

On My Mind

1/5/01

I finally came across an explanation of why this New Year's should be considered the beginning of the millennium, that is so simple I wonder that anyone could have argued otherwise. It goes like this: in counting, what number does one always start with? The number "one." Be it apples, oranges, or days or pairs of shoes, the first one is assigned the number "one." So it makes eminent sense that in counting years, or millennia, the count begins with the number "one" - in this case, 2001.

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The "zero" number is not a beginning, but an end, as in the number "ten" or "100." And so the year 2000 marked the end of a millennium, not the beginning.

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Which goes to prove that the values of abstract and obscure theories notwithstanding, keeping it simple makes a lot of things a lot easier to understand.

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The House Speaker's announcement that he will be forming a new political party is as presumptuous as is the name he has chosen for it. According to the election law, he cannot lay claim to a "recognized political party" because the law requires that to be considered as such, its candidate must have received not less than 10% of the vote, in a general election, for the office to be filled.

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Since there has been no election at which votes for the Speaker's new party have been counted, the criteria for a new party have not been met. The Speaker will have to run as an independent. Of course, he can call his backers a "party." And he can give that group a name. But the ballot will not identify him as anything other than an independent candidate.

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To call his party the "Covenant" party is both arrogant and disrespectful. The Covenant to Establish a Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands in Political Union with the United States of America is the foundation upon which the CNMI has been built. Signed in 1975, the Covenant is the document that defines the unique relationship between the U.S. and the CNMI and the relative rights and responsibilities of each of the parties to the agreement.

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It is the Covenant that gives the CNMI the right to limit trial by jury, to rebate federal taxes, to maintain a Senate independent of the one-man one-vote rule, to control its own immigration and its own minimum wage. To debase the term "Covenant" by interpreting it to mean only a political party - an unsanctioned one at that - and, to make matters worse, a party tainted by mafia connections, borders on the treasonous.

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Granted, "covenant" is but a word, and is, after all, a legitimate word in the English language. But the connotations of the word, to the people of the CNMI, is very special. To use the word in the context that Fitial is using it is deliberate affront, a be-smirching of the language that should not be tolerated.

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Duty Free Shoppes, Inc, has done something similar - taken ordinary words and twisted their meaning in negative fashion so that duty-free no longer means free of duty, but refers to a particular chain of over-priced retail outlets. At least that company has now backed off somewhat - and refers to itself as DFS "Galleria" more often than as Duty Free Shoppes.

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Fitial's announced candidacy brings to five the number of potential gubernatorial candidates in the upcoming November election: Juan Babauta, Republican candidate; Jesse Borja, Democratic candidate; and independent candidates Froilan Tenorio, Fitial, and Pepero - if, as rumored, he decides to run as well.

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With so many candidates, it is possible that the next governor will not be elected by a majority (that is, over 50% of the votes ), but could win with as little as 21%, or just over 1/5th, of the votes. The Constitution does not specify what is required to elect a governor. The election law specifies only that the winner is the one who receives the highest number of votes for that office.

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Some states require that if no candidate gets a majority (more than half) of the votes cast, the two top candidates should face a run-off election. Under current CNMI law, that will not be required. Whether that is a good thing or a bad thing, is open to question. While winning with only 21% of the votes may not give a mandate to the victor, it is, on the other hand, a lot easier than having to garner 51% of the votes cast in order to win.

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Realistically speaking, the race will probably not be that close among the five candidates. So it will take more than a minimum 21% of the votes to win the election. But with some votes going to the other candidates, at least it won't require a full 51% - if that's any consolation.

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It's almost too bad that Saipan's Marpi Grotto has achieved recognition as one of the world's ten best grotto dive sites. Both local papers carried the story last week, that <I>Sport Divers Magazine</I>, a bi-monthly publication, listed the Grotto as 2<sup>nd</sup> in a list of "Ten Great Cavern Dives" world-wide.

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Now MVA will no doubt be tempted to put its inevitable mark on the site, paving the parking area, putting up more of those fake wooden log fences, issuing vendor permits to sell drinks and souvenirs, and probably going so far as to clear the undergrowth alongside the steps to modify those infamous 103 stone steps that lead to the pool at the bottom. Or who know, even install a lift - as it has threatened to do in the past.

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MVA should leave the dive site alone. The 103 steps are part of what make the dive different, special, a challenge. Besides, if access to the dive site is made easier, it - and the coral outside the grotto - will become even more trashed than they already are from the heavy traffic to which they are already subjected.

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A perennial thorn in the side - the bombing of Farallon de Medinilla - is again making news, this time prompted by a suit filed in Hawaii by the legal arm of the Sierra Club against the U.S. Navy on grounds that the bombing harms endangered species.

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A letter to the editor in Wednesday's <I>Variety</I> claims that the CNMI will lose all manner of income if the bombing is stopped, because Navy ships will no longer come to Saipan, and all the income they bring will be lost. Since the planes that bomb Farallon de Medinilla are based on Guam, since it is not aircraft carriers supporting those bombers that come to the Saipan harbor, I fail to see the connection.

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The ships that come to the Saipan port are part of a Pacific fleet. They would be in the Pacific regardless of whether bombing of Farallon de Medinilla were allowed or not. Their presence at the Saipan dock has nothing to do with the bombing of Farallon de Medinilla. They come to the CNMI, for rest and recreation, because it is attractive, and is a convenient American location.

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A <I>PDN</I> editorial claims that the armed forces need our northern island in order to maintain their readiness. The editorial argues that "The reality is, the very lives of our fighting forces depend on their ability to train in circumstances that simulate reality," - which it claims bombing Farallon de Medinilla does. Well, if that is the case - if the island is all that important, doesn't it make sense that the CNMI should be appropriately compensated for sacrificing one of its islands for the good of the country? Is there anyone out there who believes the pittance the CNMI has received to date is appropriate compensation?

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There is also the issue of all the ordnance not only on the island, but polluting the waters surrounding it (surely no one believes that no bomb dropped has missed?). The Puerto Ricans have won new terms for continued bombing of the island of Vieques. Perhaps it's time the CNMI did the same.