

On My Mind
by Ruth L. Tighe

It's a well-known fact that during election year legislators spend a lot of time and energy trying to get approval for pet projects that will win them votes from their constituents. This year, members of the House are also spending a lot of time and energy hoping to get approval for a pet project that will benefit themselves, rather than their constituents.

They have proposed House Legislative Initiative 11-9, which - if passed by the House and Senate, and approved by voters in November - would amend the CNMI Constitution to expand their terms to four years instead of the present two-year term. A legislative initiative must be passed by a three-fourths majority of the members of both houses of the legislature in order to be placed on the ballot.

The four-year terms, argue its proponents, would save the Commonwealth the cost of holding mid-year elections, and would allow House members to focus on their legislative duties rather than having to campaign for re-election every other year.

On the other hand, doing away with two-year terms of office would disenfranchise the voter because it would delay the voter's ability to replace House members who have not performed as promised, or as expected. A four-year term would leave inept, or lazy, or irresponsible or spendthrift members comfortably in office with no way to vote them out of office for a full four years.

In addition, abolishing mid-year elections would deny voters an opportunity to approve or disapprove how well the governor and House and Senate may be working together. If there was friction, and the voters wanted it to cease, they would not be able to vote out the troublemakers and elect replacements. If there was unity, but the voters didn't like the direction that was being taken by the legislature, the voters wouldn't have any way of electing legislators who could change that direction. Votes would be unable to make any changes to the legislature between gubernatorial elections.

There is, too, the argument that if some 400 members of the U.S. House of Representatives find a two-year term of office acceptable and do-able, shouldn't 18 members of the CNMI House of Representatives be able to do so as well?

The concern over the high cost of re-election could be dealt with by the simple expedient of changing the election law to set expenditure caps.

At the moment, it would appear that the question is whether the Senate will support the effort of House members to cushion their nest and will vote to approve the initiative, or whether it will put voter needs first, and refuse to adopt the initiative.

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Perhaps government isn't yet hungry enough to go after smaller sources of income, but it sure seems like a "freebie," a give-away, that companies who use the CNMI as settings for their film-making pay only \$100 each in fees. Accommodating film crews, and facilitating their projects could become big business - as some states can attest - but even if the CNMI only increased the basic use fee, it could bring in extra dollars, particularly with the number of film crews coming to the CNMI seeming to increase every year.

Speaking of ways to earn money, why is it that no one has ever invented a termite repellent? There must be dozens of mosquito repellents on the market, not to mention dozens of techniques for killing or repelling most other household pests. But as for the flying termite, there doesn't seem to be either a repellent for use by humans to keep the crawly things off one's arms and shoulders, out of one's hair, or an effective way to trap them once they get inside the house.

On the mainland (even in Hawaii?) houses are tented, and some lethal gas applied to kill termites, but it would kill all the gekkos as well, something I'm not sure I'd accept even if it were available here. It's true that treatments for those underground, tunnel-building termites are available on island. But for those flying termites, that spoil the pleasure of watching the season's gorgeous sunsets, that make outdoor evening festivities a nightmare, that get into my food and on the book I'm reading - how come there's no repellent for them?

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I don't mean to sound like a curmudgeon (curmudgeon - an ill-tempered person full of ...stubborn notions, according to the American Heritage Dictionary), but I find those cute pictures of kindergartners in cap and gowns - and particularly the picture of the kindergarten valedictorian - appalling, ridiculous, and pitiful. Don't get me wrong - the kids are generally cute enough - it's the use of caps and gowns that bothers me.

After kindergarten, comes "graduation" from elementary school. And then "graduation" from junior high. And then "graduation" from high school. By the time college graduation rolls around, kids will already have worn a cap and gown on as many as four previous occasions. Cap and gown - indeed, graduation - are no longer a novelty; rather they become dull, boring, same-old same-old. Which may be why, in fact, many college graduates don't regard the cap and gown with all that much respect, and find all kinds of ways to decorate, alter, or otherwise undercut the attire itself, if not the ceremony as a whole.

Too many graduations, too many wearings of the cap and gown, cheapen the occasion and its significance. The right to wear a the flat-topped tasseled cap, or mortarboard, and gown at one time was reserved for the learned and the educated. It was an honor and a mark of distinction, proof of serious educational endeavor and academic achievement.

Perhaps, with high school being the final educational attainment for a considerable part of the student population, use of cap and gown and a graduation ceremony at the end of high school is

not inappropriate. But at the kindergarten and junior high school level, it is inappropriate.

In the eyes of this old curmudgeon, at least, to dress up kindergartners in cap and gown, to hold a "graduation" for them, makes a mockery of both the attire and the ceremony.

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It's also disturbing to see the local press so thoughtlessly regurgitate poor information. Take the alleged closure of 2000 businesses last year, for example. Many questions were raised about the legitimacy of that figure when it was first reported, and the accuracy of it has never been confirmed. Yet again and again, reporters repeat that misleading and inaccurate piece of information.

Another is the charge that the Wireless Hill cemetery poses a threat to groundwater. It doesn't actually, pose much more of a threat than does the Mt. Carmel cemetery. There is no source of water, and there are no wells either operating or proposed in the Wireless Hill cemetery area. The same is true of the area surrounding Mt. Carmel cemetery. Yet, reporters have been repeating this misleading and inaccurate piece of information as well.

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Having rather freely criticized the Marianas Visitors' Authority in regard to the publicity given its "Taste of the Marianas" project, it seems only fair to compliment the Authority on the publicity given its first annual "Traditional Dance Festival" held this past weekend. The ads and posters were colorful and eye-catching, the information on them included all the necessary details in highly readable form, and their timing was well-spaced and effective. Not to mention the roadside banner, which contributed its share to creating an awareness of the holding of the Festival. Well-done, MVA! (But since it's now over, how about taking down all the signs?)