

On My Mind  
11/21/03

Senator Paul A. Manglona's "statesman-like" comments, at the conclusion of the court hearing Wednesday on his suit against members of the "rump" senate - that it is time for the Senate to get down to business and for all senators to work together - stand in stark contrast to his assertion that the suspensions against the "rump" senate members must stand.

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The suspension against the four members - Senators Pete P. Reyes, David M. Cing, Ramon S. Guerrero and Thomas P. Villagomez - was imposed earlier this week by the five remaining Senators after they first changed the Senate rules so that suspension would require only five, instead of seven, votes.

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The pettiness, vindictiveness, divisiveness of that act - apparently there's even been an attempt to bar the four from their offices during the 30-day suspension period - are appalling, and bodes very poorly for harmonious relationships between the two factions in the future. Nor do they reflect at all well on the integrity or sincerity of Manglona himself.

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By dismissing the case, the court said, among other things, that the actions of the four senators did not violate the Constitution, as Manglona's suit had charged. And since they are not guilty, there are no grounds for the punitive action Manglona and his cronies have imposed. The court, granted, dismissed the case on the basis of the separation of powers principle, but it isn't much of a leap to conclude that if the court had found that the Constitution had been violated, there would have been no dismissal.

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Judge Govendo, who heard the case, suggested at one point that recall petitions be launched for all nine of the Senators. The pity is that Saipan residents, who have been disenfranchised by the suspension, are not able to recall Manglona.

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And now this model of insincerity, this proponent of inter-necine warfare, this mockery of a model legislator, has been left in charge of the CNMI as acting governor. Which, in turn, does not speak well of the governor, either. Why in the world was it necessary for the governor himself to inspect the float being prepared for the Rose Bowl Parade six weeks from now - which was the excuse given for this latest of his continuing absences from the CNMI?

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Not only does this show the governor to be a micro-manager, unwilling to trust his staff to do even such a inconsequential task as build a float, but it again reveals the extent of his marked bias towards Manglona. As though his desertion on Veteran's Day, in the face of visiting WWII veterans from the mainland, wasn't enough.

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Perhaps Judge Govendo should have expanded on his suggestion that there be re-calls for the nine senators.

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Speaking of leadership - or rather, the lack thereof - it isn't too soon to think about putting together some form of orientation for all the new legislators who will be inaugurated in January. Particularly for those who have not held office before there is a need to familiarize them with parliamentary procedure, and the process of how a bill becomes a law. It would be nice if it were also emphasized that the object is not to generate as many bills as possible, but rather, to generate and pass only those bills that would make good law.

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But orientation to parliamentary law is not all that is needed. The new legislators - and perhaps even a few of the returning, or existing ones - would also benefit from a briefing on what current issues the legislature, and the CNMI, are facing - the background and history, the efforts made so far, the pros and cons of various solutions, etc., etc.

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Ideally, this would be arranged through the Legislative Bureau, for both houses.

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One of the less useful of the proposals just offered in the House was to make Chalan Kanoa the "capital" of Saipan. The proposal was motivated by the deteriorating condition of many of the buildings in Chalan Kanoa, especially when compared to its condition in former years when it did serve as a de facto "capital."

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Having survived 25 years without a capital, it seems silly to establish one now, particularly since it would be bound to involve a demand for all sorts of additional funding just at a time when even funding for essentials is in short supply.

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Saipan itself is no bigger than many small towns elsewhere. Would a small town name one of its suburbs the "capital"? No, and neither should Saipan. B

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To all those expecting packages from the mainland for Christmas: there is a U.S. Post Office regulation now in effect that requires packages for zip code 96950 to have a customs slip attached. If the package does not have a customs slip, the package is, according to the regs, to be shipped by surface mail - regardless of what fee was paid to have the package come more quickly.

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This restriction is written into the machines used by post office clerks to determine the cost of mailing a package. All post offices on the mainland should be familiar with it, according to George Diaz, the local post master. Diaz has said that there is, however, an informal agreement between the CNMI and the Hawaii post office (where CNMI packages are sorted out) to ignore the regulation and ship all packages according to the postage that has been paid for them.

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However, it might be a good idea - just to be on the safe side - to advise those on the mainland to

put customs notices on their packages. Christmas mail comes slowly enough as it is. There's no point in giving the service an excuse for slowing it down even more.

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While the governor may succumb to micro-management in some quarters, in other quarters, the reverse would seem true. In his abrupt and apparently unilaterally-arrived-at announcement that CHC should immediately begin hiring all its nurses directly, the governor appears to have failed to consider the impact of his decision. Not only were the manpower agencies that had been supplying CHC with nurses caught off-guard, but so were the nurses hired by the agencies.

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The intent, of course, was admirable. The Commonwealth Health Center had already begun the process of phasing in the direct hiring of nurses, which would eventually put all CHC nurses on an equal footing, with equal pay and benefits. The governor's action would merely speed up the process.

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But instead, it has left the nurses already working at CHC "hung out to dry." There was no provision made to enable them to transfer from the status of agency-hired to direct-hired. There was no arrangement offered to make the transfer acceptable to the manpower agencies. And now the agencies are threatening to take their nurses and ship them elsewhere.

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CHC spokesman John Douglas has claimed, in a statement appearing in the <I>Variety</I>, "...we are taking the best possible step so that nurses that are already with CHC will be retained," which doesn't sound all that reassuring. Nothing has been heard from the governor on the matter.

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Last but not least, the coconut wireless says that the assistant attorney general assigned to the Division of Environmental Quality and the Coastal Resources Management Office has no experience in anything even remotely having to do with the environment and that, to make matters worse, his wife works for the agency whose head is trying to usurp the responsibilities of both DEQ and CRMO. Isn't this, at the very least a conflict of interest???????????