

On My Mind  
12/08/06

Today is CNMI Constitution Day. Yet, except for one story on the front page of today's *Marianas Variety*, there was been no other mention in either paper, nor, in past issues this week, mention of any commemorative event. Has the Constitution fallen into such disfavor that no one acknowledges it any more? What a shame!

Yet, second only to the Covenant, Constitution Day marks the most important of the four "C" days, since without a constitution, the CNMI could not function. Even though the Constitution experienced significant change as a result of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Constitutional Convention in 1985 (not all of them well-advised), it has successfully withstood the test of time, remaining appropriate, accommodating and relevant to this day.

The lack of observance only strengthens the argument that it's high time to take seriously the suggestion that the four "C" days be combined into a single holiday that would celebrate the entire range of events leading up to the establishment of the CNMI. Then everyone could focus on the one day as celebration of all four events - which would have the useful by-product of also saving the government money.

The only "C" day that occurs in a month without another holiday is, appropriately enough, Covenant Day, observed in March. It would be most fitting, therefore, if the the four "C" holidays were combined and celebrated together on Covenant Day in March.

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Ricky Delgado pulled no punches in his presentation at this past week's Chamber of Commerce meeting. Delgado, PTI chief executive officer, said that if major changes are not undertaken immediately, the CNMI's future looks dire indeed. As more people and businesses leave island, the burden of supporting government services will fall on fewer and fewer people, which, in turn, will result in a shrinking of those services. It will bring an end to the good life as we know it, he warned.

The solution, he said, is to bring in more foreign investment. There is no shortage of investor funds, Delgado noted. But the money is going elsewhere, and until and unless the CNMI is able to improve its competitiveness, those investors will continue to ignore the CNMI. In order to attract more foreign investment, Delgado noted, the CNMI will first have to overcome four handicaps: a power system which could collapse any day, polluted beaches that put the lie to our claim of offering a beautiful tropical setting, land leases most of which are set to expire shortly, and unequal treatment of investors.

Yet privatization of CUC has again been delayed. What are we waiting for? he asked. CIP monies should be prioritized to clean up pollution of the lagoon - such a simple solution, he said, that no one seems to have recognized. He compared Riyadh to Dubai to illustrate. Riyadh is rich in oil, yet it is Dubai, which is not, that is attracting foreign investors - because of its pristine marine setting, in addition to the fact that it also welcomes capital, people and new ideas. And even if land is still held by local islanders, the lease terms must be increased - no investor is willing to sink his money into land that has only a few years left on the lease, Delgado said.

The CNMI economy can still turn around, he said, but only if people realize the gravity of the situation, only if they stop thinking of the good old days and work towards a future they can

control, only if those who elect the officials demand boldness and accountability, and only if people understand that its now everyone's problem, and that **THEY** need to act, because no one else is going to solve their problems for them.

"We need to educate people about the key issues, and help them make an educated decision," he noted. And "if people choose to live in isolation and refuse to change, then they need to be made aware of the repercussions," he added.

He warned that time is running out, and that failure to act immediately will result in more crime and a run down appearance - big negatives for tourism. "If people do opt for change, then all of us **MUST** demand from our elected officials to put the laws and policies in place that will allow that change to take place," he concluded.

A much-needed, and very sobering "call to arms." But will the legislature listen? As Delgado said, it is up to the people to make them do so!

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As the pressure to amend the CNMI Constitution's Article XI, which restricts ownership of public land, and its Article XII, which restricts ownership of private land, increases, before language is actually put together for one or more amendments, it would seem only prudent to consider the socio-economic impact of making those changes.

For example, would investor needs be met if only the term of the lease were changed - to, for example, 99 years as was done in Hawaii? If not, why not? Is relinquishing ownership altogether the only alternative? Why? Should only Article XII be changed, so that longer leases become available for private lands, but not for (commercial development of) public lands?

After all, the amount of available of public land has shrunk considerably over the years. If Article XI is also amended, would leases to developers really be the highest and best use of that land? What public lands would be affected? What if people gave up all their land? Would they rent? Try to purchase elsewhere? Leave the CNMI? How would that affect the economy?

Because land is such an important issue, it would be far better if the consequences - even the unintended consequences, if that is possible - be examined before any permanent change is made.

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Short takes:

The November issue of the *Commonwealth Register* came out on November 30, but this time the *Tribune* did not publish it. Wonder why. Included: emergency regulations re support for medical referrees and accompanying persons; proposed amendments to the Medical Licensing Board regulations, to the Board of Professional Licensing Regulations for Real Property Appraiser; notice of adoption of emergency amendments to the Alien Labor Rules and Regulations.

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Anyone who's ever had an interest, however slight, in arts and crafts should make a point of looking at every one of the Christmas trees now on display at the Paseo. Decorated by school students using re-cycled materials, the trees sport some of the cleverest, most creative and downright fascinating manipulation and use of re-cyclables I've ever seen. Real impressive!

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The Administration's Christmas decorations up on Capital Hill, on the other hand, flaunt a profligacy (EVERY single doorway is trimmed) that hardly seems fitting in these austere times. Some of the decorations may be hold overs from previous times, but nonetheless, it gives a bad impression.

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Interesting that copper thefts seemed to begin occurring on Guam after they had begun in the CNMI. Guam has arrested some of the perpetrators. So far as I know, the CNMI has not. Which is not surprising, given the scattered nature of the thefts, and the small size of the police force. It would not appear, however, that forbidding the purchase of copper wire - as has been suggested - would help much. After all, presumably the known purchasers of scrap metal are being watched, but to no avail - so far.

Wouldn't it be better, perhaps, to try catch the thieves as they send the wire off-island - which is presumably what they are doing? What would happen if every container, every small boat was inspected before it left the shore? Can those little fishing boats that leave from random launch spots around the island carry copper? Or is it too heavy? Assuming the latter, wouldn't it be easier to monitor the shipping of the wire, than try be everywhere at once to catch the thieves in the act?

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I don't know how anyone else feels, but I sure wish there were a different abbreviation for Teacher of the Year than TOY - which is what everyone seems to be using. Teachers are not toys!!! How about TOTY (Teacher Of The Year)? Or TOFY (Teacher OF the Year)? Or TOTHY (Teacher Of THE Year)? Seems to me any one of them would be better than TOY!

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In response to my inquiry as to whether there was a central contact point for government agencies on austerity Fridays, Mark Pangelinan, EMO Public Information Officer, wrote that EMO does have an established 24-hour contact number of these department heads in case of an emergency.

Pangelinan asked that I mention EMO's dedicated website at [www.cnmiemo.gov.mp](http://www.cnmiemo.gov.mp) He said anyone in doubt about any preparedness or weather issues or even ideas on how EMO could improve on its services, can give EMO a call at 322-9528/9529 or 322-8001/8003 or e-mail the office by clicking on the contact information contained within the website.

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Don't forget the Friend's of the Arts' performance of Scrooge this week-end: tonight at 7:30 p.m. and Sunday, the 10<sup>th</sup> at 3:00 p.m. at Charley's Cabaret at the PIC (admission \$10/adults, \$5 students age 11 and over; 10 and under free); Saturday, the 9<sup>th</sup>, at 7:30 p.m. at the Kagman Community Center, for which admission is by donation of canned/dry (unperishable) goods or cash in any amount, and proceeds for which will go to Karidat for Guma Esperanza, the shelter for victims of domestic violence.

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Lastly, a correction: There were not three new movies last week, only one. My error, and my apologies.

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New movies: a low-rated PG comedy, and a mediocre PG-13 romantic comedy; the rest: 3 PG's, 2 PG-13's.

*"On My Mind" can also be found on the web at <<http://net.saipan.com/cftemplates/omm/index.cfm>>, at <[www.chamorro.com](http://www.chamorro.com)> or at <[www.cnmi.net](http://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.*

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