

On My Mind

3/31/06

There's a rumor on the coconut wireless that there's a move afoot to recall the governor. And that it is having a tough time getting started because people are afraid that retribution for them and/or their families will follow if they sign the required petitions. That's a rather sad commentary on the state of democracy in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands - that people are so intimidated that they are afraid to exercise their rights under their constitution.

Just as the canary is used to test the amount of oxygen in underground mines, and whose death warns that there is not enough, this situation should be considered an indication, if not a warning, that perhaps governors - or this governor - are acquiring too much power, and that democracy, the voice of the people, is beginning to die out.

It is long established tradition that a governor has the right to appoint his immediate advisors - the members of his Cabinet, the heads of executive agencies. That he also has the right to appoint judges and justices to the court system. But it is not tradition, nor is it permitted under the CNMI Constitution, that the governor has the right to appoint and dismiss members of agency boards and commissions - much less staff within agencies.

And it is the abuse of this power, I believe, that is the chief contributor to the erosion of democracy in the CNMI. No one seems safe in their jobs anymore, regardless of how knowledgeable and competent and well-liked they may be. And given the high percentage of local people in the government work force, this means no family is immune from arbitrary, punitive job cuts. Political patronage - giving jobs to one's supporters - also has a long tradition, and it is possible that that will always be with us to some degree. But political retribution is something else, and should not be tolerated.

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Unfortunately, it would appear that the move towards recall of the governor is prompted not by anything other than personal economic concerns. Seemingly, there are no grand issues behind the move, no lofty principles. The issue, plain and simple, is said to be loss of personal income. Apparently, it is the threat of cutting work hours, or salaries, that is behind the move to recall.

While we all get, all too easily, accustomed to spending up to the limits of our income (if not beyond!), when disaster looms, and the need comes to tighten our belts a little just to survive, we should be willing to make that adjustment. After all, everyone has benefitted from the surplus, when it was there. Everyone should now be as willing to sacrifice a little, when there no longer is one.

Of course, those complaining about the threatened cuts have some justification. The cuts should be fair. They should be made across the board - everyone should have to sacrifice at least a little, not just in the executive branch, but also those in the legislative branch, the judiciary, the independent agencies. In order to do that, the cuts should probably be proportional - with those with lower incomes having to give up less than those with more magnanimous incomes.

Moreover, those about to be deprived are entitled to a rationale - information and explanation - and a plan for just how the monies that are taken will be used, how long the cut is expected to be in effect, whether there is any intent to make up for those cuts at a later date, and if so, how that is expected to be done. People are giving up something to which the law entitles them. They have a right to know when it will be restored.

Besides, people are already taking cuts in income. There is the CUC surcharge. There is the seemingly ever-rising cost in gasoline. The jump in NMC tuition. The increases in grocery store prices.

Whether or not the move to recall becomes reality, it would certainly make it easier to accept the pay cuts if the administration could come up with not only a equitable schedule of cuts, but also a credible plan for their restoration.

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I'm sorry, but I had to laugh. Here's the inimitable Dr. Jesus D. Camacho, carrying on for almost a full half-page, in this past Tuesday's <EM/>Tribune</EM>, about critics of the new administration having a field day trying to be "arm-chair governors." And then he proceeds to counter five specific criticisms made by the alleged arm-chair governors, in each case, implying that "these critics," "these people" or "these proponents" or just plain "some" or "critics" or occasionally "one" is/are misguided, uninformed, or otherwise lacking in intelligence.

I don't think I am either paranoid, or egotistical, but in each case, the points to which Camacho objects were made in columns I have written this past month. I don't know of anyone else who said that the governor seemed to be operating like a bull-dozer, or that he didn't seem to be listening to the community; that the administration needed more than a text-book economist, or that it should encourage investors to look for private rather than public land for their projects, that maybe increasing the minimum wage would be a good thing - though others have also said the latter.

In other words, he wasn't responding to a lot of other people. But he was hiding behind them to rebut things I wrote. I'm not sure I should be flattered, but I did think it funny. Like when a child thinks he's invisible when he hides behind a coconut tree.

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add that better to impose a tax than cut only gov't employee pay. Less repercussions (like RF). Also re CoC and rebates.

M Variety, 3/15/06, p 12, "Opinion:" "The right to Ridicule" by Ronald Dworkin

"So, in a democracy, no one, however powerful or impotent, can have a right not to be insulted or offended. That principle is of particular importance in a nation that strives for racial and ethnic fairness. If weak or unpopular minorities wish to be protected from economic or legal

discrimination by law...then they must be willing to tolerate whatever insults or ridicule people who oppose such legislation wish to offer to their fellow voters, because only a community that permits such insult as part of public debate may legitimately adopt such laws. If we expect bigots to accept the verdict of the majority once the majority has spoken, then we must permit them to express their bigotry in the process whose verdict we ask them to accept."

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- My brother and I, both in our seventies, have become quite involved in issues dealing with the environment - his concern has focussed on groundwater protection and use in northern Vermont - though we had not been particularly concerned when we were younger. He has started a newsletter, joined a local council, conducts letter campaigns, etc. We've concluded that maybe the explanation is that unless an environmental issue affects someone directly, commonly those issues are of only secondary importance to people still struggling to put food on the table, pay the rent, keep their head above water.

boards and continuity  
mercury-tainted fish

<http://www.ehjournal.net/content/3/1/7>

The International Agency on Cancer Research (IARC) has classified employment in the boot and shoe manufacturing industry as a Group 1 risk factor, meaning there is sufficient evidence that the exposure or setting is carcinogenic to humans [6]. A number of chemicals used in the shoe and boot manufacturing industry including chlorophenols, hexavalent chromium, aniline and azo dyes and benzene are known or suspected carcinogens. Of these, benzene has most often been implicated as a likely etiologic agent in the development of leukaemia among workers in the industry. IARC has classified benzene exposure as a Group 1 carcinogen [7] and the United States Environmental Protection Agency has also characterized benzene as a known human carcinogen for all routes of exposure based upon convincing evidence from human studies and supporting evidence from animal studies [8,9]. Exposure to benzene has been most strongly associated with acute myeloid leukaemia, the most common type of leukaemia in adults [7,9].

A number of epidemiological reports have shown an association between employment in the shoe and boot manufacturing industry and an increased risk of leukaemia mortality among workers in Italy, Turkey and Great Britain [10-15]. The workers found to be most at risk were those who worked in specific jobs where exposure to solvents and glues containing high levels of benzene was common. In Great Britain, elevated mortality rates were found only among workers in the departments where solvents and glues were used to attach soles to the upper parts of shoes, and exposure to benzene occurred [12]. In Italy there was also evidence that the elevated risk of leukaemia was highest among workers who began work prior to 1963, after which time glues containing high levels of benzene were banned by law [13,14]. A follow-up of the Italian cohort of workers found that the risk of leukaemia increased with increasing cumulative exposure to

benzene [15]. Similar results, however, have not been reported in studies of mortality among workers in shoe and boot manufacturing in the United States [16-19].

However, many of the most carcinogenic chemicals, which at one time were used in the industry, have not been used for several decades.

Nonetheless, lessons learned from retrospective analyses of disease among workers in American industries may be applicable to overseas industries, particularly in developing nations, where many of the safeguards and restrictions that have been in place for decades in the US and Europe have not yet been adopted.

"There is no direct consequence between some EU shoe makers' losses and China's shoe exports to EU countries following the end of the global quota system on January 1, 2005. Chinese shoe makers oppose the EU's unfair anti-dumping probe," says the announcement.

[http://www.shanghaidaily.com/art/2006/02/09/241111/Body\\_set\\_up\\_to\\_unify\\_shoe\\_makers\\_against\\_EU\\_probe.htm](http://www.shanghaidaily.com/art/2006/02/09/241111/Body_set_up_to_unify_shoe_makers_against_EU_probe.htm)

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The increasing speed of innovation has forced companies to invest heavily into R&D initiatives in order to ensure their products remain at the cutting edge, particularly within the sports footwear sector.

To combat cost increases, the market's leading players have used their scale economies to decrease suppliers' prices.

Adidas' acquisition of Reebok will provide the company with a significantly larger scale economy with which to compete against global market leader

Nike.<http://www.marketresearch.com/product/display.asp?productid=1200407&SID=88376151-344750205-298384170>

Comparisons to Guam re schooling, new approach to tourism (see clippings)

In order for CNMI to activate those ships to assist CNMI, some things have to be in order. First, the President of the United States must first declare our area as a Disaster Area, then DHS-FEMA will come into play as those ships are DOD assets. Next, if we see that we will need them, we will recommend to the Governor to request it thru FEMA.

re: Grotto dive and lack of appropriate investigation (police tested gear above water, not under water)

I love the way it is assumed that everyone has access to tv.....

Also Fiji guy vs Abe Malae - slick! But cover different areas.....STILL need Malae - for mgmt.

The CNMI may be suffering from a slowing economy, but strangely enough, that doesn't seem to affect the restaurant business. Several new restaurants and coffee shops have opened recently, and two I know of have added lunch service to their former dinner-only hours. There's the new Chinese restaurant next to Wendy's on Beach Road, and two new restaurants, one Japanese and the other Jeff Boyer's new place, across from Memorial Park in Garapan. Then there are the new coffee shops - one in As Lito, one in Susupe next to Church's chicken restaurant, and the other Jeff Boyer's, which also has a coffee bar.

Both Naked Fish, itself a fairly new restaurant, and the Abyss have recently begun opening for lunch.

What does it mean? Of course, restaurants close, too. But it doesn't seem to be at the same rate as new ones open. Are more people eating out? Are people merely looking for a new experience? Or are restaurants settling for smaller and smaller pieces of the same pie - as the same number of people now have an even wider choice than before?

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PSS - and others - need to build accountability into funds granted by legislature - Trib 5/9 p 2

small scale venture: publish Sam's students' works  
what are Chinese tourists going to do? Jap/ war sites not of interest  
availability of info not necessarily an FOIA issue - but of who knows, and who is willing to share  
on Guam, see truck emitting black smoke, told to report it (PDN 4/26) True in CNMI?

government by cliff-hanging - CUC fuel payments, PSS teacher payments, HPMPR renewal

Iraq war - technology keeps more wounded alive - though wounds may be terri-ble.....(clipping)

NMC accreditation satisfied by La Fiesta transfer - who accredits NMC gov't for acquisition?

Illegal dumping at PR dump shows need for transfer station

whatever happened to social eyesore beauty contest?

From Ed Klingsberg: Randy Fennel says law requires member of Treasury present at opening of poker machines; metered NMC reduced cost in half! ; JoeTen opposes increase in minimum wage since it hires so many locals

punitive fee for littering not big enough to deter people from doing so

need for large meeting places when JoeTen library space gone

corporations not held responsible, held accountable since not considered person

war on terrorists being won; war on terrorism is not.

Give aid, education, to countries where immigrants coming from. If have it there, won't emigrate...from UN report on economic and social affairs

Open airport to other vendors - magazines and books and newspapers (need to check!)

Highway bill

Zoning priority - strip malls

sad that doctors who go into nursing deprive community of doctor services

would add, in addition to very limited tourism infrastructure, the failing local infrastructure generally--power of late, the constant beach pollution and lack of responsiveness (here and Guam) to federal threats of fines for maintaining a healthy community, water quality problems on both islands. Also, year after year, vandalism of property and purse snatchings, graffiti and litter, show (at best) no improvement in solving the problem.

Also, the hotels are now entering the maintenance upkeep stages of their lives (note the upgrades and improvements being made); the newness factor gone. The challenges of dealing with ever-changing local laws and regulations re: labor and other threats (I think the attempt to take back the Nikko by Ted Mitchell left a big imprint on Japanese investment/economic observers as JAL/Nikko was prepared to implode the hotel before they left if forced out of their multi-year agreement) has made this a tough place for someone to sensibly try and get something started.

The days of venture (risk) capital are gone for Japan. There aren't too many Willie (deep pockets) Tan's around who have the money to put up now, and even if things continue to slide, or crash, he will own a major chunk of the island when things start to turn around some day. Plus, he is getting things on the cheap these days. Also, he has long known the ways of the island, which buttons to push, which local people to lobby, his local staff being well-paid to protect his interests.

The Chamber and others (existing businesses talking about CDA's QC) say not enough attention paid on longtime investment folks, keeping them happy. True, from my observation point. They are taken for granted. Frank points out that the hotels are changing hands; new buyers. But the sale price has to represent a major loss.

The cliff-like falloff in new business started with the advent of the \$100,000 security deposit. But it took years for its cumulative effect to take hold. And, finally, just recently, has it been done away with.

The CNMI is surely its own worst enemy when it comes to understanding the economic

world. Bill Stewart has said for years, not for publication, 'the CNMI has done wrong just about everything possible, to undermine its own economic future.'

I can't believe someone in MVA isn't meeting with airline executives, hotel executives, and tour executives every week. Airlines, hotels, and tour companies are the life blood of our tourist industry. Somebody should be on top of this at all times. (Bud)

It would be irresponsible to pretend that I have any answers. But one can speculate. One of the tertiary reasons could very well be the increase pressures to be put on the tourism industry with a closure and downsizing of the garment industry. Any hotel manager who has been here any time at all would probably realize that far more pressures is going to put on the industry to make up for the losses in tax revenues. This at a time where media challenges of increased fuel costs and airline transportation is tempting JAL to seek greener pastures.. Combine that with the somewhat overenthusiastic and optimistic projections about the benefits of the new Chinese tourism market could have raise alarm bells within the Japanese community. I would also add that the Commonwealth has done very little to improve the tourism infrastructure in the past 20 years. This is leading more and more tourist to select more aggressively marketed destinations. Unfortunately, we have consistently been convinced that our proximity and historical ties with Japan would guarantee a constant market. No matter what happens in the rest of the world. (Sam)