

On My Mind

9/17/03

There's something wrong when the most powerful country in the world is headed by such a dullard as George W. Bush. One would have thought that the strongest and second-richest country in the world would have produced someone equal to the task of intelligent management of such an empire. But that has not happened. Why is that?

Granted, presidential candidates are not required to take intelligence tests. But perhaps they should be?

While that may sound facetious, in light of today's events the idea is not that far-fetched. After all, apparently teachers will now start being tested in the subjects they teach. It's not that big a step to require that presidential candidates - and even congressional candidates - be tested as to their knowledge and understanding of the issues they would be dealing with. And if it is done at the national level, why not at the state level as well?

But perhaps a more serious problem is the mindset of the electorate (defined by my American Heritage dictionary as "a body of qualified voters"). Judging from the situation in California, where money rather than reason succeeded in persuading voters to call for a recall, and where silliness succeeded in amassing the biggest field of unqualified candidates ever seen in any election, anywhere, the mindset of the electorate is in serious trouble.

Perhaps voters should be given a test to determine their ability to understand the issues at stake, their ability to identify qualified candidates for office?

Yet much of the problem of how voters vote comes from the nature of the resources they use to inform themselves, and on which they base their actions - that is, the media, in all its forms. And the media, as any discerning person will tell you, never tell the whole story, do not always tell an unbiased story, and all too frequently do not tell the story at all, in their zeal to attract reader- and viewer-ship.

So maybe the media should be given tests to determine their qualifications for reporting the news to the voters?

Following this tale to its logical solution would call for students - since all media personnel presumably went to school at one point - to be tested for their ability to be discerning, and perhaps even for students' parents to be tested for their grasp of the importance of formal education in today's world.

But at core, the problem is, I would argue, a matter of values. The values of honesty, integrity, respect, dignity, selflessness and self-esteem, charity, love and humility, among others, no longer seem as widely subscribed to as before. This loss of values can be most clearly seen in the entertainment media - in the abysmal quality of the movies, tv shows and made-for-tv movies being shown today. Should video producers be given value-tests?

Which doesn't, of course, answer the question of what to do about the poor quality of the U.S.' present leader. Maybe we should follow California after all, and do a recall?

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Speaking of the quality of education, I would urge the governor, who is said to be polling scholarship students on their needs towards re-vamping the government's scholarship policy, to consider also those not on scholarship. The CNMI no longer gives scholarships to those going beyond the B.A. degree. That leaves out doctors, lawyers, librarians, engineers, high school and college teachers and environmental scientists, among others.

There should be some prioritization in the scholarship policy. What is the CNMI most in need of? Which profession requires the most resources? As it becomes easier and easier to acquire college credits at the undergraduate level - through NMC, through its arrangements with other schools or through on-line courses - it's time to focus on the needs of students pursuing the more demanding post-graduate degrees.

And yes, the novel idea of taking into account, in the awarding of scholarships, the merit of the applicant should definitely be implemented.

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The tragic farce - or is it a farcical tragedy? - at the Senate continues. Paul Manglona continues to mouth platitudes - along with some pathetic bits of bravado, while the new majority earnestly continue trying to act like responsible legislators.

Meanwhile, the key to the dilemma lies before the court, where the presiding judge has assigned the sticky question of whether and when Ricardo S. Atalig's term as senator expires to the court's most junior judge, whose law clerk has only this week arrived on the scene. One would think that with such a crucial issue on its hands, the court would make an effort to treat it expeditiously. Yet this would appear far from the case.

Is it possible that politics are interfering with even the court's performance?

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Short briefs:

So now the pre-positioning ships are back anchoring off Saipan's waters. And dropping their anchors without heed to what lies beneath. Why is it that no one has ever demanded that permanent buoys be installed, so that what coral there is may continue to grow?

Is it because the ships have never been formally permitted to anchor off Saipan - they were originally permitted to anchor off Tinian, but a storm uprooted their moorings - and therefore

there's no instrument through which to make such demands? Isn't it about time that situation was remedied?

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There's a rumor afoot that even though Pam Brown's appointment as CNMI Attorney General has not yet been approved, she is - and has been - already acting as attorney general - spending much of her time in that office, and requiring that all decisions be cleared by her before issuance.

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Does anyone else find it peculiar that the criteria to be used in evaluating proposals for the building of a desalination plant assign four times as many points to the cost of the water as they do to the bidder's previous experience with similar projects? And assign only 5% of the total points to the financial status of the bidder?

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And on the subject of peculiar, isn't it weird that CNMI's Director of Lands and Natural Resources wants to make it illegal for anyone to eat any fish, deer, or any other regulated wildlife except during the hunting season for that particular wildlife?

Apparently the task of determining whether a deer steak comes from a legal haunch frozen last year, or from a haunch illegally taken at a later date, is too difficult for DLNR to figure out. But isn't half the point of hunting or fishing to stock the freezer for later consumption?