

On My Mind
10/31/03

What a week-end! Election Day - and All Saint's Day - on Saturday, All Soul's Day on Sunday, and then on Tuesday, a day off for Citizenship Day. Citizenship Day, for those who are not history buffs, is the day former President Reagan declared the Trusteeship no longer applicable to the Northern Marianas, thus formally establishing the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. In addition, on that day, the eight remaining sections of the Covenant - dealing with such things as land acquisition by the U.S., U.S. responsibility for foreign affairs, and qualifications for U.S. citizenship, went into effect. Citizenship Day marks, therefore, the day qualified residents of the Marianas became U.S. citizens.

To those who may read this before Election Day (this column appears on-line some time Friday afternoon, Chamorro time, at <<http://net.saipan.com/personal/omm>>: please do go vote! But please make sure you know whom you are voting for, and to vote, not simply on party lines - despite pleas to the contrary by certain party leaders who shall be nameless - or for those who made the biggest splash in terms of advertisements, rallies, or offerings of goodies of one sort or another, but for those candidates who are knowledgeable, capable and principled. Good laws come from dedicated lawmakers, not spendthrift politicians.

To those who may not read this until Sunday, when this column appears in the <I>Tribune</I>: the election results were not available as this was being written, so there'll be no comment on the outcome til next week.

To both groups of readers: election results may be found at: <<http://www.votecnmi.gov.mp>>, where returns will be posted as counting is completed.

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A serious gap in voter education in this election has been the absence of information on candidates for the Board of Education and for municipal council. While these are non-political positions, that is no excuse for the fact that the print media, at least, has made no mention of either group of candidates.

Nor has the print media (I cannot speak about cable tv, or the radio stations, as I do not watch tv, and listen primarily to public radio) carried any information about the Rota candidates for Ricardo Atalig's senate seat - a matter of no small interest to the entire Commonwealth.

Better late than never, the <I>Tribune</I> finally printed out a complete list in its issue for today, Friday. The <I>Variety</I> did carry a complete list of candidates in this past Monday's edition, but in tiny print, buried in its election advertising supplement, and not in very helpful format, at that.

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The effort made by Sam McPhetres' NMC students to gather and disseminate information about the candidates and their background, achievements, and aspirations, is truly noteworthy. Unfortunately, due to lack of candidate response, the report came out rather late, and included information about little more than 1/3 of the candidates. Most responsive were the Republican candidates; least responsive were the independent candidates.

The reports - with great graphics! - (one on candidate responses, the other a survey of voter opinions) established a precedent that, hopefully, will be followed in 2005 when the gubernatorial elections take place. Next time, one would hope that the students get their reports out earlier, and not give candidates a "second chance" to turn in their responses. The <I>Variety</I> published the list of those who did turn in a response in this Friday's issue.

On the mainland, such voter education efforts are often undertaken by organizations such as the League of Women Voters. In its absence, CNMI voters are fortunate that McPhetres' classes were willing to take on that chore. In depth information about candidates has been sorely lacking in the past. The student effort thus marks a major milestone on the path toward creating an informed electorate.

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Another fanciful tale, speaking of an informed people, has made the front page of a local paper, this time in the <I>Variety</I>. Thursday's paper carried a story about a deposit of deuterium in the ocean between the CNMI and the Republic of the Philippines that is 868 miles long, 52 miles wide, and 7 miles deep, and that it could "replace most fuels in powering engines" making it a high potential new industry for the Marianas.

However, this article again does not provide any basis for the claims made by the idea's proponents (Manasses S. Borja and Melqui Pacis). Deuterium is one of the atoms that makes up hydrogen. Hydrogen, according to the <i>Concise Columbia Encyclopedia</i>, 3rd edition, and elaborated upon in the <i>Columbia Desk Encyclopedia</i> is highly inflammable, and forms easily ignited explosive mixtures when mixed with water or air - hardly the stuff to put in one's gas tank.

Deuterium itself is defined by the on-line version of <i>Webster's New World Dictionary</i> as "a hydrogen isotope used in nuclear reactors, accelerators, etc." According to a cursory web search, it is also used in physics and astronomy research and experiments. In combination with oxygen, it forms deuterium oxide, a compound that is found in ordinary water, is known as heavy water, and is also used in nuclear reactors and other scientific experiments.

Who has discovered that this element is now able to "replace gasoline (liquified petroleum gas), (liquefied natural gas), Avgas, etc., in powering all types of internal combustion engines" the article does not say. Nor does it say where such an assumption has been tested, and whether it has been proven, and if so, where, when and by whom. Nor does it give any indication of how practical an idea it is to attempt to extract this from its alleged deposit in the area ocean trenches.

Fairy tales are fun. But they don't belong on the front page of the newspaper parading as genuine news.

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Short takes:

- re the fate of NMC's lab school: why wouldn't it be possible to have student teachers in the regular classroom? Doctors and nurses are trained under actual hospital conditions - not in a "lab" hospital. And student attorneys intern in practicing law offices. Training in real-life situations, rather than artificial ones, is bound to be much more practical.

- Did anyone notice the assignment as "inventory manager" that is reported as having been given to Ricardo S. Atalig in prison? It would be interesting to know what the euphemism really stood for - counting silverware, perhaps?

- And on a more positive note: Miracle of miracles! Hollywood Theater has added a second "G" film to the list of what's now showing. (Do you suppose complaining made the difference?) I haven't seen "Brother Bear" yet, but I would urge all and sundry to do go see "Radio." The acting by Cuba Gooding is superb, and the story is inspirational and heart-warming - something the whole family can enjoy together.

- Lastly, I did not know last Friday was UN Day. But, serendipitously, the UN did get mentioned in last week's column. Why isn't it still celebrated here? Not only for its significance in TT times, but now, for its role in attempting to keep the peace, heal the sick, feed the hungry throughout the world?