

On My Mind

7/21/00

Will he? Won't he? Should he? Shouldn't he? The reports, speculation, arguments pro and con, on the question of whether the CNMI needs, will benefit from, can afford, the firm of Preston, Gates, et al (Joe Murphy, please note: Preston is a surname, not the given name of Bill Gates' father) and therefore Governor Tenorio should hire it, have become prime fodder for the media in recent weeks.

Granted there is extensive lobbying on the part of the garment industry to hire Preston, Gates et al. - heavy pressure that is always difficult to ignore. Granted that numerous members of the U.S. Congress are reportedly ready to curtail CNMI Covenant-granted controls. And granted that the use of paid lobbyists seems to be a way of life in the U.S. Congress these days. Yet the issue, it seems to me, is not whether or not to hire Preston, Gates, et al. The real question is how well the CNMI is served by the use of any paid lobbyist.

Surely the Congress by now realizes and understands that paid lobbyists are just that - hacks for hire. That they tell a story because they are paid to do so. To my way of thinking, that should make all paid lobbyists suspect, because they are only saying what someone else is paying them to say - not what they themselves believe in. And if those paid lobbyists are aligned with a particular political party, that makes them even more suspect.

Formerly, the CNMI did its own lobbying. The story those representing the CNMI had to tell was their own (CNMI) story, reflecting their own (CNMI) concerns. Those sent to Washington to lobby for their own (CNMI) interests were not hired hacks, but people directly concerned, directly involved, directly affected. They may not have been as glib, as articulate, as clever as paid lobbyists, but they were sincere, and they were earnest. And they were unaligned with either national political party.

Presumably, members of Congress can tell the difference.

It is to be hoped that the CNMI - its leaders and its legislators - can also tell the difference.

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Another "will he/won't he" type question floating around is whether or not the governor will agree to the CNMI's supporting a class action suit against various federal agencies on the grounds that they are responsible for causing PCB contamination in and around the village of Tanapag. Two lawyers, recruited by Congressman Dino Jones, have proposed such a suit, but are insisting that the CNMI government become a party to the suit before they proceed.

Class action suits, as I understand it, are usually undertaken because a large number of people believe they have been wronged under the same or similar circumstances, by the same party or parties, and deserve the same, or similar compensation for their suffering. Usually, as I understand it, the lawyers who undertake such cases, do so on a contingency basis: if the people

bringing the class action win the lawyers get a share of the winnings. But if they don't win, the lawyers may not get anything. In most cases, the government does not get involved in bringing suit.

So why are the lawyers contemplating the Tanapag PCB suit insisting that the CNMI government become a party to the suit? Could it be that they are not willing to undertake the case under the more customary contingency basis?

If there are grounds for the suit, the suit should proceed on its own merits. If there aren't grounds, the government should not be expected to bail out foolhardy lawyers.

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In wading through a month's accumulation of newspapers trying to catch up on what's been happening in my absence, I've discovered that there's considerable difference between reading only one or two papers every day and reading two or three times that many.

Ordinarily, it doesn't bother me that only the first six to ten pages contain local news. I read the rest just to stay in touch - even if on the most general of terms - with what's happening elsewhere in the world. But when I'm trying to catch up on local news, the rest of the paper becomes irrelevant, adding only minor increments of new information, much like a soap opera, from one day to the next. Would that it was possible to get some sort of summary instead!

What I find more bothersome are the "filler" stories - the many stories in each issue of accidents, murders, weird incidents or bizarre behavior in homes, schools, hospitals, the skies or on the road. The stories typically involve only a few people. The people aren't famous. The places aren't famous. The stories are not even cited as indicative of a trend. There's nothing particularly noteworthy about any part of them except the bad luck, or the questionable behavior, or the unfortunate consequences involved.

Yes, newspaper carry such stories every day. But their negativity, their irrelevance, their repetitive nature becomes much more obvious when having to read a month's worth of them at a time. How newsworthy is it really that a small plane crashed in Malaysia, killing two people? That a minibus in Cairo crashed and killed 18 people? That a woman sitting in a university library was jabbed in the foot with a syringe? Bizarre, yes, but newsworthy? How newsworthy is it that lightning killed a man in Maryland? That the bodies of two missing seventh graders in Canada were recovered from Lake Huron? That a bus in northern India went off a mountain road, killing 27 and leaving only 10 survivors? More people die every day throughout the world of various illnesses, acts of wars, accidents, and yes, normal causes, even, than are involved in these news stories. So why do these stories see print? What makes them so special? They're all so grim, so ugly, so depressing. Other than friends and immediate family, of what import are they?

It sure would be nice to see some happy, cheerful, heartwarming, uplifting stories instead! About how people treated each other nicely. Did good deeds on behalf of the world's denizens.

Saved a whale, or a raccoon, or a reed warbler or a penguin. Helped someone find a home, a job, a doctor or a lost ring. How a dog, or a horse, or an elephant saved someone's life. or learned a new trick. or adopted some animal of another species.

There is enough that is grim, depressing, sad, frustrating, in most people's lives already. Stories about similar problems in other peoples' lives don't help. We don't need reminders of everyone's woes in the daily press. What we do need are stories that give us hope. That renew, reenforce our faith in others, in the goodness of the human race. That give us pride, satisfaction, enjoyment, pleasure.

I'm convinced that if we were surrounded by positive stories, rather than negative ones, it would eventually have a noticeable positive effect on all of us.

I know it's too much to expect my small voice to change the tenor of the media stories distributed by the international news syndicates. But perhaps it will influence local editors to pick the more positive stories, the ones that set good examples instead of those that show us how vile some people can be.

And then, the next time I try to wade through a month's accumulated newspapers, I won't end up being quite as frustrated and depressed.....

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This trip home was more arduous than most - I spent half of it helping to take care of my nine-month-old twin grandsons and their six-year-old brother. It's been a long time since I've done all those domestic chores (clearing the table, doing dishes, washing and folding clothes, feeding, consoling and schlepping babies, occasional dusting) on a daily basis. I spent most of the rest of it in the company of a 12-year-old teeny-bopper (though I'm not sure that's what they call them today).

I didn't get much sympathy when I described it all to my friends. Seems that almost every one of them had similar tales to tell - of doing their share of taking care of young grandchildren. The media has been reporting that more and more child care is being provided by grandparents. But I didn't believe it - until now. (Mine was but a short stint - but for others it's more often an on-going, year-round thing.) Grandmothering sure has changed!

