

On My Mind  
11/24/00

I suppose one should be grateful that presidential contestants Bush and Gore are content to hand over their differences to the legal profession to settle for them, and that their supporters - and the rest of the voters - find that acceptable as well. Most of the alternatives aren't all that pleasant to think about.

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On the other hand, the proliferation of law suits, at every possible level, in every possible court - from county to state to regional to federal - isn't all that re-assuring to think about either - except for the attorneys involved, their staff, and their families, for whom all those law suits must seem providential indeed.

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In fact, I find it downright disturbing that running to the courts is being seen as the logical, obvious and only honorable route to solution of the problems. The over-lapping and multiple court filings will only complicate, confuse, and quite possibly delay final resolution. And what a model for the rest of us to follow: if things don't go as you think they should, go sue! Will - heaven help us! - enrollment at the nation's law schools suddenly increase with the "glamour" attached to this election circus, spewing even more lawyers out onto the playing fields?

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Whether or not Gore was sincere in offering to meet with Bush to resolve the differences, at least he offered another alternative.

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The funniest story I've heard about this whole spectacle is from a commentator on a news show that was featuring reaction in other countries. In Singapore (or it could have been Bangkok or Hongkong, or....), the commentator said, they're having to start with the very basics and explain what Florida is.

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While on the subject of matters political, and their irrationality, the proposal to have the CNMI Attorney General elected rather than appointed doesn't make a lot of sense to me. For one, having to compete in an election costs money - a burden not every candidate for attorney general may want to take on.

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Secondly, having to please the general public is not conducive to good legal decisions - particularly when they might become controversial. As I would argue the defeat of Tim Bellas's bid for renewal of his bench seat proved, good decisions are no guarantee of either public support or re-appointment. An elected Attorney General is as apt as not to have no backbone.

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More workable might be the pattern set by the appointment of the Public Auditor. He is appointed by the governor, approved by both houses of the legislature, and may be removed only for cause upon the affirmative vote of two-thirds of the members of each house. Since the

Attorney General functions as the governor's attorney, the attorney general could be given a four-year term, concurrent with that of the governor, but in all other aspects be treated like the Public Auditor - appointment approved by both houses, and removal prior to the expiration of his term only for cause, and only by a two-thirds vote of each house.

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The proposal for an elected Attorney General is under consideration at the Senate as a legislative initiative that would be submitted to the voters at the next general election as an amendment to the CNMI constitution.

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This too, would be funny if it weren't so self-serving, and so frustrating: The Senate has passed the FY 2000 budget knowing in advance that the House will not approve the changes made by the Senate. Senate Fiscal Committee Chair Edward U. Maratita is reported in a front-page story in Tuesday's <I>Tribune</I> as saying, "Definitely, the House will reject our [budget] proposal."

The logic of that action escapes me.

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Commendable, rather than funny, is a policy on population and development formulated by a special committee appointed by Palau president Kuniwo Nakamura in response to concern about increasing numbers of foreign workers.

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The policy, as reported in a story in the 11/15/00 issue of the <I>Variety</I> calls for a four-pronged approach: maximizing Palau's existing human resources; encouraging Palauans living abroad to return to Palau; limiting the number of foreign labor permits to no more than 70% of the labor force, and balancing the rate of commercial development with Palau's human and natural resources.

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Would that work for the CNMI?

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Not funny so much as odd, the scooter craze - which seems to have reached even to the CNMI - seems strange indeed. When I was a child, scooters were but a pre-cursor to bikes. If one was too poor to own a bike, at least one could own a scooter. Now the lowly vehicle is being sold as some sort of "high tech" fad. Just amazing what skilful marketing can do.

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And what it can't. Despite the bally-hoo about invasions of privacy and data banks of personal information for sale, it looks as though those of us who don't live in the 50 states needn't worry all that much. I tried to find my name on two web personal search services - whowhere.com and anywhere.com - and discovered that they seem to search only the 50 states. The pull-down menus of where to search do not list Washington, D.C., Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands,

American Samoa, Guam, or the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.

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That's one instance where ignorance on the part of mainland data base builders would appear to be to our benefit! (When mainland data base builders do not include the CNMI's MP two-letter state code in the data bases of catalog sales companies, that's quite a different matter, of course!)

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Another thing that even skillful marketing cannot do is cover up the downright cruelty involved in catering to the Japanese taste for shark fin soup. "Harvesting" of the fins is done by shearing off the fins, and then throwing the sharks, now not only seriously wounded but also unable to navigate or swim, back into the water to be eaten by other fish.

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Sharks may not be the most likable critters out there in the ocean, but that doesn't give mankind the license to treat them so cruelly and so wastefully. Sharks serve a purpose in the life chain of the seas, and fishermen who kill them indiscriminately upset the ecological balance as well as reduce diversity of the species.

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Shark-finning is already illegal in U.S. Atlantic, Caribbean and Gulf of Mexico waters. There is now a push to have the practice declared illegal in Pacific waters as well. A bill proposing that shark finning be banned in all U.S. waters, that imports to the U.S. be banned, and that the U.S. Secretary of Commerce be required to negotiate with other countries on an international ban on shark finning is under active consideration by the U.S. Congress, with the support of Hawaii's House members.

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Too many of the restaurants here in the CNMI carry shark-fin soup on their menu. If local restaurant owners will not, of their own accord, remove the item and cease serving the soup, perhaps the restaurants should be publicly listed and black-balled?