

On My Mind
10/20/06

With its off-putting and distinctly user-unfriendly presentation about its proposed new rates at the public hearing earlier this week, the Commonwealth Utilities Corporation lost a prime opportunity to show its customers that despite the high rates, it is an open, approachable and reasonable agency. At least there was a hand-out of the slides used in the power point presentation made by economists.com's Robert Young, but even that didn't do much to reassure the overflow audience at Oleai school that CUC was listening or would change its stance regarding the high rates it is proposing.

The hand-out and the presentation were full of graphs, numbers, percentages - driving some audience members, saying it was too confusing, to sit outside til the presentation was over. The whole thing would have been far more appealing and understandable if it had been made in terms of a single customer's sample power bill: here's what each set of numbers represents, here's what each one pays for. If a series of sample customer bills had been presented, showing the effect of differences in usages, differences in user category, it would have been all the more enlightening. But that was not done. It was corporate-speak all the way.

Nor did CUC offer any information on what effect the rolling power outages, the reduction in energy use by cost-conscious consumers, the austerity holidays, have had on the consumption of fuel oil. Surely, noted more than one speaker, those factors should have brought down CUC's fuel bill, and should, therefore, also bring down the rates being charged customers?

A comment I particularly liked (I did not catch the name of the speaker) was the one that said if the government cut its costs, it would save a million dollars, lowering everyone's costs. The speaker called upon members of the government to take off their ties, to wear short pants to work - as befitting a tropical climate - and to stop working in frigid offices, wasting fuel that others are being asked to pay for.

Amid the many complaints that CUC was inefficiently and ineffectively run, that it had made no efforts to streamline operations, to cut waste, to recover line losses - which CUC customers should not have to pay for. Young admitted that his company's study, on which the new rates were based, had not looked at efficiencies within CUC in coming up with its figures.

Young noted that CUC's present engines were in such bad shape that they would not work with the lower cost heavy fuel oil mentioned by several speakers. Young also pointed out that at present CUC operates 24 engines, which generate only 65 reliable megawatts of power. His recommendation: to bring in 5 large engines - purchased by the government - and contract out only their operation and maintenance. The process, he said, would take about two years.

He also said that neither wind nor solar would work in the CNMI because turbines and solar panels would not survive typhoon winds - a statement I would take exception to just on the basis of the many solar panels in place that have indeed survived.

Will the hearings have any effect on the proposed new rates? Only time will tell, but based on CUC's performance during the hearings, the chances don't look very promising.

A seemingly beneficial House bill that has been allowed to die was recently called to my attention. It's House Bill 15-101 - and it would have provided a tax incentive to those

individuals and businesses who made a donation to the public facilities of the Commonwealth.

The "findings" section of the bill - the part that usually spells out the purpose and justification for the bill - stated that "funding for the routine maintenance and improvement of the Commonwealth's public facilities is often not available. As a result, many of these facilities are falling into disrepair. This result negatively impacts both the residents of the CNMI and the tourism industry. The Legislature finds that private individuals and businesses in the Commonwealth have expressed an interest in providing cash contributions for the maintenance of these public facilities."

The bill provided that up to \$5,000 in cash contributions, in-kind donations of materials, and/or the fair market value of donated labor made during the tax year to qualified public facilities would have been considered a nonrefundable credit for those individuals or businesses that made such a donation. The bill detailed the specific taxes that would have been abated by such donations.

The facilities for which such donations would have been accepted included public parks, beaches, playgrounds, libraries, and meeting areas. The definition of "public facility," stated the bill, did not include "government office buildings or any government-owned property or fixtures thereupon that are not used by the public for the purposes of education or recreation."

Could anything have been more beneficial to the community? Less harmful to the economy? Yet it was allowed to die in committee. The bill, which was introduced by Congressman Absalon Waki in March of this year, was not given a long life span - it had called for an end to such tax credits as of December 31, 2006. But it sure sounds like a bill that ought to be revived, as it were, and passed - with a longer time frame. What's to lose?

It has been announced that a pala pala will be constructed at Bird Island Lookout as a "destination enhancement" to provide shade for the tourists. All I can say is, please, please, PLEASE, don't let the same architect who designed the Grotto overlook design the Bird Island project! What an abomination that is! I had not been to the Grotto for years, but went, last week, touring a friend of a friend. What a shock! The overlook - a huge expanse of unadorned, ugly, concrete - complete with fence and benches, and almost big enough to be a skating rink, dominates the entire site!

The Grotto is a natural phenomenon. It is unique, special, lovely. Would it not have been possible to design and construct something more appropriate, more fitting, more attractive? Something that blended in with the surroundings, rather than sticking out like a sore thumb? Something that reflected the natural beauty, the uniqueness of the site? Surely a more tasteful answer could have been found to meet ADA criteria? (By the way, the Grotto overlook doesn't have shade either....But please don't go there - it's ugly enough as it is.)

It's also interesting that whoever designed the "improvements" to the Grotto site did not take into consideration the needs of the divers - the prime users of the Grotto. Divers need a surface on which to lay out their gear, and a place to sit down and put it on, or take it off. But the two pavilions that have been built are far from the entrance to the Grotto, and as of now, divers still work from the back of the pick-up trucks, or vans, that bring them there.

Short takes:

Another point of contact for anyone interested in the Center for Disease Control grant

program for cancer education and prevention (described in last week's column) is Doctor Shearer's e-mail address: "docrobin@pticom.com".

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Given that diabetes is of such concern on island, one would think that low sugar and low carbohydrate foods - both of which would benefit diabetics - would be readily available on island. But they're not. Some aisles, in some stores, stock a few low-cal, fat-free, or sugarless products. But there aren't many of them, and they are hard to find. At least there are some, but there should be a whole lot more. Two of the worst offenders, in my opinion, are the shelves full of high-sugar, high-calorie breakfast cereals, and the shelves full of canned fruits in heavy syrup.

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It's that time of year again - public radio station KRNM is conducting its semi-annual fund drive. Programs provided by the station are not available anywhere else on the radio dial - the classical music, classical guitar, jazz concerts, the challenging Bioneers, Justice Talking, Infinite Mind programs, the horizon-expanding British Broadcasting Company news reports..... To keep them coming, public support is needed. Your donations may be mailed to KRNM, c/o NMC, P.O. Box 501250 CK, or pledges may be called in to 234-KRNM (234-5766) or e-mailed to "carlp@nmcnet.edu." Do it today!

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A drive of a different sort is the Saipan Zoo's limited-time offer of annual passes to its ever expanding facilities. Until October 30, people may purchase single passes for \$150, couples' passes for \$200, passes for a family of three for \$250, and for a family of 5, \$300. The passes entitle holders to free access to the zoo from November 1, 2006 to November 1, 2007, free water, free coffee, access to other zoo activities as they become available, and opportunities for volunteer protecting and caring for the animals at the zoo. Call Maribel or Plumeria at 322-5711 or 5118, or e-mail them at "tropicalgardens@pticom.com" for more information, or send in an application through the mail to Tropical Gardens, P.O. Box 500014, Saipan, MP 96950. Only 20 passes per category will be issued - on a first come, first serve basis.

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Kudos to another community-oriented service that has just begun: Mel Pangelinan's Public Island Transportation Service. He's offering island-wide taxi service for fares ranging from \$3.00 to \$10.00, which is available 24 hours a day at 285-8487, radio*83442 or via e-mail at "mel_talu@yahoo.com." Sounds like a real bargain! I hope it succeeds! I sure could use it for those times when I have to depart Saipan at ungodly hours of the morning, and don't know what to do about getting to the airport, about my car.....

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Last but not least, the Division of Fish and Wildlife has put out a neat new booklet: "CNMI Fishing Regulations." Available at no cost from DFW in Lower Base, the booklet spells out in plain easy-to-understand language, what is permitted, and where, throughout the islands, and what the penalties are for violating the rules. Good job, DFW! (Next time, though, be sure to add the year of publication.....)

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Movies this week: One new one - the first "family drama" in some time - rated PG; an action thriller and an horror thriller, both PG-13; two comedies, one R and one PG; a crime drama rated R and an action drama rated PG.

"On My Mind" can also be found on the web at <www.chamorro.com> or at <www.cnmi.net (just click on "News & Weather"). If you missed a column due to an overfull mailbox or whatever, you can find it in the "Archives" section.

If you wish to be removed from the mailing list, please e-mail me at the address above.

- Lastly, is there any interest out there in forming a Eudora (e-mail system) users group on Saipan? I occasionally get hung up on one thing or another, and the computer gurus don't seem to have all that much familiarity with it. I know, I could switch, but I've got SO much invested in Eudora.....If so, let me know!

I can't figure out whether it's a generational thing, or a technophobia thing (which might also be generational) or an economy thing (money is involved), but I am beginning to feel that corresponding by e-mail has distinct disadvantages when it comes to trying to make and keep friends. Used to be that one talked to friends by phone, and the calls weren't just short questions and answers, but chatty conversations about a myriad of things great and small.

Nowadays, I guess some people do the same thing via cell phone, but I don't have one, and so far, haven't really felt a need for one.

It seems to have fallen out of favor to just pick up the phone and call. It might be interrupting a meal, a nap, another conversation. The person called might not be in. Or can't be interrupted at work. Or, out here, the time zone may be wrong. So I - and many others - use e-mail to "chat" with my friends - except it isn't really chatting. We forward "funnies." We inquire after one's health. We share a bit of news.

But the long conversations just aren't there anymore. And so real friendship gets more difficult to sustain.

A tip for saving water: replace all the push-type faucets - whose water flow is automatic - with faucets that allow one to control the flow of water. Several government installations now use the push-type faucets. Maybe the Water Task Force, or CUC's Water Division, could offer rebates to anyone who replaced such faucets?

One of the most egregious situations that belies the present governor's promise to work with the private sector, his avowal that he had the interests of the people at heart, is his on-going refusal to allow development of the fisherman's market at Garapan to proceed. Local entrepreneurs and local fishermen, joined by local farmers, have all requested that the plans and budget, already in place, be allowed to go forward. But the governor has rejected their pleas on the grounds that he hopes the area will be developed by a foreign investor. There's a saying that "a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush." Fitial might better take advantage of the development plans already in existence than delay action waiting for some promised future development to materialize.

Which brings up the issue of the ease of doing business. If my own experience is any indication, local or foreign investors must have a terrible time trying to conduct financial transactions in the CNMI. Not only do many businesses refuse to deal with anyone who does not have a street address - my desire to buy certificates of deposit on-line was flat-out rejected by one otherwise reputable company solely on the grounds that I had no street address and house number. I could have "lied," and made one up, and I occasionally do, as I know others do as well, but the fact remains that it is an obstacle.

On another occasion, a stock transaction required what is called a "medallion bank signature guarantee stamp." I'm not sure whether it was just my bank, or would have been true of others on-island, but obtaining the required stamp turned into a major hassle, not only the first time, but on subsequent occasions as well.

And of course, there is little in the way of traditional investing available on island at all.

It doesn't seem much talked about, but it would appear that the financial sector needs some reforming too - some modernization and improvement - if the CNMI hopes to offer an investor-friendly environment to new businesses.

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Aone, Traditional Use

1. What is park zoning?

Park zoning is the assignment of specific areas of land and water to certain restrictions and uses. The zones are chosen based on the ecology of the area, sound ecological and conservation principles, the needs of the local community, and feasibility.

2. Why is park zoning important?

Zones are necessary for the management of a large park. Regulations for each zone ensures the long-term survival of the Park's flora and fauna, its ecosystems, and the local communities who depend on the Park's resources.

3. What are the proposed zones of Komodo National Park?

There are seven proposed zones for Komodo National Park, which are based on a decree from the Director General of Forest Protection and Nature Conservation concerning the conservation of biological resources and their ecosystems. These zones are designed to allow traditional activities by local communities, while at the same time protecting the most valuable and sensitive natural environments in the Park. The zones include:

Core Zone, Wilderness Zone with Limited Tourism, Tourism Use Zone, Traditional Use Zone, Pelagic Use Zone, Special Research and Training Zone, and Traditional Settlement Zone.

Details of the regulations for each of the zones are published by the Park Authority. Below are summaries of these regulations.

4. What is a Core Zone?

The Core zone is a no-take, no-visit area. This zone is designed to fully protect important ecological areas. The only activities allowed in this zone are research and monitoring with permits.

5. What is a Wilderness Zone?

The Wilderness Zone is a no-take, limited visit area. This zone allows research, monitoring, environmental rehabilitation, and limited tourism that includes diving, wilderness trekking and sea kayaking. Fishing or any harvesting activity is prohibited.

6. What is a Tourism Use Zone?

The Tourism Use zone is a no-take, intensive tourism area. This zone allows the same activities as in the Wilderness Zone, but more tourism activities are allowed, such as the development of tourism facilities. Fishing or any harvesting activity is prohibited. The popular komodo dragon watching sites in Loh Liang, Komodo and in Loh Buaya, Rinca are included in this area.

7. What is a Traditional Use Zone?

The Traditional Use zone is a limited-take and utilization area that covers both terrestrial and marine areas. This zone allows for traditional fisheries using small-scale gear (subject to permits and restrictions), tourism (but not recreational fishing), mariculture, captive-breeding, research, monitoring and environmental rehabilitation and free passage of vessels.

8. What is a Pelagic Use Zone?

The Pelagic Use zone is a limited-take and utilization area that covers only offshore marine areas. This zone allows for pelagic fisheries, (subject to restrictions on gear-type, location and target species, and permits), passage of vessels, tourism, research and monitoring.

9. What is Special Research and Training Zone?

The Special Research and Training Zone is a no-take utilization area. This zone allows for research and training, monitoring and environmental rehabilitation with permits. Fishing or any harvesting activity is prohibited.

10. What is a Traditional Settlement Zone?

The Traditional Settlement Zone is intended for local communities currently living within the Park. Allowed uses include rearing of domestic animals, harvesting sand or limestone, use of pesticides within the home, limited agriculture without use of pesticides or fertilizers, and limited fresh water use. To avoid crowding of the settlement zones, immigration into the Park is prohibited.

11. What kinds of activities are not allowed in any zone?

Anchoring in non-designated areas, collecting legally protected animal and plant species, damaging marine or terrestrial habitats, keeping dogs or cats, disposing garbage in non-designated areas, harvesting firewood, and using cyanide, poisons, hookah, SCUBA, or explosives for fishing in the Park are all prohibited.

Chapter 4: PARK ZONING

In the Wilderness Zone, tourism will be subject to seasonal closures whenever

necessary to prevent disturbances to breeding or spawning animals in specific areas.

Article 10 Section 2: Report on Tax Exemptions. Every five years the governor shall report to the legislature on the social, fiscal and economic impact of tax exemptions provided by law. The report may include recommendations by the governor on tax exemption policy or laws.

Source: Original provision, unaltered (ratified 1977, effective 1978).

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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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

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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>

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.

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, HPMR 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)

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