

On My Mind

5/24/02

Earlier this week, a select group of journalist-types got involved in a discussion (actually, an e-mail exchange) about the governor's handling of the press. The discussion was prompted by a first-hand report that last week the governor had rudely rebuffed attempts by one of the afore-said journalist-types to ask the governor about the Maratita affair.

This writer, overlooking for the moment the rudeness of the governor, maintained that the "in-your-face" style seemingly practiced by the journalist in question was inappropriate, that islanders find it offensive because it is unfamiliar to them, and that such confrontation runs counter to the need, on small islands, to maintain civility.

Others, however, felt that the governor no longer quite fits the category of inexperienced islander, and that with his plurality of college degrees, his many years in public service, he should long since have developed not only a "thick skin," able to slough off critical comments by the press, but also some degree of skill in handling face-to-face encounters with the media.

Nor were they willing to overlook the rudeness, the foul language, used by the governor in his spate of angry words to the journalist.

The governor's inability to cope with the media has come before the public eye once before, when he threatened, some time ago, to hold no press conferences whatsoever because of the supposed inaccuracies of the stories that made it into print. With at least 6 media people on his immediate staff, one would think that the governor would have found a way by now to handle the media more smoothly. Is he not making proper use of them? or are they the wrong people for the job? or?

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The questions about the Maratita nomination remain. Senator David M. Cing and the governor both have denied the rumor that a "deal" had been made for Cing's committee on executive appointments to approve all the governor's nominations in exchange for a \$2-million commitment for Tinian schools. But why did the Governor withdraw, and then re-submit Maratita's name as CPA Board member? Why did he not, as Senator Cing urged, nominate Maratita to another board where there was no conflict of interest?

Two more questions the journalist said he wanted answered: what the governor's plans are about resolving the salary cap violations, and whether the governor ever did actually return the Willie Tan donation to his campaign. Reasonable questions, both of them.

On a slightly different level, but still media-related, a question from this quarter: With all those highly-paid media and other experts on the governor's staff, how come the "cnmi.gov" page on the web contains no press releases from the office of the governor later than October 1999? How come the "Cabinet" listing still shows Pete P. as Governor and Pepero as Lt. Governor?

While such inattention may explain why the much-touted government budget was not put up on the web, where anyone with a computer could access it, but was only distributed on paper, and then only to NMC and the public library, that's certainly no excuse for either shortcoming. Better to take the old pages off the web, than to leave such embarrassingly outdated information out there.

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Not so much out-of-date as perhaps out of line is the stance taken by the CNMI Board of Examiners that six Chinese students should not be allowed to take the National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX) because the Board questions the background of the school the aspiring nurses had attended in Shanghai.

According to a report in the 5/21 issue of the <I>Marianas Variety</I>, the students came to the CNMI on a student exchange program, intending to enrol in an NCLEX review course at the Eucon International School, only to find that the CNMI Board of Regents had withdrawn the school's temporary certification.

As even a preliminary search of the web shows, preparatory materials for the NCLEX exam are readily available - in theory, the students could have obtained the material themselves and prepared on their own, whether or not review classes were available through Eucon.

But the point is that nowhere does it state that review courses are a mandatory pre-requisite to taking the NCLEX exam, and more importantly, nowhere does it state that the schools at which exam candidates took their courses is an issue.

The six students have been doubly wronged in that the Department of Labor and Immigration has taken their passports on the grounds that the students are ineligible for student visas - making it impossible for them to collect allowances for which they must show a passport - and the CNMI Board of Examiners has barred them from taking the NCLEX on grounds that would appear to have no legal basis.

It makes no sense for the CNMI to claim it is open to new revenue-generating undertakings (and educational institutions are certainly far more benign than off- or on-shore ambling casinos!) such as Eucon's efforts to serve the Chinese population in the CNMI, and then proceed to throw every stumbling block imaginable in the way of those who try.

NMC's Board of Regents should stop dawdling and re-instate Eucon's provisions license, extending its time frame to compensate for the time it has caused Eucon to lose. DOLI should return the passports to the students so that they may collect their allowances sent from their families and deposited in the Bank of Hawaii. And the Board of Nurse Examiners should allow the students to take the NCLEX exam. That would leave a much better taste in the mouth when MVA tries to encourage Chinese tourism than does the present situation.

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By contrast, some kudos:

To the Commonwealth Health Center and its new contractor for cleaning and janitorial services. The improvement is remarkable and most welcome!

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To Representative Andrew S. Salas, for initiating a beautification campaign in District #2. The judging is scheduled to take place tomorrow, with homes being rated on the cleanliness of the yard, general appearance of the house, foliage, and general appearance of outer surroundings.

Let's hope that others follow his example. A similar custom is said to have been practiced here before though then, reportedly, it was among villages, not individual residents. Residential beautification is good for tourism; it also promotes good health - since it removes breeding grounds for mosquitos and vermin.

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To <I>Tribune</I> reporter John Ravelo for being awarded one of the Environment Protection Agency's 2002 Environmental Achievement Awards. Ravelo was the only environmental news reporter in the Pacific Southwest to receive the award. According to the report in the 5/23 issue of the <I>Tribune</I>, the Ravelo was recognized for his exceptional work and commitment to the environment.