

On My Mind  
5/18/07

The political scene sure is heating up - what with the disagreement between the administration and the Washington office about the U.S. Congress' draft immigration bill, the move to amend the CNMI Constitution regarding run-off election for governor, squabbles within, largely, it would appear, the local Republican party about its candidates, and most recently, the appeal to the court to reapportion and redistrict voter representation on Saipan, in all the headlines of late.

The *Saipan Tribune's* Ed Stephens considers such a pre-occupation with politics and government a negative quality (see his column in today's paper). Rather, I believe it a sign of a community actively practicing democracy, actively participating in its governance - a positive quality at a time when voter apathy is still of concern, when democracy itself seems under attack elsewhere in the world. People in the CNMI are involved not only because community activist Tina Sablan has prodded them of late, but also because their government is not a remote, invisible, and unknown quantity as in so many other places; but is, instead, composed of their nearby family, friends, neighbors. (Of course, sometimes they may be too close, but that's another topic.....)

Perhaps that, in fact, explains why the governor and the president and members of the Saipan Chamber of Commerce are having such difficulty in relating to the immigration proposal drafted by the Department of Interior and now before U.S. Senator Bingaman and his committee.

Their "opponents" are largely unknown, invisible, components of remote and complex institutions. On the other hand, if the disagreement were among parties within the CNMI, their stance would not, in all likelihood, be nearly so confrontational, so inflexible.

Which is all the more reason to listen to and cooperate with the CNMI's Washington Rep - who was, after all, elected for the purpose of liaising with those very same people in the faraway capital of the U.S. in Washington, D.C. To Pete A. Tenorio, those players and their institutional procedures are not remote, unknown and invisible, but people and strategies and techniques that he deals with on a regular basis. I do not believe our Washington Rep is campaigning for governor here, as some contend. I think he is just doing his job, and particularly in this instance, doing it very well.

Moreover, Tenorio's warning that the CNMI runs the risk of getting folded into national immigration legislation if the DoI measure is dropped is all the more timely now that headlines report that the U.S. Senate and the White House have reached compromise on national immigration issues - clearing the way for progress on that front. The governor, the Chamber president and its members should drop their confrontational stance and join the Washington Rep in working together to come to acceptable terms. Don't they know that it is far more productive to sit around a table and negotiate than to sling barbs and arrows from afar?

\*\*\*

Re: the proposed amendment to the CNMI Constitution that would require a run-off election if the candidate for governor does not receive 50+1 percent of the vote: it would be unwise for people to rely on the CNMI legislature, which is discussing passage of a legislative initiative to do the same thing. Though it is a huge challenge to collect the 7,000+ signatures

needed to get a popular initiative on the ballot - particularly given such a short time-frame (deadline is May 31) - it can be done. All it needs is 75 people, each collecting 100 qualified signatures! :-) If you believe there should be a run-off, your help is sorely needed! Call Roger Ludwick at 322-4950, or e-mail him at < [ludwick@itecnmi.com](mailto:ludwick@itecnmi.com) > for forms, instructions.

\*\*\*

I won't discuss the local Republican Party's internal conflicts. But as to the petition filed by Senator Maria T. Pangelinan and Tina Sablan in the CNMI Supreme Court asking for reapportionment and redistricting of voter representation, I believe there are some unresolved issues. Pangelinan and Sablan rightfully argue that the actions are necessary to conform to the CNMI Constitution, which requires that these steps be taken after each decennial census, and that the CNMI has not done so.

They propose that there be a total of 14 districts - one for Tinian and Aguigan, one for Rota, and 12 for Saipan and the Northern Islands. I'm all in favor of cutting the size of the CNMI House of Representatives. For such a small place as the CNMI, 18 members are far too many. While the Pangelinan/Sablan proposal would only reduce that by four, still, it is a reduction.

However, I do have a problem with who it is that the two propose to count. They would limit the persons to be counted to U.S. citizens, on the grounds that it is, after all, only citizens who vote. However, members of the House are expected to represent all of the concerns of their district, and if their district is impacted by large numbers of non-voting residents, that certainly would change the range of concerns, be it in regard to adequate power and water, crowded housing, over-flowing schools, or crime in the streets, to name a few. It seems neither fair nor prudent to disregard this factor in determining precinct boundaries and population per member.

On the other hand, if the last U.S. census is used as the basis of allocation, that will skew things considerably, since many of the foreign workers one assumes were counted are no longer in the CNMI.

The court has asked for comment from several government agencies. Others interested in submitting comments may file a motion to be allowed to submit briefs by May 21, 2007; briefs are due on June 1. The issue is set for hearing on Tuesday, June 12, at 10:00 a.m. in the Supreme Court Room 114B.

\*\*\*

Short takes:

First of all, another correction (sorry, folks!). My being mathematically challenged messed me up again, this time, believe it or not, because I did not catch the difference between a comma and a decimal point. The long and short of it is that the CNMI did NOT receive \$36,647,000 in funding for CY 2007, but \$21,735,502.17. My apologies.

\*

Talk about unfriendly business dealings: An invitation for bid published in both local papers said specifications for needed replacement parts - i.e., network switches and accessories -

would be available as of May 15, 2007, and the bid for providing them was due on May 18, at 10:00 a.m. Isn't that a rather short span of time to provide bids? The IFB was issued by Northern Marianas College.

\*

Not unfriendly, so much as confusing, is trying to figure out how the Request for Proposal to "conduct a CNMI-wide economic impact analysis and report" issued by the Governor, and the "updated economic report on the CNMI" requested of the Government Accounting Office by the U.S. Congress, relate to the push in Congress to pass a CNMI immigration bill. The governor's RFP has a deadline of June 8 for submitting proposals. Then there's the time lag involved in deciding to whom it should be awarded, and the time to produce the report - not to mention the time to study the results of the report - all of which could take months! There's been no deadlines set for conduct of the GAO study as of yet. The assumption, though, is that neither party will take final action on the immigration bill until the results of the respective studies have been received and reviewed - which could conceivably take as long as a year from now.....

\*

There's been no follow-up to the dilemma expressed by 12<sup>th</sup> grade Mount Carmel student Cyd Xyrene Gojar Tribiana, winner of this year's Covenant Day speech contest sponsored by the Attorney General's office. His speech was framed in terms of a family, and he described the CNMI as just now reaching political adolescence, the U.S. as just now reaching adulthood as it celebrated its bicentennial. In resolving the present conflicts under the Covenant, he said the relationship between the two should be as that of a family with the U.S. more tolerant of its adolescent child, the child more respectful of its parent. It was very well, and movingly, done.

The dilemma is that under the Covenant that Tribiana respects so highly - and credits for his being in the CNMI to begin with - and despite having lived on island for 15 years, under present law he and his family do not have the right to stay in the CNMI. His mother, as an employee of a now-closed garment factory, will be returning to the Philippines, and he too will have to leave. He had said, in his speech that "Whenever I visit the Philippines, I always look forward to coming back to Saipan, I look forward to coming home."

I don't know if Tribiana is eligible to stay under a student visa or some such if he immediately enrolls at Northern Marianas College. But it somehow seems cruel and unusual punishment if he can't.

\*

On a brighter note, a new theater production company has been formed, and will present its first play on Sunday June 3rd, Friday June 8th and Saturday June 9<sup>th</sup>, at 7:00 p.m. at the American Memorial Park theater. Tickets are \$5.00 each. The Fabulous Invalid Theater Company, founded by actress, writer, director, and Hopwood Teacher Nahal Navidad will present the play "Stuck," written by Jessica Goldberg. Tickets are available from cast members Keisha Paez, Lynda Rowe, Bernard Rivera, Rick Jones of Java Joes, and Navidad. Bree Reynolds, stage manager, Leyda Ada and Paul Guerrero, in charge of publicity, should also have tickets for sale.

\*

New movies: "Shrek the Third," rated PG, and "Fracture," rated R, for a total of 1 PG, three PG-13s, and 2 Rs, or two "Action," three "Thriller" and one "Animated Adventure" films.