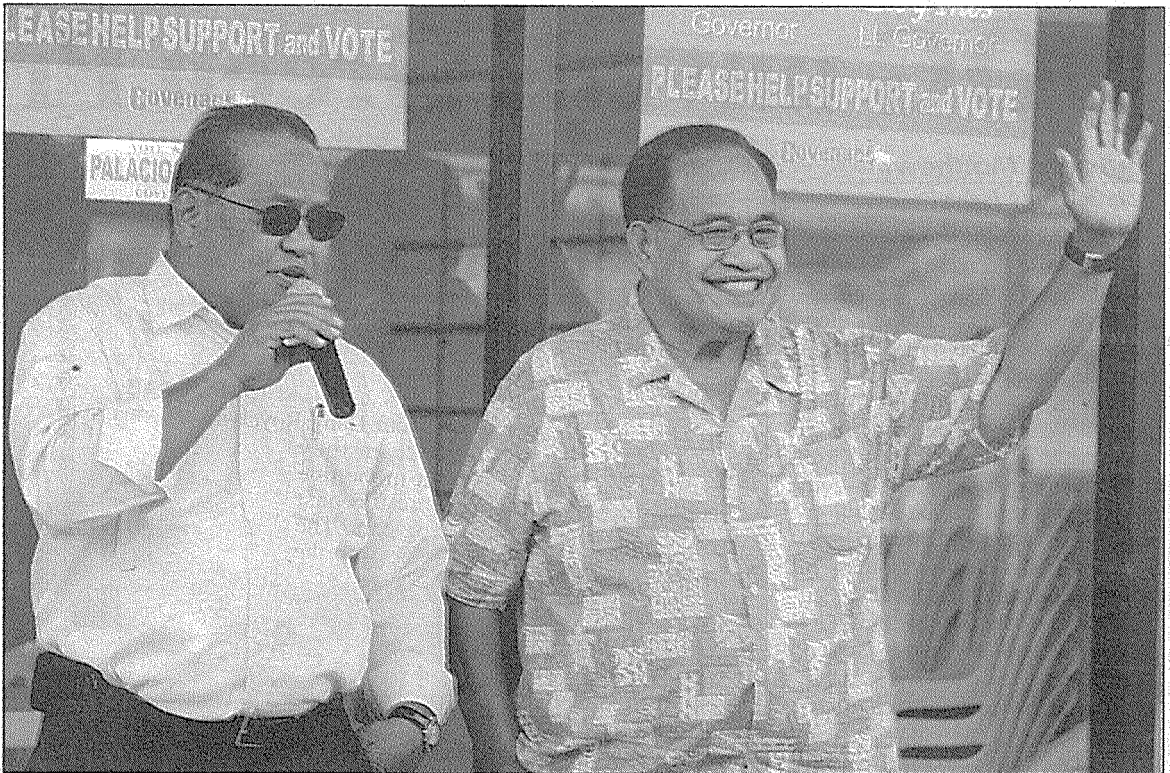


Fitial wins CNMI runoff



Saipan Tribune

Victory: Gov. Benigno Fital, right, waves to the crowd as Lt. Gov. Eloy Inos gives a victory speech after the final results of Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands runoff election were tallied yesterday.

Incumbent governor wins with 6,610 votes

TO THE POINT

▲ CNMI Gov. Benigno Fital and Lt. Gov. Eloy Inos won the run-off election after the absentee ballots results were tallied yesterday.

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The Covenant Party's Benigno R. Fital will be the governor of the Commonwealth of the Mariana Islands until 2014.

The remaining 970 absentee ballots — of which only 720 were valid — from the



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Nov. 24 gubernatorial election were counted yesterday, giving incumbent Fital a total 6,610 votes. Republican Party Rep. Heinz Hofschneider received 6,240 votes, according to The Saipan Tribune.

Fital had been leading Hof-

schneider by 501 votes after an initial count Nov. 24. During the absentee ballot count yesterday, Hofschneider won 428 absentee votes and Fital won 297 absentee votes. Those votes were enough for Fital to maintain his lead over Hofschneider.

The initial Nov. 7 election,

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CNMI: 'We ran a clean and positive campaign'

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in which Hofschneider edged Fitial by just eight votes out of more than 13,500 cast, was the closest election in the commonwealth's history. A runoff was necessary.

"We ran a clean and positive campaign that highlighted our significant record of accomplishment during some very challenging and difficult times for our commonwealth," Fitial stated via e-mail to the Pacific Daily News.

He cited the fixture of the Commonwealth Utilities Commission, the securing of millions of dollars in stimulus money — including state stabilization funds for public education — and the movement of federal capital improvement, federal highway and water projects to successful completion as factors that may have led to his win.

"They saw that we established new educational institutions, a new

education industry, including new nursing schools, and made meaningful progress on a number of different areas, including prudent budget cuts and prompt tax rebate and refund payments," he said.

Plus, Fitial said the people probably wanted to keep the leadership stable while the CNMI undergoes major changes as a result of its federalization — implemented Nov. 28 — and the regional military buildup.

"We believe the people realized and appreciated what we faced and what we still must address, and were not willing to take a risk and change leadership at this critical (time)," Fitial said.

Platform

The Covenant Party's platform is based on building the economy by opening up opportunities to foreign investors, including aggressively embracing the U.S. military presence in the CNMI by identifying new tourism markets, according to

the party.

That will be helped in part by the visa-waiver program that has been allowed by U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security Janet Napolitano, allowing Chinese and Russian tourists to enter the CNMI without a visa on a parole basis. President of the Saipan Chamber of Commerce Jim Arenovski said last week those tourists constitute about 20 percent of the region's tourism revenue.

"I am an economy governor, a business-friendly governor," Fitial said last Thursday. "All the times I was a public servant, I was going after revenue generation."

For example, he said he was able to change the investment policy in 1982.

The commonwealth's government discriminated against foreign investors through Title 33, which required foreign investors to find a local partner. The local partner had to own 51 percent of the business and

the foreign investor owned 49 percent. Fitial repealed that law, he said.

"That's how the CNMI started benefiting from real foreign investors."

Federalization

Fitial's win is historic not only because it was the first time a CNMI gubernatorial race was so close, but also because of the federalization of the commonwealth. Fitial said the most pressing issues over the next five years will be federalization of CNMI's immigration and the Marianas' military buildup.

"(Federalization) is going to stymie the investment negatively," Fitial said last week. "We are proud to be part of the U.S., but we are prouder if they would allow us to maintain laws that (we) need to economically (survive)."

Fitial said he will continue to engage the federal government to minimize the adverse impacts of federalization.

The hurdles he used to have with the legislature may not exist the way they once did, now that his party holds a majority in the law-making body, he added. He said he expects a better working relationship between his office and the Legislature.

Another challenge will be to balance the commonwealth's budget, according to David Sablan, president of Century Insurance on Saipan.

"In my own opinion, the total liability of this government is close to \$500 million," Sablan said Nov. 24. "How they reconcile that is going to be a tough situation. That is the biggest concern I have."

With about \$150 million needed to continue to operate and another \$500 million needed to be liquidated, Sablan said CNMI residents have essentially accepted sub-par service from the government as normal.

"I feel people deserve a heck of a lot of a better life than what we are experiencing today," Sablan said.

GEC: Letter submitted last week

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Commission on Utilities and is a former executive director for the Civil Service Commission, yesterday said he submitted a letter last week to the GEC in which he listed six possible violations of the law by the freshman senator.

According to Hara, Sen. Rector violated Guam law that states: "No person shall sit in the Legislature ... who has been convicted of a felony or of a crime involving moral turpitude and has not received a pardon

ready in the works."

Rector stated he applied for the weapon permit because he had received threatening phone calls and feared for his life.

"Winning a better life for Guam's families has become my foremost mission in life and I can't get it done if I am dead so I thought that it was important that I have the means to protect myself and the people around me," the senator stated.

Rector said he pleaded guilty and was given probation and community service and is now trying to have

he is not an honorable man" because of his recent conflict of interest case.

"We don't want a dishonest man holding such an honorable position," he said.

Rector has come under fire in recent months over his potential conflict of interest as a senator and union president.

The Office of the Attorney General twice this year refused requests by Rector, citing his conflict of interest as union president.

Rector currently faces a legislative ethics complaint related to his dual

Annual procession today

