

On My Mind
6/10/05

Much as I support the CNMI's Energy Division, and the work it does in promoting energy efficiency and awareness, I do think it - and CUC as well - are missing the boat by not using the present high price of gas and the increase in CUC's power rates to "do their thing" and emphasize, publicize, the many energy savings strategies they can offer the rest of us to help us cope.</P>

Instead, it took a smart businessman putting ads in the paper (see theSaipan Tribune's 6/3 issue, page 3, 6/6 issue, page23) to let people know at least one way of cutting down on energy costs: insulating their roofs by installing foam sheeting. Painting roofs a reflective light color also helps. Using shades to keep the sun out, or adding reflective tinted film to house windows - as well as car windows - is another way to reduce the heat in the house, keep the air conditioner from working overtime. Planting shade trees is another way of cooling down the house.</P>

It might even be a good idea to sit the family down together, and brainstorm other ways of cutting energy costs in the home. Maybe the hot water heater doesn't have to be left on all day, every day. Maybe, in homes where air-conditioning is used, rooms not being used can be shut off, so that they are not cooled as well. Or fans can be installed, to distribute the cool air more efficiently, and make it possible to turn up the aircon.</P>

In offices as well, if offices pay their utilities directly - as I would guess most government offices still do not - turning up the air condition so that sweaters and long sleeves are no longer necessary for comfort would go a long way to reducing power bills.</P>

And of course, the most obvious way to save on gasoline costs is to use a car which provides better gas mileage. I've been told that the Prius, which gets approximately 50 miles to the gallon, is selling well, and it's easy to see that other small cars, notably Toyota's Echo, which gets 30 miles per gallon, are also selling well on Saipan.</P>

Higher gas and power bills are painful, but there are measures one can take to reduce the pain. These strategies are not new. Reducing energy consumption and energy pollution have been publicized for years as a means of ways of protecting and preserving the environment and our natural resources. It's a pity that it takes pressure on the wallet before more people start taking them seriously, but if it results in people developing energy-saving habits, and practicing them consistently, it might almost be worth it.</P>

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The Saipan Chamber of Commerce, and most notably its president - not to mention various members of the legislature - in advocating that Saipan's power plants go back to burning heavy fuel oil, would seem to be advocating an approach that is "penny-wise and pound-foolish," to quote an old English saying. The heavy diesel oil they are recommending may be cheaper than the low sulfur fuel the power plant is now using, but it does not meet the Environmental Protection Agency's air quality standards. Installing scrubbers or other devices so that the

higher-sulfur fuel oil would meet EPA standards could easily cost more than the savings in fuel prices, leaving no one better off.</P>

Wasn't it in observance of EPA standards that the switch from diesel to low sulfur fuel was made in the first place?</P>

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Let's hope this is just one law-maker's way of pandering to the public in an effort to solicit votes, rather than a more widely supported move, but House Bill 14-377 sure seems silly in light of the problems the CNMI has in just paying present bills. H.B. 14-377, introduced by Representative Norman I. Palacios, would restore the extravagant 30% bonus retiring government employees have been getting - an extravagance that the last legislature finally got up the courage to cancel. It goes into effect this year. Palacios is worried that too many people will retire this year, to take advantage of the bonus while it is still in effect.</P>

It is unclear from the story in the 6/5 issue of the Trib whether Palacios is concerned about the drain on the budget involved in meeting the retirement costs of all those proposing to retire, or whether he is concerned about the loss of personnel to government. Clearly, the loss of personnel to government would be a good thing, since it would cut the number of people on payroll, and if replacements were needed, would at least save some money on salaries, since the replacements would presumably come in at a lower pay rate. That is, providing the retirees are not all hired back as highly-paid consultants.</P>

If he's worried about the drain on the budget, that is perhaps a legitimate concern. But the drain would be only temporary, a one-time thing, and then the costly bonus would finally be off the books forever, providing a much greater benefit in the long run.</P>

But maybe there's no need to worry - maybe the bill will just join the 300+ other "personal interest," poorly-thought-out, redundant, or otherwise unnecessary proposals that have been introduced in this session of the legislature, continue to clog the legislative process, do not deserve to be, and never will be acted on.</P>

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Let us hope, further, that the Commonwealth Development Authority will be a little more flexible in the administration of its Qualifying Certificate program, and not make the World Resort go through too many hoops in submitting what amounts to a change in its original application. The consensus of the Chamber of Commerce's recent Economic Roundtable Economic Summit was that the QC program is not being properly administered, and is not meeting its purpose of encouraging investment in the CNMI. Further, another Summit finding was that the CNMI shows no concern for its existing investors, focusing only on new ones.</P>

Here's CDA's chance to show it has listened, and to apply the QC to help an existing investor in his intention to invest even more into the CNMI economy, rather than setting further stumbling blocks in his way.</P>

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If the brightly colored "P: people, places, phases" magazine (or Pee magazine, as some wag has dubbed it) is meant to serve as promotion for the re-election of the "BB" team, why is it so hard

to find? It's not in any of the usual places - Payless, Townhouse, JoeTen, the bookstore. How is one supposed to get a copy? Who is meant to read it, and where are they supposed to find it?

It is apparently being distributed through Emmanuel Staffing Services, which has an office on the second floor of the Sablan building next to Microl Motors in San Jose - at least that's where I got my copies. While there is some interesting information in the issues I've seen, it's a pity that much is so poorly written and edited. It does no credit to anyone involved - from publisher to subject to reader.</P>

And while on that subject, one of the things I've missed in the present administration is the presence of a First Lady. Former first lady Sophie P. Tenorio, Governor Pedro P. Tenorio's wife, was indeed a memorable one - lending a gracious note to the many social events a governor must attend, but more than that, contributing substantially to the interests and welfare of the people of the Commonwealth. She was instrumental, as I recall, in promoting the Saipan Beach Pathway, in promoting walking as a healthy undertaking, in beautifying the island at Christmas time, among other things, and, behind the scenes, in lending a helping hand to individuals in need. Her presence was palpable, serving as a model of what a first lady - as well as a wife and mother - could and should do in and outside the home.</P>

Not that that is, or should be a criterion for choosing the next governor. But it bears thinking about.</P>

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Short takes:

- The timing of the visit by the Emperor and Empress of Japan to the CNMI later this month is ironic, to say the least. They are coming just as the Japanese presence in the CNMI is showing signs of decline - with the selling off of Japanese hotels to others, the departure of a major Japanese airline, and a decrease in Japanese tourists. Ordinarily, one would expect the visit of the Japanese Imperial Couple to generate a major increase in the presence of Japanese interests and tourists in the CNMI, at least for the short term. And maybe that will occur. But will it last? Or does the visit indicate a "sayonara" - a saying of farewell to the dominance of the Japanese in our islands (a thought that, in all honesty, did not originate with me, but came from a friend)?</P>

- Several readers responded to my comments last week on the value of higher education credentials for legislators and other government officials by pointing out individuals who've succeeded without such credentials. They also argued that integrity, ethics and moral values are at least equally important. I do not disagree. Generally speaking, though, the fact of the matter is that more education does help in dealing with today's many complex issues.</P>

- Last but not least: Despite the shortcomings, inadequacies and other problems CUC may have, at least in the area of trouble-shooting, it is still functioning superbly. The power at my house and that of my neighbor went off at 10:30 p.m. last night - though not that of anyone else in the area. Two trucks appeared in less than half an hour, and while it took two attempts, at the end of another hour, power was restored. Since only two houses were involved, CUC could have said it wasn't worth expending overtime. But thank goodness, it did not. Thank-you, CUC!!!</P>

