

On My Mind

3/9/01

Well, well. After weeks of accusation and denial all too fulsomely aired in the press, the CNMI Senate finally confirmed David S. Wiseman as a trial court judge in the CNMI's Superior Court. Not, I suppose, that there was all that much doubt about the outcome. Wiseman worked very hard to obtain that appointment.

Despite the honor he must believe he has achieved, I feel sorry for him. He has placed himself in a position where he now may be forced to issue not only judgements against those who supported him, but also judgements favorable to those who opposed him. Every one of those presumed impartial judgements will be subject to public scrutiny - open to all to hear, see, evaluate. I imagine that that will be an arduous task, requiring a lot more self-control, restraint, and conscientiousness than is normally required of most people. I don't envy him.

Of course, all judges, in a manner of speaking, face those same challenges. But not many judges owe as much as it appears Wiseman owes to their supporters; not all that many have as many detractors as it appears Wiseman has. And not many face the probability of facing as many of their supporters or detractors in their court as, given the size of this community, Wiseman does.

I don't envy Eric Smith - who was first nominated for the judgeship, but to whom the Senate did not even extend the courtesy of a hearing - either. While judge-shopping is not legally permissible, I would imagine that Smith will do his best not to have to appear in Wiseman's court. And when he does have to appear, I imagine it will take a lot of will-power to maintain the degree of respect expected of attorneys in the courtroom. But Smith has proven himself in other arenas. He's bound to survive.

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It's not news that the two local papers, the <I>Saipan Tribune</I> and the <I>Marianas Variety</I>, reflect different points of view. But it became crystal clear during the Wiseman controversy, when the <I>Tribune's</I> columnist Charles P. Reyes, Jr, openly critical of Wiseman in the past, suddenly changed his tune, and remained mum throughout.

And the <I>Tribune</I>, of course, did not publish that fascinating letter to the editor in the March 5 issue of the <I>Variety</I>, which spells out any number of reasons why House Speaker Fitial should not expect to win his bid for governor this fall - the <I>Tribune</I> being owned by ardent Fitial supporter Willie Tan.

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Much as I continue to admire Bishop Tomas A. Camacho despite some very fundamental differences in our beliefs, I have to voice objection to his comments, as carried in both local papers recently, that the CNMI's prostitutes are obviously women who are bored with their lives, and

have gone into the trade for lack of anything better to do with their time.

I would beg to differ. I've never spoken to a prostitute - that I know of - but all the literature on the subject points to the fact that most of the prostitutes are in that business because they need or want the money - and know of no other way to earn it other than by the use (or abuse)of their bodies.

I would venture further, and say that in the CNMI, at least, any number of prostitutes are not in that "profession" by choice, but have been forced into it by their employers. Hired to be waitresses or to give massages (and not every woman who offers massage is a prostitute...), against their will they have been made to serve customers in ways they did not contract for, unable to speak English or Chamorro, unable to find help, unable to find protection away from the job.

These women are not bored. They do not seek idle ways to fill their time. They are wronged, abused, held in bondage by illegal and unscrupulous men, usually, who profit shamelessly from the women they control. It is the men who should be condemned, not the women..

The statement by the Bishop seemed uncharacteristically uninformed, biased, insulting, even. He might want to reconsider his point of view.

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A review of a book that documents how much stronger tobacco companies are than the Food and Drug Administration (as though we didn't know that already) ends by saying that companies should not be allowed to make a profit from products that kill people when used as intended.

That the cigarette companies still continue to flourish, still are free to advertise their poisonous products, proves the book's point, of course. The tobacco industry has so much at stake that it cannot afford not to pour millions of dollars into its lobbying efforts, its influence peddling, its court battles.

Since the Supreme Court ruled in 1999 that the FDA does not have the authority to control tobacco, the author, David Kessler, argues in his book "A Question of Intent" that the solution will have to come from greater corporate responsibility - that the tobacco companies themselves must begin taking responsibility for the products they sell. It is in that context that the statement about not making a profit from products that kill people is made.

It isn't all that clear whether those words came from the reviewer, or from the book itself. But I found the thought pretty powerful. According to that principle, since handguns are designed and intended to kill people - as is the ammunition for them - no handgun or ammo manufacturer or merchant should be allowed to make a profit either.

The N.R.A. would naturally not approve. But perhaps it could be persuaded to at least insist on greater corporate responsibility when it comes to marketing guns?

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One of the components of the socio-economic structure that has not improved all that much over the past two decades is the press. In fact, it could even be said to have declined. The <I>Pacific Daily News</I>, for example, once had a regular Friday insert called "Focus on the Commonwealth." And in addition to the <I>Tribune</I> and the <I>Variety</I>, there was also the <I>Observer</I> and, for a while, the <I>Pacific Star</I>, as well as a second cable channel, providing for lots of competition.

It's not only a question of language - the latest example of which includes a comment found in one of this past week's papers that most of these "...kids are currently on their 6th grade" as well as the comment that "...Aldan was bequeathed with warm accolades."

It's also a question of coverage. There is, for example, an element missing in the <I>PDN's</I> reports of the bombing of the Thailand premier's plane. What is it that makes everyone so sure that the bomb was not intended for the premier, that it was the work of "insiders," and now, that the "mastermind" behind the bomb placement will never be found?

Perhaps a scouring of the Internet, or the reading of international papers, would provide the missing information, but the point is that a locally-available paper carried the story, but did so incompletely.

Then there's the total absence of any post-performance review of the Baryshnikov ballet company's appearance on Guam. Isn't there anyone out there capable of writing a theater review? Or did the <I>PDN</I> not think the story worth printing? In either case, it doesn't say much for the state of the press in this corner of the world.

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Joe Murphy has sung his swan song, so he claims. Regardless of how one views what he wrote, one has to admire his feat of managing to write a column every day of the week for as long as he did. Murphy, once editor of the <I>PDN</I>, continued to write his column, "Pipe Dreams," long after his retirement, but announced this week that he is now retiring in earnest, and will no longer do so. May you enjoy your leisure, Joe! the CNMI Senate finally confirmed David S. Wiseman as a trial court judge in the CNMI's Superior Court. Not, I suppose, that there was all that much doubt about the outcome. Wiseman worked very hard to obtain that appointment.

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