

On My Mind

4/7/00

It was announced earlier this week that the only two cargo carriers operating between Guam and Saipan were raising their rates an identical 8.8 percent this month, the first time rates have been increased, according to a story in the *Variety*, in nearly a decade.

So far, there seems to have been little reaction to the notice of increase - no accusation of price fixing, no complaint of potential hardship to businesses or to the consumer. Yet when the two local petroleum companies raised their prices at the pump recently, the accusation of price-fixing, the complaints about the increase, were prompt and noisy. If the two cargo carriers' price increases are identical, doesn't that also raise the question of price-fixing? Where is the difference?

Granted that gas price increases at the pump affect individual consumers immediately and directly, while shipping rate increases may take a while to show up on merchandise in the stores. But the increase will affect everyone eventually, since almost everything for sale on island - from food and clothing to tv's, tools and cars - comes in by boat. Why has no one protested? Could it be because there are no legislators left on island - the legislators having all gone to Washington, D.C. to lobby fellow Republicans - to look after the concerns of their constituents???

<center>* * *</center>

In the local media, it was not announced until after the fact - and then only as an afterthought - that night skies late in the week would offer some rare sights, like the planets of Saturn, Jupiter and Mars forming a small circle with the new moon in the southwest sky. The best night for to see it was yesterday, April 6, though, supposedly, it is also visible this evening. Early notice of the event came to me from my older son, who is somewhat of an astronomy buff.

According to the NASA Science News on the internet at <http://science.nasa.gov>, the phenomenon would be visible without a telescope - providing, of course, that there were no clouds in the way, and that ambient light did not outshine the moon and planets.

The *Pacific Daily News* gave one sentence to the Saturn-Jupiter-Mars-moon circle in today's paper, though a story in yesterday's issue does mention "Jewels of the April Sky" as an astronomical phenomenon visible this week-end. This time with a telescope, one should be able to see 9 of the 10 brightest stars and 18 of the 20 brightest stars - a sight possible only in the equatorial tropics, according to the notice - all in the same evening.

The problem, though, is not so much in learning about such things (there's always the internet), as it is in finding a place from which to view them. Banzai Cliff, which made a stunning setting for observation of that "biggest, brightest" moon of several weeks ago, faces an eastern, not a western, sky. The roof of the Aquarius, which is ideally located, has too much ambient light. The Nauru's rotating restaurant doesn't exist anymore. Neither does the Lighthouse restaurant.

Beach restaurants, like the Gardenia - and Coffee Care - give great sunset views, but not clear views of the sky above the horizon. Only the Oleai Beach Club comes to mind as a possible candidate.

Wouldn't that be a neat market specialty to develop - the convenient viewing of stars, planets, constellations, unique sightings possible only in tropical skies, and other astronomical phenomena? It would appeal to tourists as well as locals, it would be a great place to take students on field trips, its chief environmental impact could be as little as the requirements for a parking lot.....

<center>* * *</center>

I try to limit the "mass mailings" I do of e-mail or internet "funnies" because it seems the more you send out the more you get, and my in-box is cluttered enough as it is, thank-you very much, but that same son - who also happens to be a computer nerd - sent me one that seems so timely that I can't resist. If you've already seen it, my apologies:

If Noah had lived in the United States in the 1990s (or even 2000), the story may have gone something like this: And the Lord spoke to Noah and said, "In one year, I am going to make it rain and cover the whole earth with water until all flesh is destroyed. But I want you to save the righteous people and two of every kind of living thing on earth. Therefore, I am commanding you to build an Ark."

In a flash of lightning, God delivered the specifications for an Ark. In fear and trembling, Noah took the plans and agreed to build the ark. "Remember," said the Lord, "you must complete the Ark and bring everything aboard in one year."

Exactly one year later, fierce storm clouds covered the earth and all the seas of the earth went into a tumult. The Lord saw that Noah was sitting in his front yard weeping. "Noah!" He shouted. "Where is the Ark?"

"Lord, please forgive me," cried Noah. "I did my best, but there were big problems. First, I had to get a permit for construction, and your plans did not meet the building codes. I had to hire an engineering firm and redraw the plans. Then I got into a fight with OSHA over whether or not the Ark needed a sprinkler system and approved floatation devices. Then, my neighbor objected, claiming I was violating zoning ordinances by building the Ark in my front yard, so I had to get a variance from the city planning commission. Then, I had problems getting enough wood for the Ark, because there was a ban on cutting trees to protect the Spotted Owl. I finally convinced the

U.S. Forest Service that I really needed the wood to save the owls. However, the Fish and Wildlife Service won't let me take the 2 owls. The carpenters formed a union and went on strike. I had to negotiate a settlement with the National Labor Relations Board before anyone would pick up a saw or hammer. Now, I have 16 carpenters on the Ark, but still no owls. When I started rounding up the other animals, an animal rights group sued me. They objected to my taking only two of each kind aboard. This suit is pending. Meanwhile, the EPA notified

me that I could not complete the Ark without filing an environmental impact statement on your proposed flood. They didn't take very kindly to the idea that they had no jurisdiction over the conduct of the Creator of the Universe. Then, the Army Corps of Engineers demanded a map of the proposed flood plain. I sent them a globe. Right now, I am trying to resolve a complaint filed with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission that I am practicing discrimination by not taking atheists aboard. The IRS has seized my assets, claiming that I'm building the Ark in preparation to flee the country to avoid paying taxes. I just got a notice from the state that I owe them some kind of user tax and failed to register the Ark as a 'recreational water craft'. And finally, the ACLU got the courts to issue an injunction against further construction of the Ark, saying that since God is flooding the earth, it's a religious event, and, therefore unconstitutional. I really don't think I can finish the Ark for another five or six years." Noah waited.

The sky began to clear, the sun began to shine, and the seas began to calm. A rainbow arced across the sky. Noah looked up hopefully. "You mean you're not going to destroy the earth, Lord?"

"No," He said sadly. "I don't have to. The government already has."

<center>* * *</center>

I feel somewhat guilty about re-printing it here without any acknowledgment of authorship. But there wasn't any indication of authorship on the copy I received. Creative effort deserves acknowledgment and appreciation. But the new technology makes it all too easy to deprive people of duly-earned recognition. And that's a pity.

<center>* * *</center>

The Satawal/Puluwat canoe crews are probably under way by now. Fifteen people are re-enacting the historic canoe voyage of Caroline islanders to Saipan - with canoes from Satawal and Puluwat meeting at Pikilot from which they will sail to Saipan with only natural navigational aids like the sun, stars, waves, moon, birds. They are supposed to have left Pikilot about now, after a week or more of training on Satawal and the trip from Satawal to Pikilot.

We wish them safe journey!