

## On My Mind

11/22/02

Wouldn't it be nice if someone out there - up there? - had the courage and the integrity to tell the rest of us what the status of the CNMI's finances really is? Tell us whether the accusations by Rota's Mayor Benjamin T. Manglona, that funds he has requested - that had been certified, authorized and approved - have not been forthcoming because someone has reprogrammed them elsewhere? Tell us why payment of refunds and rebates is being dealt with separately this year?

Tell people what the chances are that the government will find a lender to cover the costs of their their refunds and rebates? Tell people what that means in terms of when they can expect their refund and rebate checks?

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Wouldn't it be nice if someone were to explain why deductions taken from government paychecks for health insurance and/or for the retirement fund, aren't being turned over to CHC and the NMIRF, respectively? If someone explained what deep pockets are being used to pay off the thousands of dollars owed to the Retirement Fund's third party health insurance administrator? How the government is planning to correct the cash flow and general budget short-fall problems, what it depends on and how long it will take?

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The not knowing, the not being sure, the lurking suspicions fed by rumor that what money there is isn't being fairly allocated, is destructive, debilitating, demoralizing. Perhaps if the full picture were known, there'd be more willingness on everyone's part to accept rebate and refund payment delays, put off pay raises, postpone major expenditures. There'd probably be less complaining, protest, carping if people were given the truth instead of double talk and evasiveness.

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There is, of course, the uneasy suspicion that perhaps no one up there really does know what the status of the CNMI's finances really is. And that no one does have any idea how to correct the problems, much less within what time frame. In which case, heaven help us all!

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It doesn't help "get the picture" when what appears in print is so frequently garbled, incomplete or inconclusive. Take, for example, the stories on the observance of "Feed Saipan." The signing of a proclamation declaring November 21 "Feed Saipan" day was reported in the press, but no information on just what "Feed Saipan" is, or what it means or what is supposed to happen on "Feed Saipan Day" was provided until the <I>Tribune</I> finally explained it all on "Feed Saipan" day.

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Another example is the story about Rota's road project, which appeared in the <I>Variety</I> on November 18. Apparently the governor is objecting to the Federal Highway Administration's cancellation of the contract with Western Equipment Company to build the road, after the company abandoned the project. There is no explanation as to why the governor feels the contract should not have been canceled, or what the trade-offs are in trying to continue the project through

Western Equipment Company's bonding firm.

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A story in the <I>Variety</I> tells us that Matson Navigation is increasing its fuel surcharge, but we never learn how high the surcharge is.

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The <I>Tribune</I> tells us that three of Managaha's beach area have been found to contain excessive contamination, but does not indicate where they are.

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Both papers carried stories this past week urging people to save watermelon seeds as a means of combating drought, but neither article explained how the seeds would do so. While the <I>Tribune</I>'s story came from a wire service, the <I>Variety</I>'s story came from its own stringer, which should have made it possible to follow-up and get the rest of the story.

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Granted not all the incidents involve significant issues, but the fact remains that the public is not consistently well served by the print media. Yet it is only when the people are fully informed that they can be expected to play an intelligent and meaningful role in public affairs.

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Editors, it would seem, need to exert more pressure on their reporters to insure they cover all the "w's" (who, what, where, when, and why) as well as the "how" in their stories. People providing information to the press would seem to need to exercise more care in ensuring that their press releases, etc., cover all the "w's" and the "how" as well. And consumers of information would seem to need to demand a fuller accounting from media sources. Only then can we be assured that we are getting 'all the news that's fit to print.'

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The fact that the CNMI lacks the equipment to transfer hospitalized infants to off-island medical facilities is certainly a worthy news story (See the <I>Variety</I>, 11/19/02, page 3). But did it really take the governor's putting on a nurse's "scrub" shirt to call attention to the problem? It is, of course, not at all clear whether the governor's new PIO had a hand in the governor's appearance in the neo-natal intensive care unit of the hospital, but the fact remains that this time the governor has gone too far in his seemingly unquenchable search for a daily "photo op" for the press.

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The expression on the head of the CHC's neonatal intensive care unit, featured on the front page of the <I>Variety</I>, would seem to say it all: "What on earth do you think you are doing here?" Grabbing publicity at the expense of the acutely ill, disrupting sterile precautions, invading the privacy of the labor room is inappropriate behavior that is neither dignified nor informative. Moreover, the comment by Senator Paul A. Manglona, who accompanied the governor, that "Now we have an idea of how it feels to be a nurse" could hardly have been more condescending.

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Please, governor, won't you please stop the grand-standing, stay in your office, and at least give the impression that you are attempting to solve the CNMI's more universal monetary - and other - woes?

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As long as we're wishing, wouldn't it be nice if Representative Stanley Torres took a little more care in aiming his shotgun? We admire the Representative for his willingness to stand alone on sensitive issues, to tackle well-known persons regarding their perhaps questionable actions and expenditures, to criticize everyone else's idols. But every once in a while, the shotgun seems to hit wide of the mark, to go off prematurely, to aim at the wrong target.

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Such an instance would seem to be his attack on Northern Marianas College President Dr. Wright for his trip to attend a technology conference in California. The trip was federally funded. It took no money out of the CNMI's pockets. There would seem no basis for Torres' attack. Did someone in his office not do their homework?

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Last but not least, our kudos to Mar-Vic Cagurangan, the <I>Variety</I>'s intrepid, indefatigable reporter from the Republic of the Philippine Islands, for her series of articles on autism, a little-understood ailment that affects young children and for which there is no known cure. Children with autism appear introverted, a-social and incommunicative. There has been little help through routine medical channels for either parents or autistic children.

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Cagurangan has told us, through her occasional by-lined column in the <I>Variety</I>, that one of her children suffers from autism, a courageous act all on its own. Since then, she has written additional articles on autism, the latest being from Melbourne, Australia, where she attended the recently concluded Inaugural World Autism Congress.

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It can't be easy to deal with an autistic child. It can't be easy to share such problems with others.

It can't be easy to write objectively, clearly and informatively about something as personal and painful as having an autistic child. Yet Cagurangan has done so, not with pathos and self-pity, but with intelligence, clarity and compassion. Great job, Mar-Vic!