

On My Mind

2/23/01

Party loyalty has its place. It is what keeps political parties together, what gives them strength. With 'strength in numbers' parties stand a better chance of passing their version of legislation, and of seeing their nominees for government positions or judgeships, their candidates for office, succeed. Party loyalty generally assures that individual members who are loyal to the party are also rewarded - by perks, by support of the individual's legislation, by positions of prominence in party politics.

But party loyalty can also hurt. When one's party is out of power, the prospects of achieving anything are pretty slim - as all those who've found themselves in a minority position in the CNMI are well aware. Proposed bills are shelved, favored projects are never funded, the appointment of minority party officials to government positions just doesn't happen.

CNMI's Republican Party might want to think again before it decides to formally align itself with and become a member of the national Republican Party, as, according to a <I>Variety</I> story reported earlier this week, is under consideration by local party officials.

The CNMI may be expected to benefit, at least in minor ways, from formally declaring its loyalty to the Republican Party now in power in Washington, D.C. But will it benefit in significant ways? Hardly. Not only the other insular areas, but also the fifty states, all with far larger Republican populations, will also be competing for the benefits that membership in the party in power brings. By comparison, the CNMI's small number of Republicans - who, it must be remembered, have no voice in Congress - have very little to offer to the national party in exchange for presumed potential benefits.

Additionally, by formally aligning itself with the Republicans, the CNMI will lose all chance of favorable response to its needs the minute the Republican Party loses control in Washington. Instead, it will face two, if not four, years of being ignored, of no special consideration on any issue. All of which is equally true, of course, were island Democrats to consider formally aligning themselves with the national Democratic Party.

Prior to the previous administration, the CNMI wisely did not align itself with either party in Washington. Instead, it established and maintained good working relationships with the staff of Congressional members of those committees most involved with issues related to CNMI interests.

The concerns of the CNMI were heard, and acted upon, regardless of which party ruled the White House.

Or could it be that island politicians believe that national party affiliation requires no more loyalty than does affiliation with local political parties, that their changing allegiance will be accepted as readily in Washington as it appears to be in the CNMI?

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Speaking of aligning one's self with one party or another, it is a pity that the Governor has (in loyalty to a party member?) seemingly aligned himself with the position of Congressman Dino Jones, who believes that Tanapag residents are in need of re-location due to the presence of PCB's in the village. In actuality, reports from the village would seem to indicate that there are no villagers seeking re-location. Moreover, the fact of the matter is that most of the PCB's have now been removed from the village, therefore no longer posing the threat of exposure to villagers.

In the future, the Governor might want to check out the facts for himself rather than letting a presumed party loyalty cloud his judgment.

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The tightrope the Governor is required to walk at times was never more evident than in the signing of the declaration proclaiming March as the "CNMI Recognition Month for Persons with Disabilities." The signing - which took place outside the Administration Building, a picture of which was featured on the <I>Variety</I>'s front page this past Wednesday - was followed by a statement to the press in which, the paper reported, the Governor urged island hotels to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Not mentioned was the fact that the Administration Building itself is not compliant with the ADA - which is why the signing ceremony was held outside, in front of the building, rather than, as is customary, in the Governor's office on the second floor - to which there is no elevator.

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Ken Govendo's sense of humor has a tendency to be rather harsh on occasion, but I am in total agreement with his praise for Governor Tauese Sunia of American Samoa, as expressed in his letter to the editor which appeared in today's <I>Variety</I>. Governor Sunia has decided that garment factories have no place on his islands. "I simply do not believe that garment factories, supported by an expatriate workforce, have a place in the economic development of American Samoa," he is quoted as saying in a front page story in Monday's <I>Variety</I>.

The promised gold at the end of the rainbow, said Sunia, had always been that the garment factories would train locals, providing them with skilled, stable jobs, and enabling them to replace the alien workers initially hired for the factories. But that concept "has not stood the test of reality," and Sunia now believes that "not even the best management practices can translate that ideal into reality."

He also blames the garment industry for unfairly tarnishing the image of the territory, its people and its government. "[U]nfortunately, no level of public relations efforts can remove the stigma which now taints us," as a result of the inaccurate reporting of problems in the industry, he said.

Of course, American Samoa also has an existing tuna processing industry, so the garment factory

was not its sole alternative to tourism, as it is here. But it is worthy of note that not all island governments see the garment industry as a desirable component of their economic development.

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“Introduced” species - plants, animals, insects that are not native to an area - generally turn out to be undesirable components of an area’s environment, since more often than not, they have no natural enemies, and tend to dominate their surroundings - often, with rather disastrous effect. Some arrive accidentally - though some are due to carelessness, but some are not - with no one to blame for their arrival.

Yet attempts continue to be made to deliberately introduce “alien” species for one reason or another. Few have accomplished what was intended, due in large part to a lack of adequate research. The legendary example is the importation of mongooses to control snakes on an island, only to discover that the snakes were day creatures while the mongooses were night creatures (or it may have been the other way around).

The latest example is the importation of oryx - this time not to control some other species, or resolve some imbalance of nature, as is often the case, but to provide “good trophy animals” to recreational hunters in an empty corner of New Mexico. The oryx, an exotic antelope native to Africa, was imported because it is able to survive in desert surroundings. But it has survived far better than anticipated, and there are now so many of them that there are fears they will spread to Texas and Mexico.

According to an Associated Press release appearing in Monday’s <I>Variety</I>, even increasing the number of hunters, or the number of permissible trophies taken, has not worked, because the oryx are within the White Sands Missile Range, and providing the required escorts to an ever-larger numbers of hunters has become prohibitively expensive. The oryx have already gone beyond the boundaries of the Range, crossing highways, grazing on private lands, and entering runways at an air force base where F-117 stealth fighters are based.

Belatedly, missile range researchers have now undertaken a \$350,000 study of the oryx’s behavior patterns.

Which once again proves the wisdom of the old adage, “Don’t mess with Mother Nature.”