

Administration Shelves Plan To Give Guam More Autonomy

By Peter Baker
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The White House said yesterday that an administration proposal to grant the territory of Guam broad new autonomy was shelved following vigorous internal opposition, disputing reports that campaign money from the island apparently had swayed government policy.

Officials said the plan to allow the island more authority over immigration, taxes, trade, labor laws and federal land was deemed unacceptable during internal discussions and not endorsed by President Clinton. Instead, officials have been assigned to rework it and develop a more limited, and therefore more politically salable, plan to present to the president.

The proposal came under scrutiny because it was advanced after the island's Democratic governor, Carl T. Gutierrez, helped steer \$642,000 in contributions to Clinton's reelection campaign and the Democratic National Committee following a visit to the island by first lady Hillary Rodham Clinton.

Judged against its population of 140,000, the donations made the tiny Western Pacific jurisdiction the biggest Democratic Party donor of any U.S. territory. Gutierrez appeared to boast in public speeches and interviews about the access the generosity had bought him.

"Only when we showed Washington that there were people who could write a \$1,000 check, a

\$5,000 check, a \$25,000 check, did people begin to sit up and take notice," he said in one interview.

But administration officials said the proposal by Deputy Interior Secretary John Garamendi essentially was turned down even before a report in *The Washington Post* last month about the intersection of campaign cash and potential policy shifts.

"Campaign contributions have no role whatsoever in determining our decision on these complicated issues," said White House special counsel Lanny J. Davis.

In late January, officials from across the administration called the plan problematic; criticism came from the Justice, State, Defense and Treasury departments. Among other things, officials worried that such a change in Guam's status would set an unwelcome precedent in dealing with Puerto Rico.

Clinton seemed to embrace such concerns in a Jan. 21 letter responding to criticism by Rep. Don Young (R-Alaska), chairman of the House Resources Committee. "I share many of the positions you expressed," Clinton wrote.

Although they publicly praised Garamendi, White House officials said he himself was the only major figure lobbying for his extensive plan.

But the issue is not resolved. Clinton met with Gutierrez at the White House in December and promised to consider his requests seriously. A task force began meeting last month to develop "supportable" alternatives to Garamendi's plan.