

On My Mind

2/9/01

The Governor's strategy of dealing with issues by establishing a task force isn't always that productive, but at least it serves to defuse the issue, and to delay action until, hopefully, calmer heads prevail. But without either hot tempers or a crisis to deal with, the House proposal to establish a commission to handle the opening of Texas Road would appear to be not only non-productive, but downright wasteful.

The commission would have as members the Department of Public Works, the Division of Public Lands, the Coastal Resources Management Office, the Commonwealth Utilities Corporation and the Division of Fish and Wildlife. Since these are the agencies that would be involved in putting in the road in any case, it is hard to understand why anyone would think it necessary to create yet another layer of bureaucracy solely for the purpose of enabling those agencies to work together to build one road.

The commission proposed in House Bill 12-267 would also be required to have a CNMI licensed surveyor and a professional engineer licensed to practice in the CNMI. This doesn't make much sense either. With those services readily available in the private sector, and, presumably, also within the government sector, there should be no need to hire additional full-time staff - unless someone has a relative in those professions who needs a job?

All of the work defined in House Bill 12-267 as needing to be done in order to build the road, such as identifying private landowners, identifying the total area of land needed, and providing for utility easements, has already been done at least once in the prolonged effort to open Texas Road to the public. There is no need to do that work again.

The bill also calls for the identification and appropriation of funding for acquiring private properties that are involved. That has not been done before, and is required before action on the road can proceed. So why didn't the House just pass a bill appropriating the necessary monies??????

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As efforts to establish a shooting resort somewhere in the CNMI continue, it is instructive and enlightening, it seem to me, that even the media is reporting that the pressure is coming not from residents, not from tourists or tourist agencies, not from CNMI government officials, but from the investors - who are, after all, outsiders, not from the CNMI, and cannot be expected to be concerned with the best interests of the people of the CNMI.

It will be interesting to see who wins - the people of the CNMI, or the Korean investors. Will the blandishments offered by the Koreans be successful in seducing our leaders, or will the integrity of our leaders - and their responsibilities to their constituents - prevail?

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With the subject of scuba diving already up for discussion, it might be worth taking a closer look at just what those scuba divers do while in the water. Those who use scuba to go spear-fishing aren't really there to admire the view - but, in fact, to destroy it, by removing the fish, eels and octopuses that make scuba diving so fascinating for the rest of us.

This past Sunday's <I>PDN</I> editorial page was devoted to a discussion of just that subject: should spear-fishing on scuba be banned? Apparently not only a giant trevally, but also a moray eel, that had been hand fed at tourist scuba sites on Guam, were recently killed by spearfishermen on scuba.

Though concern was expressed both for those who spear only enough fish to feed their families, and those who sell their fish commercially, the general consensus seemed to be that tourism concerns should take precedence. In fact, the <I>PDN</I> editorial called for a total ban on spear-fishing on scuba in all Guam's waters.

Scuba gear gives spearfishermen an unfair advantage - it allows them to stay underwater longer, and to go deeper than free-diving spearfishermen. As the fish population decreases, reproduction also decreases, and over time not only are there fewer fish, but those still left are smaller, or only juveniles. With fewer fish to clean the algae from the corals, the reef itself suffers as well.

What is left is a barren reef, devoid of fish or coral - and of far less interest to recreational scuba divers than reefs where diversity still flourishes. Diving a barren site - where there's not a single moving critter - and no color in the coral - as I've done on a dive in the Philippines - can get pretty boring.

Should a total ban on all spearfishing by scuba also be proposed for the CNMI? Certainly, it should be banned in or near areas frequented by recreational divers. It should also be banned in or near designated preserves. There's no doubt that if spearfishing on scuba were totally banned, free-diving spearfishermen would soon find fish stocks improving, making it easier for them to find fish for their families.

But then, what about families who like to eat fish, but don't have a fisherman in the family? Or the restaurants that offer reef fish on the menu? Can their needs be met by free-diving fishermen alone? Perhaps the only way to find out is to try - impose the total ban, collect the data, and then re-evaluate the decision in a year.

If nothing is done, there may come a time when there will not be fish for anyone to catch.

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Well, it's taken four months for the local media to pick up on a story that was given to them last October, but they've finally done it: printed the story of Carlos Santos' tragic accident, with the <I>Variety</I> giving over its entire back page, complete with pictures in color.

Carlos, son of Dr. Chris Ebert Santos, was a star player in the Saipan Youth Football League. His family had promised that if he continued to get good grades, they would move to the states, so Carlos could pursue football in earnest. He did, and the family moved to Colorado in 1999. But after only a year, he was injured in a football tackle during his school's homecoming game, which paralyzed him from the neck down.

Carlos is undergoing rehabilitation, and, according to the story in the papers this past week, is now able to operate an electric wheelchair, to stand partially erect, to type - and is sending out e-mails - and can walk in the pool during water therapy. He vows that he will be walking when he comes to Saipan to visit.

I'm glad to see that the papers finally gave the story - and the fund-raising efforts of friends and family - the space they deserved (The story appeared here October 20, 2000.) Of course, better late than never, as the saying goes.

But it is symptomatic of the press that even now, there is no indication in either paper, as to the source of its information. Given that the stories in both papers are identical, it seems obvious that the same person wrote both. It's also obvious that the writer is pretty professional. So where did the local papers get the story? Was it sent out as a general press release? Was it written specifically for the local papers? for some other publication? Acknowledgment of the source enhances credibility - not only in this article, but in all articles.....