

On My Mind

3/11/05

As a Christmas present, my daughter brought me four seasons' worth of episodes of "West Wing," the tv show about a fictitious U.S. president and his staff and how they respond to the many issues - and not a few crises - that beset the leader of the U.S. The show originated, apparently, during the time of Bill Clinton's presidency, and it reflects the openness and optimism and universal pride in being American that was prevalent in those times.</P>

<P>Not being connected to cable, I had not been aware of the show, and my daughter also brought a DVD player. Unfortunately, we could not get it to work, and she took the DVD player back to Jakarta with her. But she left the DVD's. I've been watching the show courtesy of a friend's hospitality - and console.</P>

<P> I find it painful, however, to watch those shows now, given the climate of the Bush regime. West Wing's president is so intelligent, so honorable, so caring; he has such integrity and dignity and wisdom. Each episode makes a point, teaches a lesson, as well as offering a fascinating insight into how government could operate with proper leadership. Will the U.S. ever be so lucky as to again reach the standard reflected in "West Wing"? One can only hope.</P>

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<P> Another media production, this time a full-length film, also provides a model, this time of what a good school, a good athletic program should aspire to. In "Coach Carter," the coach locks the gym, and cancels games of a winning basketball team when he discovers its members have not lived up to their contract agreement to maintain passing grades in their classes.</P>

<P> How the school board members, the community, the principal and the team respond forms the gist of the story. It is a movie that PSS should require every one of its teachers, counselors and staff to attend.</P>

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<P> From all the attention being given to party politics and gubernatorial candidates, you'd think elections were just around the corner. But they're not. They're more than seven months away! That's more than half a year. What's more, the deadline for filing petitions for candidacy with the Election Commission is not until August 7, almost five months from now. But with politics being practically the most important game in town, seems like the parties just couldn't stand the idea of letting government officials do their job, couldn't wait to grab attention, but had to step in, roil things up, and add political overtones to even the most innocuous of actions.</P>

<P> Among other things, it's all rather disappointing. With the gubernatorial candidates - and their running mates - already identified, no new knight in shining armor has appeared on the scene offering to lead the CNMI to greater glory. Instead, except for some of the running mates, all of the gubernatorial candidates have run at least once before.</P>

<P> There was a brief flurry of excitement as a few people contemplated finding a more promising candidate willing to run as a write-in. But with the news that write-ins are no longer provided for on the ballot, and the realization that willing candidates who would be worthy as

well as electable probably did not exist, particularly given the salary discrepancies between present jobs of likely candidates and that of the governorship, the move met an early death.</P>

<P> There is the route of independent candidate, but one independent candidate has already announced. Could there be more than one? An independent candidate, and a candidate of an Independent party? Or two plain independent candidates?</P>

<P> At least, with nearly five months still to go, there's time to consider other alternatives. Perhaps the most promising one is to push for passage of a law that would require a run-off if none of the candidates received at least 51% of the votes cast. A candidate winning with 26% of the votes - theoretically possible with four candidates running - will have disenfranchised the remaining 74% of the voters. It's true that if a candidate wins by only 51% of the votes, one could say that 49% will have been disenfranchised. But in the first place, that's hardly likely in either a four-person race, or a two-person one. And in the second place, at least another 25% will have become enfranchised.</P>

<P> It will, however, take lobbying and pressure to get the law-makers to pass such a law, for they are not eager to do so. Let's hope there are people willing to push them to do so!</P>

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<P> While on the subject of holding legislators accountable, with the House minority fighting introduction of an initiative to reduce the legislature from full-time to part-time, maybe the way to go would be to have the Senate introduce such legislation? So far, there's apparently been no interest in the Senate in such a bill, but in theory, at least, that would be another way for the bill to get back on the House floor.....</P>

<P> In the meantime, if House Minority Leader Heinz Hofschneider is sincere in his belief that legislators can cut costs without going part-time - the argument he has used against the initiative - it would seem only fitting that he introduce legislation to do so. The claim is rather empty without action to support it. One would hope that he is not delaying such a move in expectation of being elected governor, and introducing such measures then.

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<P> To return, briefly, to the matter of the establishment of post-secondary institutions in the CNMI, this column mentioned, last week, that proposed regulations for setting up such an institution had appeared in the February <EM>Commonwealth Register,</EM> and noted their restrictiveness. A reader - who happened to play a role in writing the proposed regulations - sent me an e-mail defending those restrictions, citing the disaster of Saipan University as justification.</P>

<P> Of course all reasonable steps should be taken to avoid another such fiasco, but doing so does not require going to the opposite extreme. Safeguards can be established and imposed to assure that an institution is able to perform responsibly without requiring that the entire facility, and its staff, be already in place before the institution even submits an application for a license!</P>

<P>Short Takes:<BR>

I would take exception to positions recently taken by Senator Pete P. Reyes on two issues: the first being his opposition to the re-opening of a medical liaison office in Manila, and the second being his support of the proposal to allow retired teachers to double dip. Re the Manila office: If, as Reyes contends, it is true that CHC does not hire Philippine doctors, perhaps it's time the CNMI re-examined its criteria, rather than taking the more negative approach of not helping people who go there for treatment,. After all, with as many people seeking diagnosis and treatment in Manila as apparently do - and apparently being highly satisfied with the result - it would seem only logical to provide some assistance to them. It is, after all, a lot less expensive than Hawaii.

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Re double-dipping: It does not matter, it seems to me, what Guam and the rest of the U.S. may do in terms of allowing their retirees to collect both retirement pay and salaries. In those cases - which Reyes cites as justification for allowing NMI employees to do so - two separate sources are involved: retirement pay from off-island, and a salary from the NMI. In the case of re-hiring NMI retirees, both their retirement <STRONG>and</STRONG> their salaries will come from the same source: the CNMI government. And as we all should be aware by now, the CNMI is far too broke to be able to afford such a generous benefit as double-dipping. In fact, that may be why those retired professionals from elsewhere have come here in the first place - because their retirement funds wouldn't allow double-dipping either.

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Not only does re-cycling reduce the amount of trash that goes to the Marpi land-fill; I've discovered that it noticeably reduces the trash I generate as well. Being able to take those juice and milk cartons and squish them flat - eventually turning them in at Lower Base - has made my kitchen trash basket last ever so much longer before I have to take it out and put it in the outside garbage can. Not to mention being able to turn in plastic and glass bottle and tin and aluminum cans and catalogs and newspapers.

So it should be true for other householders. The more they re-cycle at Lower Base, the less they should have to take all the way to the Marpi land-fill. Think of the gas that would be saved!

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Small nit: While our local public radio station, KRNM, cannot take advertisers, it can take - and does so eagerly - sponsors, who underwrite part or all of the costs of a particular show in exchange for being mentioned as the sponsors of that show. Want the name of your business on KRNM? Talk to the station manager, Carl Pogue, about becoming a sponsor. You can pick your own show.....

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Belated kudos to local engineering firms, and particularly to that of EFC Engineers and Architects, Inc, which played such an instrumental role in the bridge-building contest held at the multi-purpose center a couple of weeks ago. The event was well-attended, the air full of enthusiasm, and the students' engineering feats awesome indeed! EFC Inc. distributed bridge-building kits to all schools in the CNMI, and then held a contest to determine the strongest.

With a projector throwing the action up on a large-sized screen, everyone in the room could watch as the bridges were loaded down with more and more weights until they broke. A fascinating exercise for all involved.

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A reader took strong exception, in Thursday's <E>Variety,</EM> to an opinion expressed by its editor the week before. She claimed it lacked "facts and balanced reporting." How sad that some readers still don't know the difference between a news article and an op-ed column.