

On My Mind
8/25/06

I often find the *Tribune* column "Saipanpreneur Project" rather too abstract to be all that effective, but I did like the "10 Commandments of Paradise" author Walt F.J. Goodridge listed in the 8/2 issue (which I am just now reading). They are prefaced by his observation, "In the pursuit of progress, we must find solutions and make choices that ensure our survival, sustain our environment, honor our tradition, conserve our resources, respect our culture, and preserve the right and ability of every generation to enjoy their [sic] lives in a natural environment [that is] in the same or better condition as that of the previous generation." A worthy goal, in and of itself!

In somewhat truncated form - and with due apology to Goodridge, the ten commandments are: Industrialization and greed shall not become more important than the individual, more important than what is in the best long term interests of our inhabitants; Depletion of our natural resources or manipulation of the environment shall not destroy our access to and enjoyment thereof; Other nations, other societies, other individuals shall not influence us to make decisions not in our best interests, nor distort our own perspective of history, nor overshadow our own language, religion or education, nor undermine our time-honored traditions of natural methods of healing, nor replace our respect for our own concepts of fashion, beauty, food or lifestyle, nor distort our own sense of morality, nor influence our own sense of ethics. The 10th and last: to preserve paradise in the way we found it, we shall offer the world a new model that protects while it profits, that elevates while not excluding, and that expands without exploiting.

(The full text offers lots more, but is considerably longer.)

And while I could wish that those commandments not be cast as negatives, I am nonetheless impressed by them as a consequence of trying to persuade a cousin of mine that global warming really is occurring, and that the world really does need to take steps to stop it if indeed, the people of the world want their children and children's children to enjoy the beauty, the abundance, the richness and diversity we now take for granted.

Granted, global warming does not directly threaten a people's culture, history or tradition, or even values - all of which the commandments address. But it is clear - to me at least - that if all those things are nurtured and protected, if people live in harmony with themselves, their neighbors and their environment, the rate of global warming will decrease. Assuming responsibility for one's own surroundings, one's own welfare is basic to self-preservation, and by extension, to the earth's survival as well.

I did not find that the governor's much bally-hoed special public appearance on tv earlier this week offered any help or support or endorsement of any of those ten commandments, or of anything even remotely related to them. In fact, it wasn't clear to me just what the point was. Nothing new was said. Nothing has changed. The speech offered the same statements, the same platitudes he has been offering since he took office.

He was careful not to attach numbers to anything but the total budget figure, leaving unanswered the nagging question: just how much have his "austerity" measures saved, and where has that money gone? The only provocative statement was his assertion that "we do not have enough capital to experiment with unproven technology." What was that all about? Was he talking about solar or wind energy - which are hardly "unproven technologies" any more? He couldn't have been talking about the mini mono-rail being proposed for the Grotto, could he? Or maybe he was referring to the "revolutionary" waste recycling system Palingenesis once offered?

He still hasn't called for the simplest, and probably most effective austerity measure: turning up of thermostats in government office buildings. Think of all the fuel that would save! And how much it could lower everyone else's fuel bill! Or he could have asked for a law that required all government vehicles to achieve above 25 mpg. But no new initiatives were announced, no new investments launched. Instead, while pleading for unity and cooperation, he publicly chastises opposition party House members and rejects pleas to establish a farmers' market in Garapan; while pleading for austerity, he hires yet more consultants and sees nothing wrong with wearing a coat and tie in the office. Same old, same old.

Short takes:

Better late than never: I meant to include the www.savethegrotto.blogspot.com url in last week's column. Besides useful information and copies of pertinent documents, the site offers a link to an online petition that 550+ people have already signed. My apologies for the delay. I also ran across mention of www.savethegrotto.org/dfw/pdf but it seems to no longer be there. Given DLNR support of the monorail, I'm not surprised.

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More "niche" businesses that would not make great demands for guest workers or on land or infrastructure, but would seem appropriate to the CNMI: more aquaculture projects, financial services such as investment counseling, hospice services.

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Congratulations to Debbie Warfield, newly appointed Department of Public Safety Commissioner. What a brave soul!

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Congratulations, as well, to Representative Stanley Torres. While the issue seems moot for the moment, his publication of documents for use by furloughed government employees in filing protests (in the 8/7 Tribune) were indeed a true public service, and could well have been instrumental in the withdrawal of that poorly conceived "austerity" measure.

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Can someone please explain to me what a "concession" contract is? That's what CUC is apparently offering as its privatization proposal, according to a report in the 8/4 issue of the *Tribune*. And why does the request for proposal require construction of a new 90 MW power plant? What is that based on? Shouldn't whoever wins the contract decide how to meet the needs? Hasn't anyone heard of a performance contract? Where it's required that the daily and emergency power needs be met, but how they're met is left up to the contractor?????

Much as the CNMI desperately needs privatization of CUC, it's not at all clear that this newest RFP is the right instrument for doing so. The RFP was expected to be issued by August

15 but has not yet appeared.

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The full page message from Telesource, which appeared in the *Variety's* 8/24 issue sure was interesting. Made some good points, too - about giving local companies an edge in competing for the CUC privatization proposal. Telesource president Nidal Zayed asks why Telesource and Rolls Royce, which pre-qualified for the previous CUC proposal, shouldn't be pre-qualified for this one as well.

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That ties right in with the insightful letter to the editor by Bruce Bateman about where bank monies go. They are not required, he said, to invest in the local economy, and thus the local community does not really benefit from their presence. The same could be said of off-island contractors, businesses. Another reason to support local contractors for the CUC project.

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Another deadline set by the administration that has not yet been met is the July 31, 2006 holding of an administrative conference to assess the Fitial administration - announced in an article in the 7/18 issue of the *Trib*. The broken promises keep piling up.... As I recall, it all started with the one about abolishing the fuel surcharge.....

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Wouldn't it be fun if the *Trib*, rather than publishing its "Flashback - a look back at least year's headlines" chose headlines from six months ago instead? But of course, the *Trib*, being a Willie Tan paper, might not find that so amusing. Would the *Variety* be interested?

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People who have their government retirement pay automatically deposited in the bank may come across some discrepancies in amounts deposited over the last couple of months. It has to do with health insurance coverage, where the Retirement Fund paid the health care premium to the retiree, rather than the health service provider at one point (because the service was not yet in effect), and at another deducted extra for the increased cost of the new health care coverage. If you count every penny, and can't stand some fluctuation, you'd better check up on it. Would have been nice if the Retirement Fund had let us know what was happening, rather than letting us find out for ourselves.

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I really liked Joyce M. Itibus' letter to the editor that appeared earlier this month in both papers. She makes the point, clearly and succinctly, that the Praxis tests are no indication of a person's ability to teach. Well said, Joyce! Makes the Board of Education's decision to cut the salaries of those who have not yet passed the test - despite the 1-year extension of the deadline by the Feds - appear even more arbitrary and discriminatory than it already is.

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There's been an appeal for support of a proposal to build a floating Global Ocean Observatory in the Marianas, rather than Costa Rica - it appeared in Thursday's *Trib*. Comments are being asked for by MARGINS, a program of the National Science Foundation. While that's a worthy cause - it might generate a boost to our economy - there's a more pressing need for commentary, and that's on the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's proposal to approve a permit to Tasi Tours for the building of a wastewater treatment plant on Managaha that would provide only secondary treatment to wastes, and from which the effluent would be discharged "to

the marine waters of Tanapag Harbor." The notice appeared in the 8/23 issue of the *Trib*. Call the CNMI Department of Environmental Quality at 664-8500 for further details.

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Movies this week: 2 R's - one a comedy, the other labelled "action-horror;" 2 PG's - an adventure and an action comedy; and 4 PG-13's - a comedy, a horror mystery, an action comedy and an action adventure. Not much to choose from.