

On My Mind

11/3/00

Can one say that the outcome of tomorrow's primary - the Republican candidate for governor is at issue - will be a measure of the CNMI's political maturity? A test of whether family and favors, rather than substance and integrity, still sway most island voters?

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The election of third-party candidates in the last election - after years of a strictly two-party system - indicated that voters are indeed willing to step outside of the usual voting pattern. The question is, to what extent will that also be true in tomorrow's primary?

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This year there will actually be yet another departure from the norm - a three-way primary for the Democratic mayoral candidate. From the point of voter maturity, one could argue that that, too, is a good sign. But a sign of efficiency it is not. The mayoral primary will be held separately, in December.

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Can one view the mayoral primary as another test of political maturity? The "grade" a function of how many more, or fewer, voters will concern themselves with the mayoral position than with the gubernatorial position? Or should it be read as merely a measure of the relative importance of the respective positions? Of the strength of the two parties?

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Politics certainly provide an endless subject for discussion!

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Much more difficult to interpret, I would imagine, will be the outcome of next week's presidential race. Though it seems simple enough on the face of it: will voters be more swayed by a mediocre intelligence and a seemingly natural stage presence, or by a keen intelligence but not-so-hot interpersonal skills? Yet Clinton's role - or lack of it - is bound to be a major topic of discussion, regardless of the outcome. As are all sorts of analyses of voter demography, education philosophy, economic indicators, and the like.

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Not much that has been innovative or creative, much less distinctive, has been forthcoming from those charged with promoting tourism as an economic resource for the CNMI. The rhetoric seems bogged down in the same old unimaginative verbiage of more hotel rooms and/or more airline flights to Saipan.

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With thanks to a statement by Gemma Q. Casas in her column "Thoughts" in Tuesday's *Var-iety*, how about advertising the CNMI as the home of multi-millionaire Larry Hillblom? According to Casas Saipan is already known to some people as the place where "multimillionaire Larry Hillblom spent most of his lifetime and died." Why not capitalize on that?

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Other tourist destinations have heroes, artists, government leaders, around whom significant tourist attractions are built. So far, except for the Japanese Sugar King, and the Carolinians' Chief Aghurub, no such personalities have emerged as a focus for attracting tourists to the CNMI. However, there's nothing that mandates one must turn to ancient history for such idols. There's no reason not to turn to contemporary history, if it serves the purpose.

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Some ideas for using Hillblom to fill that function: There could be tours of the house he built along the beach. A contest for a statue to be erected in front of the house in Susupe that was the site of his first office. Another statue erected in front of the Legislature, to commemorate Hillblom's involvement with legislative issues, his unsuccessful bid for membership in the House. An alcove built in the Bank of Saipan, another of Larry's projects. A research library built to house and provide access to the reams of materiel created by probate of his estate with a separate room to house the documents associated with his court battles concerning citizenship, Article XII, the Covenant. A walking tour of all the legal offices involved in the probate. A monument at the site of his plane crash on Tinian. Restaurants could advertise: "Hillblom ate here." Bars could advertise "Hillblom partied here."

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And I'm sure others could come up with a wealth of additional tourist attractions built on their knowledge of Hillblom and his activities. Of course, there'd have to be Hillblom t-shirts, hats, key chains, magnets. The problem would be how to handle his more prurient side. Should it be ignored altogether? Left to the market? Relegated to under-the-counter sales, or specialty shops?

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Not that I mean any disrespect to Larry. But despite his usual unassuming attire of blue jeans and t-shirt, he was, in many ways, quite flamboyant. (In fact, I once described him - in print - as a political pyromaniac.) And now that he is gone, memorializing some of his capers can do him no harm. In fact, he might even find it amusing, if not appropriate - wherever he is - that his exploits are being used to bolster the CNMI economy.

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MVA, are you listening?

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Today is Citizenship Day. The day that President Ronald Reagan proclaimed the U.S. trusteeship agreement under the U.N. no longer applicable to the CNMI, and on which, under the terms of the Covenant, qualified residents of the CNMI became U.S. citizens.

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While a handful of people and organizations did take out congratulatory ads in honor of Citizenship Day in the <I>Tribune</I>, neither of the Republican primary contenders did - in either paper. Odd, that. Nor does either paper carry any information on whether Citizenship Day, a government holiday, will be officially observed in any way.

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That's another area an imaginative entrepreneur could use to promote tourism. "Come celebrate U.S. citizenship with the citizens of the CNMI." There could be a parade, band and dance performances, poster and essay contests - all open to, advertised to, tourists - tourists could even

be invited to be judges of any number of events of the day. Promoting Citizenship Day to tourists would remind foreigners (read potential investors) that the CNMI is U.S.-based - with U.S. laws, currency, and protections. It would provide another reason to come to the CNMI, another event tourists could attend, take in.

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MVA - are you listening?

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Admittedly, such a celebration would be rather difficult on a day as rainy as this Citizenship Day was, but that's a different issue.....

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The <I>PDN</I>'s Joe Murphy called it "one of the best campaign ads" [this season] but I beg to differ. It's one of the most deceptive ads I've ever seen - a prime example of how double-think can be used to lead people to think what one wants them to regardless of the truth involved. The ad is Mark Forbes' for Guam senator. It reads, in part: "In the time Mark Forbes has been in the Guam Legislature, the Legislative budget has been reduced by sixty-seven percent, Legislative hiring has been reduced by more than eighty percent, Legislative travel has gone down by more than ninety percent."

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All great accomplishments, to be sure, but what the ad doesn't tell you is what, if anything, Mark Forbes had to do with those accomplishments. The rest of the ad only says, "In these times of tight revenue, when we need to dedicate every dime available to keep our schools and healthcare system running, isn't this the kind of effort we need?" Yes, it certainly is. But there's not a single word in the whole ad to tie Forbes to that kind of effort. Pretty clever! But more than a little deceptive.