

On My Mind
11/07/03

Was anyone not caught by surprise at the outcome of Saturday's election? Fully half of the members of the House of Representatives - all of whom were running again - rejected by the voters? Six new faces in the Legislature - five of them Covenant Party? And only one lonely Democrat? Fascinating!

The psychology of the voter would sure make an interesting study! The two members of the Legislature from my precinct - Gloria DLC Cabrera and Frank DLG Aldan - for example, were of two different parties, yet they appeared to work hand in hand on projects to benefit the precinct. There was playground equipment installed at the Tanapag beach area, road paving, a new community center and a student center constructed, to cite just a few of their contributions. In addition, Cabrera pushed through an increase in the sin tax - providing for some much needed additional revenue. Yet neither was re-elected. Much the same may well be true in other precincts.

Their successors have much to live up to.

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Some people say the results show that voters do not like their representatives to be outspoken - citing the defeats of Representative Stanley T. Torres, and Senators Ramon S. Guerrero and Senator M. David as proof. But six other incumbents - twice as many, in fact - also failed to be re-elected. And none of them were all that outspoken.

There were other reasons for the defeat of those three. Cing, and Torres in particular, were not only outspoken, but strident, in their criticisms of people, actions, they opposed. Torres was un-remitting, almost offensively persistent, in his bullying of the NMC president, for example. Not that there aren't short-comings there, but enough is enough. In Cing's case, it may well have been the recent "outspoken" ads against his opponent - rather than his stand on legislative issues - that contributed to his downfall. Kumoi's case is a little more difficult to rationalize. Partly it may have had to do with the fact that he did little or no campaigning. And partly, it may well have had to do with his history, rather than his performance in the Senate.

There is nothing wrong with being outspoken so long as the cause is worthy, and the rhetoric controlled, and provided it is tempered with fairness, dignity, and reasonableness. In fact, given those criteria, outspokenness can be a virtue.

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While the election results are big news in the CNMI, it would appear that to our "sister" state to the south they have neither relevance nor interest. Neither Guam's <I>Pacific Daily News</I> nor its <I>Pacific Sunday News</I> has carried a single word on the election results or the possible implications thereof.

While it could be taken as an affront to the CNMI, it speaks even less well of the <i>PDN</i> or its Sunday version. It only reenforces the perception that to the <I>PDN</I>, at least, the CNMI doesn't exist. Two Sundays ago, an announcement on its front page touted the contents of its insert "Maila Halom" - supposedly all about Guam's many alleged tourist attractions. Yet the insert was not included in the copies of the paper distributed in the CNMI. The <i>PDN</i> did not even print the letter of protest I submitted!

As I wrote in the unpublished letter, "Do those at the <I>PDN</I> who made that decision [not to include the insert in CNMI copies] believe that no one from the CNMI ever travels to Guam, has any connection with Guam, and therefore would not be interested in what Guam has to offer? or no one from wherever else the <I>PDN</I> is sold?"

"Do those at the <I>PDN</I> who made that decision not support attracting tourists to Guam and thus believe that an insert spelling out Guam's attractions would have no relevance outside Guam's borders?"

"And doesn't it border on false advertising to announce, on the front page, the inclusion of an insert that isn't there?"

Such provincialism!

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Short takes:

- It strikes me as more than a little unseemly that the Covenant party is already discussing House committee assignments. The absentee ballots have not yet been counted, and though aspiring speaker Benigno Fitial of the Covenant party has the lead at the moment, incumbent speaker Heinz Hofschneider trails by only 43 votes. Conceivably, their positions could yet reverse.

- It's too bad the Board of Elections web site failed to operate as expected. We were given to understand that results would be posted as soon as known. Yet no results were posted til late Sunday afternoon - long after they'd already been broadcast by MTV, among others. Seems that due to a financial shortfall, apparently the Board of Elections Director took that responsibility upon himself, but fell ill Sunday morning, delaying the posting of results til later in the day.

- And speaking of web sites, the CNMI Senate sure could take some lessons from those who built the House web site! All that time down-loading, just to see the faces of the members! Having to go to yet another screen in order to determine a bill's status. And no bill listing beyond #13-144. The House site is infinitely better - though to give credit where it's due, the description of bills is better in the Senate version.

If the Legislative Bureau worked as it should, both files could have been part of the same seamless site - with, one would hope, both following the pattern set by the House site, rather than the Senate one.

- Particularly with the hole left in the General Fund by the use of fuel and aviation tax revenue to secure the CDA \$40 million bond issue (which makes it unavailable for other purposes) the big question - which no one seems to have asked - is: where is the \$3 million per year that the OPA has estimated direct hiring of nurses will cost, going to come from? What hidden resources does our Governor have that gives him the liberty of telling the Commonwealth Health Center to stop the phased effort of hiring nurses directly, rather than going through contract agencies, and to do it all at once?

- The Commonwealth Ports Authority is in the process of submitting a permit application to the Coastal Resources Management Office for revamping Sugar Dock and re-dredging the channel to accommodate a ferry that has the capacity, according to consultant John Gourley, to carry 300 passengers in addition to cars, and/or containers and/or heavy equipment.

The ferry itself is scheduled to arrive in the CNMI in late December. Whether the permit will be ready to allow operation before the beginning of the new year is another question.

Of course, there's also the question of whether the project will be permitted at all. Sugar Dock itself would be out of bounds once the ferry operation gets underway - a loss that fishermen as well as the kids who swim there might not take lightly.

- If one can say nothing else, one can certainly say that Ferdinand Danny Aranza, formerly Director of the U.S. Department of Interior Office of Insular Affairs, sure is one hungry individual. Did you ever see such arm-twisting to sell his consulting services as he reportedly exercised at last week's meeting with the governor? Aranza was on island, again, to lobby for an additional \$400,000 in his contract with the government, which he claimed was necessary if the CNMI's grant application for funds from the federal homeland security office was to be successful.

Let's hope that the decision-makers involved aren't as gullible as Aranza seems to think they are.