

On My Mind
4/30/99

(If you missed last week's column, you can retrieve it by clicking on "Archives" at the left side of the page.)

Mystery of the year: the construction project at the corner of Middle Road and the street on which the Horiguchi building is located. The project is huge - as large as a city block. The foundation for some kind of a building is in place, and work is beginning on the superstructure. But no one seems to know what function the building will serve - who is building there, and what it is that is being built.

There isn't a single sign at the site that offers any information. Unlike most construction sites, which sport either the name of the construction company, or some information about the source of funding, this site doesn't provide any such clues. The only signs warn that construction is under way.

There aren't even any pick-up trucks - that might be expected to carry a company logo - visible around the site.

Some neighbors of the site showed slight curiosity. But none seemed overly concerned. Theirs seemed to be a "what will be, will be" sort of attitude.

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Another mystery - of the month, this time - concerns the governor's uncharacteristic firing of the former CRM Director earlier this month. It is, I believe, the first time in either of the governor's tenures that he has outright fired anyone.

There was also the line - not used before, so far as I can recall - about the administration having a "zero tolerance" for sexual harassment in the work place. Having zero tolerance is, of course, a worthy goal. But it is not one the administration has expressed in just those terms before.

The alleged culprit had been accused - and it was duly reported in the media - of sexual harassment. Ordinarily, an accused is presumed innocent until proven otherwise. But in this case there had been no hearing of which I am aware.

Most peculiar.

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The use - or abuse - of government vehicles is again in the headlines. Two questions spring to mind that do not appear to have been addressed in regard to this subject. The first is: on the list of government expenditures, where does leasing of government cars fall? When trying to trim a budget, it would make sense to look at the largest expenditures first. Everyone knows that the

largest budget expenditure is for personnel. Yet there's been little serious attempt to cut personnel expenditures (except through attrition). It's always painful to have to reduce a workforce (it's even more painful to be one of those so reduced), but government simply cannot afford to provide employment merely as a welfare subsidy. Which is even more true of governments suffering budget shortfalls, as is the CNMI's government budget.

The second question is, who needs a government vehicle in the first place? And for what purpose? CUC needs them, of course, to read meters, to trouble shoot its distribution system, to answer trouble calls, to supervise construction projects. CHC needs ambulances. DPS needs a big fleet of vehicles. PSS needs busses. But the Department of Finance? The Legislature? The CPA? The CDA? The judicial branch? NMC? For what purpose do they need full-time use of vehicles?

There are, admittedly, meetings to attend, items to deliver or pick up, visiting firemen to meet at the airport, to escort to various places, but these needs occur only occasionally. Wouldn't it be a lot cheaper to have employees use their own cars, and simply pay them mileage costs for those times that they use their own cars on government business?

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After making headlines for a week or so, the arrival of Chinese boat-people has suddenly become non-news. It took careful reading to confirm that a second boat-load has now been sent to Tinian. And the fact that Chinese diplomats in Washington, D.C. have been involved in discussions about the sudden influx of Chinese was also buried inside the pages of the papers.

Is that due to non-interest on the part of the media? Or at the direction of the feds?

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Another buried piece of wisdom: the article in Tuesday's <I>Pacific Daily News</I> by a former resident of Belgrade who is now a graduate student at the University of Guam. Danko Taborosi argues, very persuasively, that the U.S. and NATO bombings of Kosovo serve only to strengthen Milosevic's position and the people's anti-Western attitudes; that the NATO/U.S. method of intervention has created the refuge problem, that the attacks are killing the Albanians that NATO/U.S. forces are supposedly trying to help and support.

"Lasting solutions," he writes, " can only be reached by politicians. Soldiers can essentially do two things - kill or be killed." Would that there were some way of giving Taborosi's arguments world-wide exposure!