

On My Mind

9/22/00

The proposal to allow other post-secondary institutions to open in the CNMI, as is provided for in House Bill 12-192, is long overdue. While Northern Marianas College (NMC) has attempted to 'be all things to all people,' more or less, the range of post-secondary programs that could be offered is far too vast for a single institution to provide. In addition to which, NMC has not always made the most logical or appropriate choices as to which ones it should offer.

The bill as it now stands, however, is seriously flawed. It provides no standards, or criteria, or means of establishing them, to ensure that whatever post-secondary institution is established here is legitimate, and is credentialed by a legitimate, licensed, professional agency. Without such assurances incorporated into the legislation, the CNMI opens itself to all sorts of fraudulent, get-rich-quick, fly-by-night schemes that will benefit only the institution's founder, but not its students, or the CNMI.

There is a rumor afoot that, as is true of the "shooting resorts" - allegedly also good for the CNMI - the proposal to establish additional post-secondary institutions is motivated by the promise of millions of dollars from some wealthy "investor" lurking in the background.

Of course, million-dollar investors are not to be sneezed at - provided they offer something that is helpful and appropriate to the CNMI. It is not clear, for example, that offering additional teacher and nurse training programs will increase the number of island teachers and nurses in the CNMI. Until the salary packages (including benefits) for these positions come closer to matching those obtainable elsewhere, there is no incentive to enter these programs.

Nor, it is safe to say, will trade schools lure a huge attendance so long as the wages for carpenters, plumbers, electricians, automobile mechanics, and the like, remain as low as they are, unless the courses are marketed to people (not only young men, but also young women, as well as older homemakers of both sexes) as useful skills in maintaining their own homes and vehicles.

And, contrary to the opinion voiced by the Speaker in introducing the bill, as reported in a recent issue of the <I>Tribune</I>, scientists are needed in the CNMI - from biologists, ichthyologists, hydrologists, agronomists, to botanists, to name a few - as are engineers, architects, psychologists, veterinarians, dentists, doctors, lawyers, and certified public accountants, as well as a host of other professionals.

Not to mention school and public librarians, specialists in penology, crime detection, traffic engineering, and all those other myriad professions for which the CNMI now pays top dollars to consultants - or suffers, and does without (some recently-built curbs, for example, could only have been designed by amateurs).

Care should be taken in how HB 12-192 is crafted, however, so as not to limit the level, type or subject of post-secondary institutions established in the CNMI, while assuring that their offerings and performance are properly credentialed.

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Another area where legislation might help improve competition is in retail food marketing.

There are certain brands that simply disappear from the shelves - apparently due to distributorship monopolies. Cadbury chocolate bars - with half a dozen different fillings from fruit to caramel - used to be readily available on Saipan, but have now disappeared. Bryers ice cream - admittedly not quite as good as Hagen Dasz or Baskin-Robbins, but definitely better than Dryers - is not to be found on island. And Coca Cola isn't sold in the airport lounge.

Why is that? Such absolutes - that certain brands are just not available anywhere - can't be due solely to market demand. Isn't the public entitled to a choice?

Carrying that a step further, it's a shame that the CNMI has been so demographically profiled that, despite seven auditoriums operating simultaneously, there are still certain films - and highly reviewed films at that - that simply never come to Saipan, are never shown here. Unfortunately, legislation can't solve that situation. Though public agitation might.... For those sufficiently concerned to want to write a letter, address it to David Lyons, 919 S'west Taylor St., Suite 800, Portland, Oregon 97205. A copy could be sent to Kurtis Steger, P.O. Box 50219, Saipan 96950.

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With the suggestion by Robert Underwood, Guam's (voting) delegate to the U.S. Congress, that the time zone in our area be designated "Chamorro Standard Time" again in the news, I thought it might be useful to reprint parts of an e-mail message I received from him on the choice of name. I had written him to suggest that the term "Chamolinian" be used instead of Chamorro when the story about his proposal first was reported earlier this year.

What Underwood wrote, in part, was, " There is no effort on my part to demean or ignore the very strong Carolinian influence on the Marianas. It is there, we should celebrate it and I have taught it for years to several generations of students.

"The term Chamorro is not meant as a statement of cultural superiority. It is simply the term we use to ascribe the original inhabitants of the Marianas and it is the term which all of the Marianas Islands have in common. Carolinian refers to the people of the Caroline Islands. The Federated States of Micronesia tomorrow could name their three time zones the following: Carolinian Time, Chuuk Time and Pohnpei Time. I think it is best to leave the Marianas with a name unique and common to all of the Marianas.

"I did this as a compromise. If people insist that it be named for a place name, then it will become Guam-Marianas Standard Time. Over time, the Marianas will be dropped (as it is in Hawaii-Aleutian Standard Time) and only Guam will be recognized. I didn't think anyone wanted this."

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How does that saying go: "Ask and ye shall receive"? Well, I asked, and I received, but it wasn't a matter of granting my wish so much as it was my not being as well informed as I should have been. I'm talking about that part of my last column in which I rued the non-passage of the election reform bill, and particularly noted the need to lengthen the requirement for residency in order to be eligible to vote.

Three days later, the newspapers announced that the Governor had signed the bill into law. I had not even known that it had passed both houses. While one can argue that that is my shortcoming - and to an extent, I won't argue with that - I would still argue that it is also a shortcoming on the part of the press. It would be a great service to the public if the press would at least occasionally issue a status report of bills that have passed one house or another, as well as bills now awaiting decision by the governor.

Of course, one could argue as well, that that could also be a responsibility of the legislature itself.

Surely a record of bill status is kept somewhere up there, and it should not be all that difficult to make that record more accessible to the public. Regardless of whether provided by the press or the legislature, doing so would give the public an opportunity to provide more input on bills while they were still pending and, presumably, could still be amended, rather than being forced to try for passage of amendments after the bills became law.

If there were a "League of Women Voters" here, one could ask that organization to keep up and make such a list available to the public, but it's not. Given that neither press nor legislature is apt to undertake such a service, perhaps the Chamber of Commerce could, and would?