

On My Mind
5/23/03

Unless someone decides that the Senate's 6-in-favor, 1-abstention, 2-absent vote properly constitutes a majority in the Senate, or unless suspended Senator Atalig changes his mind, or unless some other legalism is dug up, it appears that Atalig's arrogant setting of October 1 as the deadline for his resignation from the Senate will only further tarnish and discredit his name.

The 31 days between his deadline and the November election do not allow enough time for the many steps necessary to properly put together a ballot for election of his successor in the November general election. First the governor needs to issue a declaration that the Senate seat is empty. Next, a nominating petition must be drawn up, signed by a percentage of Rota voters, submitted to the Election Commission, and the signatures certified by the Commission. Then, absentee ballots must be prepared and sent out in time for the ballots to be received within the prescribed time frame.

Which gives the Election Commission the choice of either doing things hurriedly and therefore prone to error and to being sued, or conducting a separate election after the general election has taken place, creating a significant additional expense the Commission is not budgeted to cover. Not to mention the fact that in the meantime, Rota residents remain under-represented in the Senate. All because Atalig persists in putting island politics above ethics, integrity, civic responsibility and accountability.

Of course, if the vote had been 7-in-favor, thereby constituting a clear majority regardless of how majority is defined - that is, majority of those present, or majority of total Senate members - Atalig's self-chosen resignation date would be moot. So Senate President Paul A. Manglona, who abstained from the vote, can also be said to have put island politics above ethics, integrity, civic responsibility and accountability. Manglona's term is up this year; Atalig's is not.

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If it was deliberate, someone at the <I>Variety</I> certainly has a strong sense of irony. On page 6 of its May 19 issue, there are, one below the other, two stories about packaged foods - both by the same reporter. One tells of the threat posed by imported foods to the health of island residents, and quotes an NMC official as saying that the high sodium, saturated fat and sugar levels in such foods contribute to the hypertension, Type II diabetes, coronary heart disease, stroke, and certain cancers, among others, that are prevalent among Commonwealth residents.

The second article announces that General Mills - which includes Betty Crocker and Pillsbury products and itself produces Cheerios - is offering monetary awards to public and private schools that collect box tops from its products. Many, if not most, of those products are considered marginally nutritious, being high in sugar and sodium. Many of those products - all imported - are, of course, readily available in the CNMI.

Or perhaps whoever decided to place those two stories so close to each other was trying to make sure readers got the message - without any editorializing on anyone's part. In which case, the lay-out person, who placed the stories next to each other, deserves, at the very least a pat on the back.

In any case, it is downright insidious <i>[working or spreading harmfully in a subtle or stealthy manner - American Heritage Dictionary, 3rd ed.]</i> of General Mills to mount such a noxious campaign, to offer rewards to children for buying its unhealthy sugary products. Unbelievably, the campaign has been on-going on the mainland since 1966, with participation by more than 70,000 schools, according to the article in the paper. Where are the consumer protection agencies, the school dieticians, the parents?

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On the other hand, whoever is responsible for headlines at the <I>Tribune</I> deserves, as Ann Landers would say, lashing with a wet noodle, at the very least, for the Trib's one-inch headline yesterday that CNMI was on typhoon watch because a potentially destructive storm was heading our way. In fact, at no time did the Joint Typhoon Weather Center show the threatening storm as coming within even 100 miles of the CNMI. (To be fair, the <i>Pacific Daily News</i> didn't do much better.)

Yes, typhoons are erratic. And yes, it is good to be forewarned of their coming. And yes, the newspaper can serve a useful function in letting its readers know of probably storms and typhoons. But this one did not call for the scary headline the <I>Tribune</I> gave it. Someone's judgement was off. Or someone's commercial zeal (scary headlines sell more papers).

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While I would have to admit that Ken Govendo is not the first person who came to mind as a candidate for judgeship, upon reflection, the Governor's choice has considerable merit. No longer quite as fiery, quite as out-spoken, quite as colorful as he once was - remember those wonderfully caustic letters to the editor he used to write? - Govendo has taken on a patina of islandness, of forbearance and prudence, that will stand him in good stead on the bench.

The governor - and/or his advisors - are to be congratulated on the wisdom of their choice. Govendo is well-versed in island issues and is dedicated to the islands' welfare and well-being; his honesty and his integrity are unchallengeable. May the Senate be as wise, and confirm his appointment without delay.

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Why is it that objects of study always have to pay to be studied - when it's those who do the studying who reap most of the benefits? To be specific, how come the CNMI has to pay scientists to come out here to study Anatahan's eruption, when it is the researches who will get

paid for publishing the results, get paid by being promoted at their institutions? Where is the benefit to the CNMI?