

On My Mind

3/29/02

It's too bad that the debate over the Maharashi's proposal to do all sorts of wonderful things for Rota has disintegrated into a "he said-she said" media-mediated mess. The Governor's position that he cannot take a stand because the Rota's mayor has not yet formally told him of the project is weird, to put it mildly. It may be polite and politically admirable, but under the circumstances, that stance is neither helpful nor appropriate to the office. Given the details of the Mayor's efforts to inform the Governor, as detailed in this morning's <I>Tribune</I>, nor does the position seem particularly tenable.

While the Mayor is to be commended for his ardent pursuit of projects favorable to Rota, in this case sanity and reason are clearly on the side of Speaker Hofschneider and Senate President Manglona. Both have urged careful background checks of the group - which claims it intends to establish a world peace center and university on Rota, among other things.

Interestingly, it appears to take considerable skill to obtain any information from the web about the group that is not provided by the organization itself, or to find any discussion there about the Maharashi's success - or lack thereof - in establishing similar Global Countries of Peace elsewhere.

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It's a pity as well that it has taken a letter to the editor to reveal the other side of the story in the "Eucon affair." The letter, which appears in today's <I>Tribune</I>, addresses charges made by NMC's Board of Regents when it revoked Eucon International College's provisional license earlier this month.

The writer, a Jose Z. Sablan, notes, for example, that when NMC started up it would not been able to meet the criteria it now demands of other institutions. For years, it had no campus, no library, few qualified teachers - the same grounds for which Eucon is now being criticized after less than a year in existence.

Sablan maintains that the Board of Regents should have given Eucon a list of required improvements to help it reach permanent license, rather than revoking its provisional license. He also points out that in revoking the license, the Board of Regents left 10 students stranded while only four benefitted from the revocation. None of this information was carried by the press in its news stories.

Judging from the letter, which is quite persuasive, Eucon deserves another chance. Is an appeals process in place?

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We heartily applaud the stance, as described in the 3/26 issue of the <I>Variety</I>, taken by the

Coastal Resources Management Office in regard to homestead development in the Northern Islands. A number of people and agencies have in the past, and continue in the present, to expend considerable effort promoting homestead development in one or another of the Northern Islands.

The CRMO, on the other hand, has cut through all the “feel-good” rhetoric and presented a straight-forward, no-nonsense assessment of the feasibility of actually having the government do so. Its conclusion: it is not safe, it is impractical and it is exorbitantly expensive. Its comments were made in response to House Bill 13-36, which would establish a homestead program for Anatahan, Sariguan, Pagan and Agrigan.

It’s about time someone gathered all the facts and told it like it was despite the political pressures to do otherwise.

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Apropos of Covenant Day, which occurred earlier this week, it should be noted that the Covenant’s Section 901 does not grant the U.S. Congress the authority to establish a non-voting delegate for the CNMI, as the <I>Tribune</I> claimed in its Tuesday issue. Section 901 says only that the CNMI Constitution may provide for a Resident Representative to the U.S. It makes no mention of the U.S. Congress.

It is in the <I>Section by Section Analysis</I>, prepared by the Marianas Political Status Commission, that the idea of a non-voting delegate is mentioned, as it explains that Section 901 does not prevent the CNMI from requesting that the Resident Representative be given non-voting status in the U.S. Congress. The <I>Analysis</I> adds that “The principal reason given [for not establishing the non-delegate position] was the small population in the Marianas compared with the population in Guam and the Virgin Islands at the time those territories were given non-voting delegates.”

It should also be noted that the CNMI has not spent the past 25 years yearning for its Resident Representative to become a non-voting delegate. To the contrary, in the past many people - yours truly included - believed that the CNMI would lose its unique status if put into the same category as the U.S. island entities that do have a non-voting delegate in the U.S. Congress. The CNMI has rights and privileges the other entities do not, and there was concern that those differences would blur, if not get lost, if no distinction was maintained between the CNMI’s relationship to the U.S. and the relationship of the others.

However, the advantages of a non-voting delegate to the Congress - as Guam’s Robert Underwood makes abundantly clear - far outweigh the disadvantages, and there now appears general agreement within the CNMI that the time has come to request that the U.S. Congress approve the change in the status of the CNMI’s Washington Rep.

The issue is important because it is the <I>Covenant to Establish a Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas Islands</I> that defines and describes what the CNMI is, what it can do, how it

relates to the U.S., etc., and it is critical, therefore, that its provisions not be misunderstood, misquoted or misstated.

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I would echo the complaint that too many House bills of only marginal relevance are being generated - apparently alluded to by Speaker Hofschneider (I missed wherever that appeared) - and again mentioned by <I>Variety</I> columnist Haidee Eugenio earlier this week. As of mid-week the House on-line system showed 89 bills as introduced since this legislature took office in January - almost too many to keep up with. Maybe it would help if some sort of system were provided for eliminating duplicates, grouping similar bills, and then ranking, prioritizing them? Within the House, the ranking might be in terms of the likelihood that funds would be found, or in terms of their timeliness in relation to the current status of the economy, or their compatibility with the goals of the leadership, or.....

Readers could also be given a way of assigning a ranking to the bills (after duplicates have been weeded out, like ones grouped together). Three to five levels could be identified, along the lines of: very important, important, useful, not very useful, and too self-serving/useless/not important.

Eventually, those that aren't ranked, or are at the bottom, could be dropped off, making the list more manageable.

Another way to limit the number of bills would be to assign a cap to the number of bills each member could introduce - provided everyone understood that the cap was not intended as a mandatory minimum each member HAD to generate. No doubt a search of the literature of the Council of State Governments, or the National Conference of State Legislatures would provide other approaches.....

But there's no complaint about the system itself. Having all that information so readily at hand is such a time- and energy-saver! And it works so wonderfully well - from the access rules to the ease of use to the quality of its customer service.

Now if the Senate had such a system.....