

On My Mind

1/14/00

The following, with a few minor changes, was forwarded to me just a few days ago as having come over the 'net:

"Can you guess which organization this is? It has a little over 500 employees with the following statistics:

117 have bankrupted at least two businesses

71 cannot get a credit card due to bad credit

29 have been accused of spousal abuse

21 are current defendants in lawsuits

19 have been accused of writing bad checks

14 have been arrested on drug-related charges

8 have been arrested for shoplifting

7 have been arrested for fraud

3 have been arrested for assault, and

In 1998 alone, 84 were stopped for drunk driving.

Give up?

It's the 535-member United States Congress. The same group that perpetually cranks out hundreds upon hundreds of new laws designed to keep the rest of us in line.

God Help Us!"

Appalling as some of those statistics would appear, it would be prudent - as is the case with all statistics - to examine them carefully before reaching any conclusions. For example, the statistics do not tell you whether any of the statements overlap. The same person could have been stopped for drunk driving, been accused of spousal abuse, and been arrested for assault. Or the same person could have bankrupted two businesses, been accused of writing bad checks, be unable to get a credit card, and be a defendant in a law suit. In other words, there may be only a few "rotten apples" in that barrel, instead of 373, which is what all those numbers add up to.

Then too, the article does not provide any information about averages. How many of those same statistics would apply to any group of 535 people? Maybe that rate of misconduct in that sized group is not unusual?

However one looks at it, though, that figure of 117 who have bankrupted at least two businesses - that's almost one in every five Congressmen - is unsettling. If they aren't any better businessmen than that, what confidence can we have in the laws having to do with business that they pass?

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No doubt similar statistics could be compiled about employees in the CNMI government, or about members of the CNMI legislature. It may be comforting to realize that even national legislators have shortcomings, but that realization doesn't make the flaws any more acceptable.

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In Luddite fashion (Luddites were opposed to technological change), I've thought it might be interesting to collect some of what I call "funnies," that circulate via e-mail - like the one above - and publish them in a book. The anagram e-mail, or the one with the computer glossary, or the "old timers poem," the one on Jewish food, on "fits me to a t," the IQ test, or women's words, or "it's all in a name"....

Then, instead of being stored in random places in my computer directory with only cryptic titles, or scattered about the house as individual print-outs, they'd all be neatly and securely bound together in a convenient size; they could be taken anywhere, and I could share them more easily even with friends who didn't have access to e-mail or fax machines.

Books, after all, do have certain advantages. As one of those funnies puts it (which is here slightly edited): A book has no wires, no electric circuits, no batteries, nothing to be connected or switched on. While hard book versions are slightly larger, soft book versions are light, and fit easily into a handbag or coat pocket. Compact, portable, affordable and durable, books can be used virtually anywhere --- even lounging on a deck chair at the beach -- yet they are powerful enough to hold as much information as a CD-ROM disk. And they're so easy to use, even a child can operate one.

Books are constructed of sequentially numbered sheets of recyclable paper, each capable of holding hundreds, maybe even thousands, of bits of information. To keep them in their correct sequence, the pages are held together by a simple binding system.

Opaque Paper Technology (OPT) allows book manufacturers to use both sides of the page, doubling the information density and cutting costs. Users scan each sheet using only their eyes, thus registering information directly into their brain without the need for additional equipment. A flick of the finger takes them to the next page.

Books may be taken up at any time and used merely by opening them. The random access 'Browse' feature allows users to move instantly to any page, and move forward or backward as they wish. Many books also come with an 'Index' feature, which pinpoints the exact location of any selected information for instant retrieval. An optional 'bookmark' accessory allows users to open their book to the exact place where they were in a previous session -- even if the book was closed in the interim.

Users can make personal notes in a book using ordinary pens or pencils. Books never crash or require rebooting, although like other display devices they can become unusable if dropped overboard or otherwise abused.

And - what the "funny" didn't say: Books last a lot longer than information on disks, cassettes or hard drives.

Which is why the idea of collecting and publishing cyber "funnies" in book form makes sense to me.

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Enough of escapism. Turns out the inauguration of the new legislature this past Monday wasn't nearly as exciting or dramatic as some had predicted. Fitial's "coalition" held - on every vote cast: acceptance of the rules, choice of speaker, vice-speaker, floor leader, choice of committee chairs. The question, of course, is whether he will be able to sustain it, and if so, for how long.

Most touching - and telling - was Diego Benavente's comment that he'd now be experiencing a minority position for the first time. Technically, the Republicans are not the minority party; in actuality, though, the defection of three Republicans has made those remaining true to their party a minority.

Which might eventually prove to have some benefit, provided that if and when the Republicans regain the majority, they change the rules on how minority party members are treated, based on their own experience.

In the Senate, Ramon S. Guerrero offered an erudite speech, full of quotes from historical and literary figures, but there were no fireworks there, either.

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The CUC Board's decision to start over with new Requests for Proposal for construction of another power plant does not reflect well on CUC's credibility. The need for additional power can hardly be as pressing as CUC kept telling us it was, given the delays it itself has brought about by continuing to postpone award of the original RFP, and given the additional delay it has now created by deciding to start the process all over again.

Question of the day: will the rebuff to Delay's alleged interests in Enron have any effect on his apparent pledge to support CNMI garment factory interests in Congress?

How does that Chinese saying go about living in interesting times?

