

On My Mind  
1/19/07

Though some preceded Tina Sablan's "Call to Action," it's interesting to note the number of issue groups that have been springing up lately - from Beautify CNMI! and Dekada to the ad hoc Garapan committee, former Justice Dela Cruz' CNMI Enterprises Group and Cisco Uludong's yet unnamed anti-federalization group. Sablan wrote, in her CNMI Manifesto, "The action that I propose begins with speaking up: let us begin holding public forums to fearlessly discuss the problems of the Commonwealth, to come up with constructive solutions and present them publicly and energetically, and to ask critical questions and demand accountability from our leaders, and especially those officials who have been exposed in the media for corruption and waste."

Unless the present groups broaden their scope, however, yet more are needed to cover the full range of issues needing discussion and solution. The ideal would be an apolitical "political action committee" that would not only identify, prioritize, discuss and find solution to current issues, but that would then define and undertake the actions required to actually bring them about - on a non-partisan basis.

Sablan gave less emphasis to another avenue for effecting change - running for office. Wrote Sablan, "Protests, rallies, civil disobedience, letters, petitions, lawsuits, intelligent voting, participating in public hearing and legislative sessions and even running for office - these are just a few of the options we have for taking direct action to realize the changes that we want."

With plans already underway for a primary among Republicans seeking election this November, the time is already running short, but there is no better way to effect change than to bring new faces, new ideas, new and different points of view to the Legislature. Now is the time to speak up, to offer support to new voices, to inject new energies into the body politic, before the slots are all handed out to the many lackluster old-timers who have been there too long.

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Short takes (this time, quite a few - as offset to those many lengthy letters being published...):

Another couple of ideas for attracting tourists to the CNMI: allow hunting of feral animals, particularly in the Northern Islands, where they are a scourge, destroying important habitat, and fostering a birding sector for those who spend their vacations seeking new species. The CNMI has several that are unique, and they would be a real prize for birding enthusiasts. Neither of these niches require extensive investment or lengthy lead times, though both would have to be carefully controlled so as protect the environment.

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Attorney Joe Hill and his cohorts have once again proved that perseverance does pay off. It has taken years, but this past Monday, Hill finally succeeded in seeing that the CNMI celebrated Martin Luther King Day as an official government holiday. Congratulations!

The plans may have been a little over-ambitious - the lengthy final program Monday evening ran over-time, causing both Department of Public Safety Commissioner Rebecca Warfield and keynote speaker Dr. Cynthia Nance to cut short their speeches, and Judge Mona V. Manglona to forgo hers altogether. Nonetheless, what was heard was inspiring and most

impressive.....

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To all those who might be interested, there will be a gathering of friends of Barbara Gilles, a former CNMI Teacher of the Year who passed away in November, on Saturday, January 27 at 9 a.m., followed by a tree planting in her memory at Tanapag School at 10:30 a.m. The gathering will take place at Pierre's restaurant, in the Ocean View Hotel, located next to the Garapan branch of Modern Stationery. Parking is available in back.

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The most unusual Christmas gift I think I've ever received was one from a friend this year. She gave me a gift certificate for < [www.kiva.org](http://www.kiva.org) >. What Kiva does is identify individual entrepreneurs around the world who need a helping hand to get started or expand on their business, processes a small business loan for them, and then posts their stories on the web. The money for the loans comes from lenders who use the internet to choose the person in whose business they want to invest. As the debtors repay their loan, the lenders get their money back - though without interest. Loan amounts vary from only a few hundred dollars to several thousand; lender "investments" usually start at \$25.00. Kiva also offers gift certificates. My gift certificate allowed me to pick an entrepreneur, loan him the value of the gift certificate, and to get my money back when the entrepreneur pays off the loan. A truly novel idea for helping others, for cutting out the middleman, for supporting initiative around the world - and for gift giving!

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For those who may not yet have found it, the url for the Pacific Tsunami Warning Center is < [www.prh.noaa.gov/ptwc/bulletings.htm](http://www.prh.noaa.gov/ptwc/bulletings.htm) >. It cancelled this past week's tsunami watch nearly 30 minutes earlier than official notice was provided by the Emergency Management Office. The only difficulty in using the site is having to translate Zulu time, which the site uses, to local time.

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A left-over from last week: Was it really necessary for both local papers to identify a man, found guilty of wire fraud, by his former place of employment (the Coastal Resource Management Office) when his crime was totally unrelated to his former position? The implication of CRMO wrongdoing would appear unwarranted, unjustifiable.

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Perhaps those who "need to know" already do know, but I had not been aware of the veritable treasure house of beads of all colors and sizes, along with the necessary accessories, that can be found at the Garapan branch of Modern Stationery, located on Beach Road, next to the Ocean View Hotel. Just amazing!

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The U.S. Department of Interior's Insular Affairs Office deserves a vote of thanks for making available to the general public the report prepared by those U.S. DoI interns who were on island last summer. Initially, reporters had been given to understand that the report was an internal document, and would not be made public. Though the report did receive DoI editing, it is nonetheless gratifying that at least now and then products by visiting officials are made available to the subject of their visits. The report is available on the DoI website, < [www.doi.gov/oia/](http://www.doi.gov/oia/) >. Just click on the "2006 intern report" listed at the left.

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The Public School System has been offering a federally-funded "neighborhood library" program at island schools for nearly two years, but until now has not invited local residents to take part. The program, designed to promote reading, opens school libraries on Saturday mornings from 8:00 a.m. until noon, and is aimed primarily at children and their parents. However, according to the PSS federal programs coordinator, so long as other local residents first report in to the principal or vice-principal on duty, there is no reason why they can not also make use of the school's library facilities.

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A retrospective exhibit in honor and recognition of Doug Rankin will be held at the CNMI Arts Council gallery on Capitol Hill from January 31- March 5, 2007. Rankin has achieved international fame for the unique art form he developed of banana printing and painting. All those fortunate enough to own one of Rankin's works are being asked to loan the work to the Arts Council for the duration of the exhibit. Works should be brought to the Council by January 25. Council staff has also volunteered to pick up art works - the number to call for pick-up or for further information is 322-9982/9983.

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Former Justice Jose S. Dela Cruz, in his thoughtful letter to the editor published this past Tuesday, created a very apt and useful bit of imagery when he compared the CNMI to a two-wheeled bicycle. One wheel is gone totally (the garment industry) and the other is flat (tourism). The CNMI, he wrote, not only needs to fix the flat tire, but also needs to find a second one to put the bike back in operating order. That image has already been pickup by columnists Rik and Janel Villegas, who regularly write business-related articles for the *Saipan Tribune*. In their latest column, in yesterday's issue, they wrote, "Riding a unicycle is a challenge, but in this economy it is folly....Two wheels are better than one, and more wheels will be your ticket to better times." The wheels they refer to are marketing activities; the bike analogy is cleverly applied throughout.

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With all the brouhaha about taxation without representation, etc., it should be pointed out that the Covenant that established the CNMI in political union with the U.S. contains several provisions that do NOT require mutual consent for unilateral action on the part of the U.S. Congress. Article V, Section 503 provides that certain U.S. laws not then applicable to the TTPI would not apply to the CNMI **except as made applicable by the U.S. Congress by law**. Two of those exceptions are Section 503 (a), the immigration and naturalization laws of the U.S. and Section 503 (c) the U.S. minimum wage law. By the terms of the Covenant, jointly signed by both the CNMI and the U.S., the CNMI ceded to the U.S. the right to unilaterally impose those U.S. laws on the CNMI.

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The coconut wireless has it that the CNMI's economy is being made to look worse than it really is in hopes of persuading people that casinos on Saipan are indeed, the only answer to its ailing economy. Others might consider the casino suggestion a rather imperfect second wheel for the CNMI bicycle.

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Hurray for Senator Maria T. Pangelinan! She is asking the Marianas Visitors Authority to come up with a different mascot for the CNMI to replace the "Saipanda" which may have made sense to the Japanese, but certainly to no one else. How about the green gecko instead?

That way, the CNMI could weave in its pro-environment "greenness" as part of its basic sales pitch.....Or, better yet, how about a contest?

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Movies this week: Eragon is finally gone! Three new ones, a PG-13, an R, and a non-rated one. The new PG-13, "The Queen," gets a high ranking from reviewers. Info on "Samoan Wedding" is harder to find - it's a New Zealand import, but is also getting high marks. Still showing, 1 R, one PG-13 (low rating) and two high-rated PGs.