

On My Mind

11/23/01

As might have been expected, the Supreme Court Chief Justice has taken exception to this column's comments, last week, on the issuance of "rules" governing the flow of information in the judiciary. They were not "rules," his letter states, but an Administrative Order.

Moreover, that the Order came out so soon after the brouhaha at the Law Revision Commission had nothing to do with it. Their "sole commonality is timing," he wrote in his letter. Nor was the Commission's Director fired, as this column had put it; rather he was "terminated without cause."

The Chief Justice also took exception to the fact that this column called upon the other branches of government to preserve the constitutionally-provided checks and balances in regard to the judiciary. That comment was not intended to apply to the Commission, as the Chief Justice apparently interpreted it when he noted in his letter that its four-person board does represent all three branches of government.

Semantics aside, in my opinion the Order still leaves the Law Revision Commission without a voice of its own.

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House approval of a bill allowing the Commonwealth Ports Authority to install poker machines at its facilities as a means of generating income could lead to some interesting scenarios. Should the Senate approve, and the governor sign off on this bill, how long would it be before all the other financially-strapped agencies of the government demanded an equal right to install poker machines on their premises as a means of increasing income?

Northern Marianas College could claim the poker revenue would be used to finance scholarships.

The Commonwealth Utilities Commission could claim the poker revenue would be used to keep rates from going up. The Health Center could claim the revenue would pay for more nurses.

The Department of Public Safety could claim the revenue would pay for more officers, better facilities for its prisoners. Public Works would finally be able to fund its closure of the dump.....

Please, Senators, don't let this bill through! The precedent it would set is far too awful to contemplate.

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It's already distressing enough that a sloppily-written bill reorganizing what used to be the Board of Public Lands which, among other things, throws the term of office of its members into total confusion, has now become law. Senate Bill 12-123 was signed into law just this week in the expectation that the legislature would through "collective amendment" correct its several tech-

nical deficiencies. To expect this lame duck legislature to do that amending is optimistic indeed. To expect any immediate action from the new legislature is even more vainly optimistic.

All the more reason to support what follows - in the less vain hope that an informed legislature would pass better-written laws.

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With such a large proportion of the incoming House of Representatives composed of members with no previous legislative experience, now would be a perfect time to instigate a formal program of orientation for new legislators. Among other things, it would save an enormous amount of time in getting the legislature organized and functional once the inauguration takes place.

High on the list of topics covered in such an orientation should be parliamentary procedure - acquiring a knowledge of the rules that govern who gets to speak, when, how often and on what during legislative sessions. The new members will have to approve rules for the House - it will make that task easier, as well, to have had an orientation on just what they are and how they work.

Another procedural topic important to the legislature is an understanding of the budget process, and an understanding of the over-all financial picture: how much of CNMI revenue comes from federal resources, from the garment factories, from lease of its public lands, etc.

Background topics should also be covered in such an orientation so that legislators are able to put into perspective the bills that come before them: the state of the economy, the role of foreign workers in the economy, privatization, the importance of environmental protection and preservation, the impact of NAFTA.....

The Rotary Club, the Chamber of Commerce, Historian Sam McPhetres, Environmental Planner and Consultant Ivan Groom are among the resources readily available to put together such an orientation program. The benefits to the administration, the legislature itself, and the community would easily outweigh the time, cost and effort involved in doing so.

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It would appear that congratulations are due Isaac Magofna for his appointment as Director of the Northern Marianas Council for the Humanities. At least that's what it says in the Council's ad for a program officer - applications are to be sent to Director Magofna.

A pity that such a significant event got no news coverage. Did the Council not announce the appointment? or did the media not think it a story worth pursuing? Doesn't seem right to have to read the ads to find out what's going on in the CNMI.

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With no warning and no fanfare, the Hollywood Theater outfit has, in effect, raised its prices, just as the holidays are coming, and in the midst of a worsening economy in general. There are now signs at the entrance that certain films - Harry Potter and two new PG-rated films - are "restricted." This time, "restricted" doesn't have anything to do with age limits on attendance, but with money.

"Restricted," in this case, means that no special rates - not even man'amko rates - apply to any showing of the restricted films after six p.m. Even the Tuesday and Thursday bargain rates don't apply after six p.m. Apparently, the same is true on Guam.

The new policy - which was first reflected in the newspaper ads on November 9th of this year - makes a mockery of the Warner Brothers' claim that Harry Potter is setting new records at the box office. Of course it is - not because there are more people attending, but because those who are, are paying more - boosting the sales figures.

That Warner Brothers should use a children's movie to scalp viewers - especially at Christmas time - seems callous, greedy, unfair. On what basis are certain films declared "restricted"? Who knows? It doesn't help that the local theater manager claims he has no address to which unhappy movie-goers can send their objections.

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Long-time journalist John S. DelRosario, Jr. will step down as publisher of the <I>Saipan Tribune</I> at the end of this month. The announcement, in last Friday's issue, gave neither a specific reason for his departure, nor any information about the fate of the paper upon his departure. Presumably, the paper will continue, but John held out little hope that his successor would continue to publish either editorials or columns in the vernacular, as he has done.

Viewed with some skepticism as beholden to and therefore an outlet for Willie Tan interests, the <I>Tribune</I> reflects perceptible bias in coverage of some local news - most noticeable, perhaps, during the recent gubernatorial election campaign. As a result, its circulation suffers. Yet its reporters often cover stories that never appear in the other paper. The range and depth of the by-lined opinion columns from other sources that are re-printed in the <I>Tribune</I> are far superior to those that appear in the other paper. And last, but not least, the <I>Tribune</I> is on-line, and thus accessible to a far wider readership - particularly outside the CNMI - than is the other paper.

John and I disagree on many things, but I respect his industry, his knowledge, his strong support for the island's tradition and culture. I wish him well in his "retirement." And may the <I>Tribune</I> survive his departure.