

On My Mind

5/17/02

Well, the threatened typhoon has passed us by with no damaging effects. Would that the storm in the Senate had done the same! Rota's Paul Manglona is still Senate President, but there's been a serious rift in the leadership with Tinian's David Cing resigning from the positions of Vice-President and Chairman of the Senate's powerful Committee on Executive Appointments and Government Investigations.

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Cing's frustration and anger at the games played by Manglona are both understandable and legitimate. Cing rightly stood by his, and his committee's, rejection of the Maratita nomination as improper only to be gainsaid by, allegedly, not only a committee member but also the Senate President. Propriety became a political football, and to Cing, this was unacceptable. He decided not to play.

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There is no winner in this scenario. Governor Babauta, who nominated former Senator Edward U. Maratita to the Commonwealth Development Authority's board, has once again heeded the wrong advice. The Senate President, who allegedly was behind the nomination, did not get his way. Maratita did not get the nomination. The Senate leadership lost a dynamic, principled, determined partner. And the entire Commonwealth lost an honest, diligent, strong and dedicated chairman of the Senate committee that must review gubernatorial appointments - a particularly sensitive and significant responsibility these days.

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We hope Cing will reconsider - for the good of the Commonwealth.

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It may sound odd for a Saipan resident to say so, but this one was not unhappy to see the Senate leadership in the hands of Tinian and Rota. The two "outer islands" would seem to have been short-changed in too many ways too often up til now, and it only seemed right that for a change, their Senators be given a chance to lead, rather than follow.

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Leadership carries responsibilities, and though it was to be expected that Tinian and Rota Senators would be sure their own constituents were taken care of, they could hardly have ignored Saipan's altogether. And it did seem that the arrangement was working - with a good relationship between the Senate and both the House and the Governor.

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Additionally, having to take on a minority role should make clear to former majority members - thought it does not yet appear to have done so in the case of the House, where mid-term elections left quite a few former majority members holding minority seats - just how punitive the legislative rules are regarding the treatment of minority members. Given enough time, it may even have encouraged them to make some changes in those rules. But what will happen now is anyone's guess.

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For what it's worth, in the U.S. Congress, each committee has a minority chairman as well as a

majority one. It wouldn't hurt the CNMI to become a little more flexible in that regard.

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No studies - assuming they've been done - have been reported in the popular press comparing the number of people who suffered from peanut or gluten allergies in earlier times to the number who suffer from such allergies today. Can one take this to mean that people just didn't suffer from those allergies then?

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My generation certainly did not grow up worrying about the presence of peanuts as obscure ingredients in our daily foods. I do not recall knowing a single person who could not eat peanuts. I recall, in fact, the ubiquity of peanuts during the days of Jimmy Carter's presidency (I lived in Washington, D.C. at the time). Even the pecan pies made in federal government cafeterias were made with peanuts, and there was not a single objection.

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Nor did my generation grow up having to find substitutes for food containing cereals and grains.

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What has happened between then and now is that the results of marketing research have so altered and modified the seeds, the plants, the fertilizers, the pesticides used to "help" these crops grow, and the processes of readying them for market, that they are now full of all sorts of chemicals - chemicals not natural to the human body, chemicals to which many people are, in fact, allergic, chemicals which actually constitute a life and death threat to more and more of the population exposed to such treated foodstuffs.

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Thus the growing interest in organic foods - which theoretically are free from ALL artificial additives in both the growing and the production process. Science and technology are not always as benign as its advocates would have you believe.

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Rumor has it that not all of the Governor's constituents (including some government officials) feel they are being treated as respectfully as they believe they should be. Instead, according to the coconut wireless, they are being left, for embarrassingly long times, to sit and wait for the Governor to keep his appointments with them. It is said he once even went out by that back door from the second floor, for a three-hour lunch (not with dignitaries), leaving constituents still sitting in the waiting room to see him.

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True, there is such a thing as Chamorro time. But high-handed disregard for others' time, comfort and convenience is something else. Seems like someone ought to remind the Governor that respect is a 'two-way street' - he won't continue to receive it if he doesn't start giving more to others.

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On the other hand, seems the governor is rejecting the local custom of wearing short-sleeved island shirts and has begun wearing the pastel (not white) long-sleeved shirts advocated by tv directors. Among other things, if an office is cold enough to warrant wearing a long-sleeved

shirt, it means that the thermostat is set too low, and electricity (power) is being wasted.

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Another fashion note - at least Attorney General Robert Torres has given up wearing a tie on every occasion!

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Short takes:

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Last week this column praised the CRMO's regulation workshop. More recently, the Division of Environmental Quality held its first symposium on environmental issues. It was not mentioned in the context of well-conducted public meetings not because it didn't deserve it - it is said it did - but because, this writer, being off-island at the time, was not in a position to observe and attend the conference.

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It was bad enough that Liberty House, when it came to Guam, would advertise "Island wear mumus" in the newspaper with an asterisk saying that they were not available on Guam. But now Macy's is doing the same thing. What possible reason could there be for not selling island wear on an island? What's the difference between Hawaii and Guam? Who's protecting whom, here? And from what? Seems like making those wonderful (but expensive) Liberty House-style mumus available on Guam would have brought in more sales, wouldn't it?

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Will the new census designation of the CNMI as urban have any effect on the movies brought in by the Hollywood Theater? We miss a great many good shows, in all likelihood, because we have been demographically labeled as rural, and therefore not sophisticated enough to appreciate more complex works. Let's hope that the new designation changes that!

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Last but not least: The "war" against terrorism continues, with record-breaking budgets for the Pentagon in particular and defense spending in general, and continued invasion of Palestinian territory by Israelis. But tracking down those motivated to do harm to the "Western" world, capturing and imprisoning them, is a fruitless, hopeless, endless, undertaking if nothing is done to change the attitudes of the so-called terrorists. They will only breed the hatred into their children and their children's children.

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The world's "haves" must begin to consume less of the world's limited resources, to share more of the knowledge and education and skills that they have, to care more for the world's less fortunate. Only then will the hatred abate.

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The question is: when will such efforts to build peace begin? And who will take the lead?