

On My Mind  
1/8/99

The Commonwealth reaches its majority today - well, technically, tomorrow, but it's being celebrated today. Twenty-one years ago, on January 9, 1978, the first governor of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Carlos S. Camacho, was sworn into office, marking the beginning of the existence of the Commonwealth as a separate political entity.

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Admittedly, the concept of 21 as the age of majority is somewhat arbitrary. Many people assume adult responsibilities long before they reach 21. Many others do not assume adult responsibilities - going first to college, continuing to live with their parents - until long after they've turned 21. In the Pacific Islands, custom often withholds recognition of an individual as a responsible adult until much later. And in terms of the "family of nations," while 21 may be a respectable age, being one hundred years old or more counts for a lot more.

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Nonetheless, reaching 21 should count for something, and it is a pity that what observations of the event may take place were not announced in the press, so that the people of the Commonwealth could mark the event and participate in the ceremonies.

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The theory that it is the CNMI's Commonwealth status that is behind the U.S. campaign to take away the CNMI's control over immigration and the minimum wage is certainly food for thought. According to a story in a recent issue of the <I>Marianas Variety</I>, a "ranking government official" who requested anonymity believes that the U.S. wants to take over control of the CNMI's immigration and minimum wage so that it can then claim it is only being consistent when it denies Guam's request for the same powers.

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Guam, in its efforts to define a new status for itself, has apparently included control over its immigration and minimum wage in its bid for commonwealth status. The government official is quoted as saying, "The US government does not want to give Guam the control over its own minimum wage and immigration and they [federal officials] can justify this refusal by taking over the CNMI's."

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At least that would explain the stubborn refusal of the U.S. to make even the slightest change in its position, despite the many sound arguments offered by the CNMI.

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Speaking of stubborn refusals to change positions.... The media has been given much of the blame for the hysteria of Monica-gate. It is interesting to speculate about the extent to which local media is to blame for the hysteria of Maya-gate. One thing is clear - the media has not helped to bring any clarity to the situation whatsoever. Little hard data has been provided the general public in regard to just what the Senators are so unhappy about.

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Nonetheless, the situation is becoming more and more uncomfortable. It is, somehow, unseemly that a gubernatorial appointee would so deliberately embarrass the very person who appointed her. It borders on arrogance, in fact, to demand that the governor violate his recognized and well-established policy of non-confrontation.

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With the Senate so adamantly opposed to Maya's continuing to serve as Attorney General, it seems pretty clear, moreover, that relations between the office of the Attorney General and the Senate will remain hostile and unfriendly, regardless of the issue. That is counterproductive, and can only hurt all parties involved even more.

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Though likely too late to be considered graceful, it would appear that the best solution to the problem is for Maya to take the polite, considerate and gracious way out, and to resign. Though she may have made a good Attorney General, under the present circumstances there is no way that she can do so, which doesn't, actually, leave her much of an alternative.

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How praiseworthy of the Legislature! Members - led by Rep. Melvin Faisao - are urging administration officials to "strictly implement" the austerity measures proposed by the Office of the Public Auditor. Faisao, according to a story in Wednesday's <I>Saipan Tribune</I> will introduce a resolution to the administration that the OPA-recommended cost-cutting measures be undertaken now - and that they should be undertaken evenly, across the board.

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Missing in this commendable scenario is any evidence of resolve by the Legislators themselves to undertake any austerity measures on their part. Where is the audit by the Public Auditor recommending austerity measures for the Legislature?

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The on-going attacks on the Public School System by Representative Heinz Hofschneider are particularly puzzling. How anyone can expect PSS to excel in the face of continually increasing enrollments and continually decreasing appropriations is incomprehensible.

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It's a pity that the Representative hasn't taken the PSS Commissioner up on her invitation to college graduates to help out by teaching in the schools. Perhaps if the Representative obtained some first hand experience "in the trenches" he'd be a little more realistic, and sympathetic, to the immense problems faced by Commissioner Inos.

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I like the image painted by Juanita M. Mendiola in her publication <I>What's In These Tropical Yards</I> [WITTY] <I>Magazine</I>. In the November issue, she compares the CNMI to a "canoe being rowed by narrowly-focused oarsmen and led by several captains without any

navigational skills and set destination."

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"Departmental/agency management(oarsmen) are often more focused on departmental operations (rowing) and not how their activities affect other departments and the community." Whether the boat is actually moving, and to where, she writes, the captains don't even seem to know or care.

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Mendiola recommends that the Democratic and Republican parties - and each candidate for election - "should adopt a philosophy: conservatism vs liberalism, etc., and a dream: slow development vs fast, etc." Each of the candidates, further, should be asked to "submit a proposal delineating how he/she can contribute to the achievement of the dream that the party embraces."

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"It is absolutely critical now that we put an end to aimless existence by electing officials with personal agendas. Too many varying ideas and loose efforts bring chaos. ...Managers need to be competent, ...[be] able to analyze how their activities may affect everything in the community - able to see that the operation of the mechanism is but a means to get to where we want to be."

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Mendiola also recommends laying off political hired employees from the top - people who "decorate empty chairs and desks." They should be encouraged to seek jobs in the private sector, thus slowly but effectively replacing guest workers.

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Wise words!

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And to those who believe Clinton shouldn't give his State of the Union speech while under impeachment, what ever happened to the principal that one is innocent until proven guilty? Will that too be discarded in the wake of monica-gate?