Commonwealth can forgive my vote of no because I could not vote in part. But I trust that the executive branch will do its due diligence. I applaud the work of everyone involved in House Bill 24-6 to avoid and guarantee a forty-hour work week to our government employees for the Fiscal Year Twenty-Twenty-Five. Our people and our community, and those in greatest need of our attention, are in need of our help. But I will not compromise my principles, and I will continue my commitment to the Commonwealth and the people to do what is right. I work for the people of the Commonwealth. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I yield my time.

Speaker Edmund Joseph Sablan Villagomez: Thank you, Floor Leader. And with nothing further, we move down to number eighteen. Quick recess.

The House recessed at 01:28 p.m.

Recess

The House reconvened at 01:29 p.m.

Speaker Edmund Joseph Sablan Villagomez: Alright. We will rise back from recess. Before we went on recess, we about to enter announcements. I would like to recognize the legal counsel.

Legal Counsel Joseph Taijeron: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just very briefly, Representative Aquino asked me for the penalties with respected contempt, and I mistakenly gave him the wrong penalty. I did not want to start off this first session with the wrong legal opinion. So to correct my error—and I apologize to Representative Aquino and the record—the penalty that he asked for and I incorrectly gave. So the right answer should be under 1307; a person guilty of contempt under this chapter shall be—upon conviction—fined not more than one thousand dollars or imprisoned not more than one year, or both. Thank you.

Speaker Edmund Joseph Sablan Villagomez: Thank you, Legal Counsel. With that I move down to number eighteen, announcements. Any announcements? I recognize Representative Malcolm Omar.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Representative Malcolm Jason Omar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just a quick announcement, to the people and the families of Asteo, they celebrate the feast of Our Lady of Lourdes. Congratulations, guys. I know that their feast is tomorrow at the shrine, followed by mass and intercession. So, again, happy fiesta to the people of Asteo.

Speaker Edmund Joseph Sablan Villagomez: Thank you, Representative Omar. I recognize Representative San Nicolas.

Representative Patrick Hofschneider San Nicolas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. *Guaha lai puma susedi esti na weekend papa gi island Tinian I festivity of pika.* Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker Edmund Joseph Sablan Villagomez: Any more announcements?

Members of the House voiced “ready.”

Speaker Edmund Joseph Sablan Villagomez: We now move down to adjournment and I recognize the Floor Leader.

ADJOURNMENT

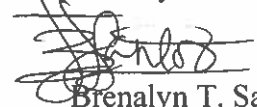
Floor Leader Marissa Renee Flores: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hereby move to adjourn subject to the call of the Chair. So move.

The motion was seconded.

The motion was seconded. The floor was open for discussion; there being no discussion on the floor, the motion for adjournment was carried by voice vote. There was no “nay” vote.

The House adjourned at 1:31 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Brenalyn T. Santos
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:

THIRD LEGISLATIVE DAY: