

On My Mind
by Ruth L. Tighe

More so than most, I imagine, this year's mid-term election will leave more people spending more time trying to figure out exactly what happened and why than they usually do. The answers are not all that obvious - and, in fact, there seem to be more than one answer to every one of the unexpected outcomes. The theories, the reconstruction, the supposed rationales, will go on being topics of conversation for some time to come - even, possibly, until the next election, which may - or may not - validate present speculations and opinions.

Did the election results reveal more mature voters, as had been projected? Not at first blush, but perhaps as things fall into place, and a new legislative session gets under way, the answer to that too will change.

The legislature lost some valuable players - we would note, particularly, the loss of Ana Teregeyo, Karl Reyes, Melvin Faisao, conscientious, hard-working, intelligent legislators all. We would lament as well the loss of Tim Bellas as Superior Court judge. There is no question in my mind that the CNMI is simply too small a place for a law that calls for popular vote on judge retention to work as it should. Before someone else falls prey, the law should be repealed..

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If the voters are not more mature, is there any chance that at least the legislators have matured? Lame duck sessions in the past have been notorious for their lack of accomplishment. Will this one be any different? Now that there's no need to cater to their constituencies - because the votes have all been cast - at least in theory that leaves the legislators free to consider the real issues facing the CNMI, and ready to act on the many substantive bills still before them, such as the election reform bill and the revised criminal code, to name just two.

Outgoing congressman Karl Reyes, for example, has complained about the "unfairness" of the retiree program to private sector employees. One could argue that the unfairness lies more in the special treatment given certain retirees - the liberal double-dipping provisions for certain professions, the even more liberal retirement allowances for certain high-ranking government employees - but the question is, now that there's nothing to lose, will Reyes be willing to stand up and do something about the unfairness?

Maturity of the electorate (or the elected!), statesmanship, being a role model - whatever you want to call it - seems to be in short supply in the political arena. It would certainly be refreshing if whatever teamwork and cooperation existed among the legislators would not now suddenly disappear in typical lame-duck fashion, but would continue until the end of the session.

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From lame duck to lame-brained: Neon lights ordinarily call to mind images of big, slick,

modern, busy, glitzy, commercial, urban settings like Times Square, Las Vegas, Hollywood. So guess what the CNMI - a small, quiet, peaceful, relatively rural island that prides itself on the so-called pristine nature of its lagoon and beaches - is going to use to advertise itself for the millennium? Neon lights. \$150,000 worth. Up and down the length of the island.

The Marianas Visitors Authority plans to erect neon images of latte stones, turtles, doves, and other island themes up and down Beach Road during the Christmas season. It seems almost superfluous, given that at the same time, Saipan's hotels and businesses usually mount their own beautiful, elaborate and impressive holiday light displays.

There isn't anything intrinsically indigenous in the idea. There isn't anything ecologically responsible in the idea. Much less is there anything that relates, or is responsive, to the arrival of a challenging new millennium in the idea.

Collecting artifacts for and arranging for a ceremonial burial of a time capsule would be more appropriate. Finding space for the museum to house the artifacts of the new millennium would be more appropriate. Creating a nature conservancy for the protection of local species throughout the next millennium would be more appropriate. Doing anything that would last more than a couple of weeks a year would be more appropriate!

Since it's only just been decided upon, maybe it's not too late to change plans. Neon lights along Beach Road will disturb lagoon habitat. They could cause traffic jams and traffic accidents. They will consume power. They are apparently planned as temporary. They have no connection to the millennium. Per se, they have little relationship to the nature and character of the CNMI.

Surely the MVA can do better. Just as it should not let Guam usurp the CNMI's claim to "where America's day begins," it should not succumb to such a crassly commercial and culturally inappropriate scheme for the observance of the new millennium.

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There's an old adage about how if you build a road, people will drive on it. It has something to do with the fact that a road is better than a path, and a paved road is better than an un-paved one, and that businesses would rather be located on a paved road than a path.

The same principle can be applied to the power plant. If you build a bigger power plant, people will hook up to it. It has to do with, among other things, the fact that it's easier to use someone else's power plant than have to build one's own, and if there's a power plant already built, it will attract users who don't want to have to build their own.

Major power consumers on island are not now hooked into CUC because CUC does not have the capacity to accommodate them. The proposed new power plant was designed to accommodate those existing power consumers, with power to spare to handle new customers. If the size of the proposed power plant is now trimmed down, little extra capacity will be left to meet the needs of

any new customers.

The adequacy of the power supply is a major factor, on the part of a business, in deciding where to locate. If Saipan does not have the infrastructure in place to accommodate new businesses, they will not come. It does not work to build the infrastructure after the business agrees to come. It takes too long. For proof, one has only to look at the Tinian Dynasty, which continues to struggle painfully because the promised longer runways have not yet materialized.

Evidence that Guam's tourism industry is recuperating continues to be reported in the press. The CNMI's recovery cannot be far behind. To wait for the full impact of substantial growth in the industry before building a new power plant simply will not work. The process is too lengthy.

To satisfy the sceptics who doubt the need for the immediate construction of a full 80 MW power plant, perhaps the construction can be done in stages. But to cut the project or cancel it altogether is not only ill-advised and short-sighted, but also downright foolish. If the power plant is built, customers will come.

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As we all know, the Internet has its share of scams, hoaxes and "something for nothing" come-ons. One site that may appear to fall into that category, but does not, is www.thehungersite.com. What the site offers is a way to help provide food to those in need at just a click of the mouse, at no cost to you. The only restriction: people are limited to one click a day.

As one webnik explains, "The Hunger Site doesn't ask much of you, but it does require that you view a small blurb from one of its sponsors when you click the button to make a donation. In exchange for that exposure, the sponsors contribute funds which are channeled to reputable international programs to feed the hungry. All the available evidence indicates that the Hunger Site, founded by private citizen John Breen as a personal contribution to improving the plight of the world's poor, is completely legitimate and really works."

While you're on-line, why not check it out?