

On My Mind
4/13/07

I've already shared this with some people, who will, I hope, forgive the repetition. It is, I believe, worth the larger audience. Not all of the details hold true - people in the CNMI do not get their computers via truck, for example - but the rest seems true enough. Granted that the question has been asked and answered before, but this struck me as the more telling response. Ready?

"Question: What is the truest definition of Globalization? Answer: Princess Diana's death.

"Question: How come?

Answer: An English princess with an Egyptian boyfriend crashes in a French tunnel, driving a German car with a Dutch engine, driven by a Belgian who was drunk on Scottish whiskey, (check the bottle before you change the spelling) followed closely by Italian Paparazzi, on Japanese motorcycles; treated by an American doctor, using Brazilian medicines. This [the original, that is] is sent to you by an Irish/German man born in the USA, using Bill Gate's American technology, and you're probably reading this on your computer, that uses Taiwanese chips, and a Korean monitor, assembled by Bangladeshi workers in a Singapore plant, transported by Indian lorry-drivers, hijacked by Indonesians, loaded into a Libyan ship, burning Venezuelan fuel, unloaded by Sicilian longshoremen, and trucked to you by Mexicans..... That, my friend, is Globalization."

My thanks, again, to the person who forwarded the e-mail to me.

One of the things this story illustrates is that the use of guest workers is not unique to the CNMI - it is happening all over the world. And I recently was reminded that even in the CNMI it is not a recent development. As far back as the 1930's, the Japanese brought in foreign workers - from Korea and Okinawa - to work in the sugarcane fields and factories.

It behooves both sides in the current debate over immigration in the CNMI to recognize and understand both points: the labor pool in the CNMI has never been enough to support industry of any kind, and immigration concerns are a world-wide phenomenon.

While it is not certain when federalization of immigration will come about, what is certain is that the issue will not go away. It's too bad that the administration, the private sector and the Washington Rep have not been able to sit down and work out an acceptable compromise on their positions, as not only the Washington Rep, but also Department of Interior officials have urged.

There is of course an aspect of David and Goliath to the issue, and I suppose there is some sense of pride in taking on the role of David. On the other hand, there is also the question of perception and perspective, with one side being more insular and parochial, and the other more able to view the issue on a broader scale, and with more direct knowledge of Washingtonian politics. If I were asked to choose, I'd support the view of the Washington Rep. At least he has offered to compromise.

The crisis regarding *e coli* contamination of the city water in Garapan and Puerto Rico was to have come to an end as of yesterday afternoon, according to the papers, though a call to the Commonwealth Utilities Corporation this morning revealed that it did not actually clear up til this morning. I was unable to confirm the coconut wireless information that the cause of the outbreak was CUC's failure to pay its vendor for the required chlorine, which allegedly resulted in the unavailability of chlorine for the water in those areas.

Nor was I able to contact anyone who could tell my how the *e-coli* bacteria got into the water system to begin with. Wouldn't it take leaks and cracks in the water pipes or in a connection somewhere or at a well-site to allow the contamination to have occurred in the first place?

And we pretend that we have much to offer investors? that we are a safe tourist destination?

Perhaps the Marianas Visitors Authority ought to begin putting some of its money and time and effort into improving the infrastructure, so that it isn't out there trying to sell such a flawed product.

What the administration and the legislature ought to do is clear enough: straighten out the mess that is CUC. But that seems a vain hope nowadays. Maybe the CNMI could sell itself as the U.S. of A's only remaining banana republic?

In the meantime.... Buried in the back of the *Saipan Tribune*, amid all the advertisements and requests for proposal, is a request for public comment on the intent of the Northern Marianas Housing Corporation to re-program certain of its funds. One of the items shown is the cancellation of \$311,170.00 originally slated for the Garapan Central Market, and the application of those funds to the Susupe Sports Complex. The notice does not provide details of how those funds would actually be used at the Sports Complex.

The notice says that the public is invited to provide written and oral comment on the proposed re-programming, for which the deadline is 4:30 p.m., April 19, 2007. Of course, the big question is how much weight any public comment submitted would carry. If dozens of farmers and other interested parties submitted comments opposing the cancellation of the farmer's market, would it do any good? Or is the notice pro forma - a mere formality - as are the help wanted ads in the paper?

A presentation to the CNMI legislature was scheduled this morning on the feasibility of using nuclear energy as a source of power. Though apparently small plants are feasible and available - starting at 50 megawatts - they are not cheap. A letter to the *Middle East Times*, in talking about nuclear energy plants for the island of Cyprus, notes that "When we come to evaluating the cost factor, in base monetary terms, for a nuclear power plant within the range of 50 Mwe to 100 MWe, one can expect to pay at least \$2,000 to \$2,500 per Kilowatt.... [1,000 kilowatts equal one megawatt] of power generation if one purchases it directly from abroad, together with concessions paid on one's foreign policies."

Further, the letter states that "The construction period would vary between 10 to 20 years depending on funding, the technology chosen, and other unforeseeable parameters." Among other

things, I don't think the CNMI can afford to wait that long.

The letter also mentions the requirement for trained and highly skilled scientific and technological personnel of which the CNMI has few indeed. Just doesn't sound all that feasible - especially when one considers that any plant can only serve a single island, and that there are major issues with storage of spent fuel, etc., ad nauseum. Url for the letter is: < <http://www.metimes.com/storyview.php?StoryID=20070319-061144-1398r> >.

Short takes:

A new abandoned vehicle has joined the ranks: it sits crashed in a weird position against a flame tree on the Marpi Road - a black pick-up, already stripped of license plate and vehicle identification number and showing signs of vandalism. It's pretty obvious that the owner doesn't intend to do anything about removing it. Must look pretty trashy to all the tourists who go by it on their way to the Marpi landmarks. I haven't checked; are there laws on the books about being responsible for removing one's wrecks from public land? about fining the owner if s/he doesn't? If not, there ought to be such a law. If there is one, how come no one is enforcing it - particularly when it's in such a highly visible area?

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Today's *Trib* notes that the CNMI spends about \$4.4 million on medical referral each year. Has anyone looked at the alternative of bringing doctors to the CNMI - either on a case-by-case basis, or for longer terms - rather than shipping the patient and a medical escort and a family member off-island? While some cases might be so difficult that a full range of medical experts and technical facilities would be needed, in other cases, patients are being sent off-line only because no CHC physicians presently on staff have the particular skills involved.

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I found it interesting that the *Pacific Daily News* story on a John Baldwin offering Guam \$1million in advance tax benefits for approval of his business to operate a casino made no mention of the fact that Baldwin is co-partner in Bridge Capital LLC, the company which just recently took on the lease of Saipan's white elephant La Fiesta Mall. Is that because the *PDN* generally ignores the CNMI, or should one read more into the omission?

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Kudos to Senator Maria T. Pangelinan, otherwise known as Fricka, for her article in yesterday's *Tribune*. There's a senator who takes her responsibilities and her accountability to her electorate seriously!

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Lastly, I apologize once more for my unthinking error regarding national elections in last week's column - it was a most sobering experience, to say the least, and I promise to do my best not to not let it happen again.

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New movies: only 1, rated R. All seven previous movies are still being shown which is just as well since none of the new releases look particularly inviting.