

On My Mind

2/28/03

Statistics are always suspect - people who know how can manipulate them to prove almost anything. Nevertheless, a comparison of the statistics for last month's visitor arrivals in the NMI and in Guam makes for some interesting speculation. According to the <I>Pacific Daily News</I>, Guam visitor arrivals in January of 2002 were 84,361; in January of this year they were 56,798 - a decline of some 27,563 visitor arrivals for the month.

Comparable statistics for the CNMI published in the <I>Tribune</I> last week show that visitor arrivals in the CNMI in January of 2002 were 38,702; in January of 2003, there were 56,625 - nearly as many as Guam, and an increase of some 14,923 visitor arrivals over last year's January arrivals.

It is interesting to speculate how many of the nearly 15,000 additional tourists who came to the CNMI last month had initially planned to go to Guam, had it not been for Typhoon Pongsana, and how many would have come to Saipan in any case. One could also ask where the remaining 12,000 tourists - who didn't go to Guam last month - went, or did they just stay home?

While it might appear, at first glance, that it isn't necessarily anything that the CNMI, or its visitor's bureau, is doing, that is attracting more tourists to the CNMI - that the CNMI's only advantage is that it is near Guam, but that it didn't get hit by the typhoon - that turns out not to be the case.

Thanks to a full set of statistics provided by the Marianas Visitor's Authority, in fact the CNMI's tourist arrival rate has been going up steadily since September of 2002 - as has Guam's. And while typhoon damage on Guam may have led to some increase in CNMI recent visitor arrival numbers, it does not appear to have been the prime factor in the increase.

The trend is promising. The question, of course, is whether - and how long - it will last.

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Congressman Stanley T. Torres' fearlessness in monitoring government is - usually - commendable. Torres doesn't hesitate to take on what he believes is wrong-doing, no matter how highly regarded the "perpetrator." But of late, it certainly looks like Torres' has lost his perspective. His hammering at Northern Marianas College's president borders on harassment.

Moreover, the extent to which Torres continues to find fault with procedures at NMC looks very much like micromanagement gone amok. The role of the legislature and its members is to draw up, be concerned with, policies and principles. It is not the role of a member of the legislature to interfere with or question the daily operation of a government agency. Numerous other agents related to NMC have responsibilities in that regard; it is their responsibility to raise questions if they do not like what they see.

This is not to say that Dr. Wright's decisions and actions have necessarily all been faultless and appropriate. Several do seem questionable. But protests have already been filed, investigations already undertaken. That Torres continues to harp seems irrational, excessive, bullying; moreover, it is unbecoming and inappropriate in a member of the House of Representatives.

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That having been said, not only Dr. Wright's past actions, but some of his proposed actions as well seem worrisome. His plans for promoting Northern Marianas College as a "Pacific Gateway" for Asian students sounds plausible enough, but talk of utilizing San Roque's Fiesta Mall, or the Riviera Hotel or the unfinished Korean hotel near the airport seem ambitious indeed.

The suggestion has surfaced that Wright's past financial acuity has not been all that successful. If Torres insists on pursuing NMC's president, he could do us all a favor by determining the extent to which the suspicion has any validity or substance.

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Speaking of statistics, is there any information on how many government employees accrue 25 or more years of service before they retire? Or on how many of those that do are more than 45 years old? Is there any information on how many "double-dippers" there are? I was told that the RF data base does not contain these components, and that a data base would have to be generated in order to answer the question.

The Senate is proposing a bill that would make it mandatory for government employees to retire after 25 years of service. Depending on the numbers involved, that could cause hardship among families with children just reaching college age, increase the number of double-dippers in government, increase the ranks of the unemployed.

At the very least, the law should not be passed until more is known about the size of the community involved and the likely impact, and related statistics are also gathered. Passing laws in a void is bound to have unexpected and perhaps unwelcome consequences.

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The United States is apparently so deeply in debt that Congress has been asked to increase the amount of indebtedness that the U.S. may legally incur. Much of the new indebtedness is due to the astronomical increase in military spending related to the threatened war with Iraq.

What, in all likelihood, is not included in the debt calculation - but will add to it in the coming years - are the millions in aid and support that the U.S. is promising other countries of the world as a bribe of sorts in order to gain their backing for the U.S. position against Iraq.

I envy neither the next president, nor the coming generations, as they attempt to deal with the growing budget deficit this administration is accumulating.

In the meantime, President Bush would appear to be putting his head in an ever bigger hole of a different sort, as he refuses to negotiate with North Korea, rejects out-of-hand Saddam Hussein's offer of a debate. Kids turn their backs and sulk when things do not go to their liking. It is more than embarrassing to see the president of the U.S. do the same.

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Not being a member of the male sex, I do not find an array of feminine bodies nearly as interesting as it apparently is to men. Not that the many pictures of the Miss CNMI and Miss Teen CNMI candidates that have been featured in the print media lately are in bad taste, or offensive in any way. It's just that I'm tired of looking at them. I'd rather see other faces, more newsworthy images, a greater variety of subjects.

There's no doubt that a picture uses up a lot of space, saving editors and reporters from having to scrounge to fill it with products of their own labor. But enough is enough, already! Just think of what could happen if a similar amount of attention were drawn to kids without school books, or CHC shortages of nurses, medications, supplies, staff, or even the harm caused by invasive plant and animal species in the CNMI.

Just think what could happen if media photographers featured office staff shivering, even in long-sleeved dresses and sweaters (indicating wasteful consumption of fuel because air conditioners are set at too cold a temperature).

They say a picture is worth a thousand words. Not, in my opinion, when it comes to the repetitious display of beauty contest candidates!