

On My Mind

11/14/03

*<i>(Correction and apology: I don't know where my head was when I wrote, in last week's column, that precinct #4 Representatives Gloria DLC Cabrera and Frank DLG Aldan were of different parties. They are not. They are both Republicans, and I knew that. My sincere apologies to both.)</i>*

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It would appear that the most consummate politician in the last election was Associate Judge Juan T. Lizama, who was up for retention, and won. In contrast to his predecessors, former judges Tim Bellas and Virginia Onerheim, both of whom lost their bids for retention, he did no campaigning. None at all. No ads in the paper, no interviews on the radio, no appearances, or ads, on tv. Not one.

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In fact, he even turned down an offer for a supply of bumper stickers with just his name and a checkmark on it. People, he said, would not look at the message - "Vote for Lizama" - but would look at what other bumper stickers were on the car, and whose car the stickers were on. If people didn't like or didn't support the person or family whose car it was, or the person or party named on the stickers, the "Vote for Lizama" message wouldn't matter, Lizama said; they would not have voted for him and he would have lost their vote.

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It was safer, better, wiser, not to have any stickers at all. And, obviously, he was right. He is the first judge to have won his bid for retention.

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As the last of the "C" days is about to transpire without ceremony (Constitution Day on December 8), it seems fitting to ask: where should the responsibility lie for determining whether and how local holidays are to be observed? Except for federal holidays, it is the legislature that determines whether or not any given day is a holiday in the CNMI. Should the legislature then define how that holiday is to be celebrated? Given the irregular performance, to put it kindly, of the legislature, that would hardly seem a good idea.

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Some holidays are holy days, and then it is the church that defines how the holiday is celebrated.

The government coordinates the Labor Day celebration - albeit somewhat misguidedly since it includes only government employees, not all laborers. Other federal observances, such as Memorial Day or Veteran's Day, are defined by those affected - the veterans. But what of the local "civic" holidays - like Citizenship, Commonwealth, Constitution, and Covenant Day?

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These holidays, each in their own way, commemorate the birth and development of the entity that is now the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. It seems neither right nor respectful that no ritual, no ceremony takes place to memorialize the events signified by those days - that they are observed only as an extra day off for government employees. Surely the events those holidays commemorate, the efforts of the people who helped bring about those actions, deserve more substantive recognition?

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At one time, Northern Marianas College, spearheaded by its archivist Herbert S. Del Rosario, sponsored Covenant Day forums, but unfortunately the effort (and/or support for it?) has since petered out.

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It would appear both logical and practical that the focus be in the office of the governor. Surely among the Offices of the Special Assistant for Political and Regional Affairs, the Special Assistant for Administration, the Special Assistant for Special Programs, the Resident Executive for Indigenous Affairs, the Special Assistant for Public Liaison, and the Special Assistant for Carolinian Affairs, a home could be found for such a responsibility? Maybe a task force formed of all the aforesaid special assistants to come up with appropriate ceremonies and rituals?

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The ceremonies needn't be elaborate - there's no need to mount a parade, or erect a carnival for each of those days. But something to remind people of their history, to recall the significance of the events, to show respect for those who participated in those events, would seem not only appropriate but long overdue.

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The Environmental Impact Statement having to do with the reconstruction of Sugar Dock and the re-dredging of the channel for a proposed second Tinian ferry has now been submitted to the Coastal Resource Management Office, which is reviewing a permit application for the project submitted by the Commonwealth Ports Authority.

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Among other things, the EIS explains that part of the reason Sugar Dock was chosen for the project, rather than any one of seven alternative sites, is that the ferry runs too slowly to compete with the Tinian Dynasty ferry if it had to travel a longer distance, and that the fuel costs would be higher if it were to operate from more northern bases. Four of the sites, according to the EIS, had "fatal flaws:" Echo and Delta are under lease to other companies, Smiling Cove could not accommodate a 150-foot ferry, and CPA was not supportive of use of Baker/Charlie docks.

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The EIS claims that no major reef structures or habitats exist in the area to be dredged, and that those fish now found in the seagrass beds there would merely "swim away" if the site were disturbed.

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The EIS admits that parking would become a problem, in that there is little public land available to accommodate both ferry passengers and fishermen and their trailers. Between homeland security and liability issues, Sugar Dock would be off-limits to other than ferry activities. The EIS does suggest, as a mitigation measure, "investigating the feasibility of constructing and operating a CNMI government public swimming area south of Sugar Dock complete with pier, separate fishing and swimming platforms, diving boards and appropriate supervision." The problem with that idea is there is little public land available in the area to do so.

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No public hearing date has yet been set on the permit application.

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Short takes:<br>

- The Dai Ichi Hotel has asked for a Qualifying Certificate exempting it from 100% of the Business Gross Receipts tax, 100% of the Alcoholic Beverage Tax, and 100% of the Corporate Income tax for the next 25 years in compensation for its intent to invest \$32.5 million in renovation of its hotel. Taking a very simplified approach, (that is, without including interest) as I understand it, that would mean that the hotel expected to pay \$1.3 million in taxes every year for the next 25 years, for which it is asking forgiveness.

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I'll leave it to someone else to figure out whether that is a reasonable assumption, and how closely that resembles the history of the Dai Ichi's past tax payments/assessments.

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- Word to the wise: "ocular" means having to do with the eye itself. Only the third definition in my *American Heritage College Dictionary*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., indicates that it can be used to refer to what the eye sees. On the other hand, "visual" **is** defined in terms of what the eye sees. Thus, conducting a "visual inspection" would seem far more acceptable usage than conducting an "ocular inspection" - unless one were inspecting the eye itself.

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-At the moment, Saipan owes a substantial portion of its appeal as a tourist attraction to the fact that it does not have military installations all over the place: that it is peaceful, rural, picturesque. The governor's seemingly relentless search for a greater military presence in the CNMI - as reflected in his recent request to meet with the Commander of the U.S. Pacific [Naval] Command - would seem to run counter to this pastoral image.

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Provided the military presence is limited to occasional training exercises, and "rest and relaxation" for Navy ships, both of which admittedly generate appreciable revenue, the CNMI should be able to retain its tranquil image. But establishment of a permanent military base in the CNMI might well do more harm than good. The governor should qualify his invitation.