

On My Mind

7/27/07

They say that internet bloggers have become so ubiquitous that they actually affect what happens in the world - because they call to people's attention, highlight, speak out on, information and events that mass media may overlook or ignore. I can't imagine where the bloggers get the time to do as much inputting as they do, or as much reading of others' blogs as they do - my days are full already! But occasionally someone sends me a citation to a blog they think I should see, might appreciate, and then I do get a look at a blog or two.

One such citation I was sent this week I found particularly interesting: <
<http://www.dailykos.com/story/2007/7/21/22848/5207>>. The blogger's writing isn't all that civil- or all that literate - but here is part of what the 7/20 entry contains: "*The Pirates of Saipan* [presumably, the CNMI government] should lose on all three of their goals [described in a previous paragraph as "1. Block a pathway to US Citizenship to ANY Guest Worker on the CNMI, including those with children who are US Citizens. 2. Maintain a steady flow of new, time-limited Guest Workers to maintain their corrupt economic system, and 3. Maintain the ability to have a special CNMI travel Visa that will allow local control of customs for visitors from China, Russia and elsewhere."].

"To push their corruption-as-usual agenda, they have hired the Democratic equivalent of Jack Abramoff, a lobbyist named William Oldaker. And in a more predictable move they have hired two PR flacks and loyal Bushies: Former National spokesman for the Bush-Cheney 2004 Campaign, Terry Holt and former Deputy White House Press Secretary, Trent Duffy.

"It would take somebody skilled in advanced lying and spinning to defend the CNMI system of neo-slavery with a straight face....And the flacks are already helping the *Pirates of Saipan* tell their story. Take a look at these gems: 'The CNMI can be an American success. They are struggling to rebuild their economy and have initiated reforms to put immigration and labor problems in the past, said Trent Duffy of Duffy PR Strategies.'

"Too often, the only time policymakers have heard about the CNMI, it's been in the context of the Jack Abramoff story. It is time to move on, said Duffy.'

"Northern Mariana Islanders are American citizens and we share an important history, forged stated battle[sic] for the Pacific in World War II. And their place on the map makes them a significant national security asset. It's time people hear about some of these facts too,' Duffy."

They're clever, aren't they? Putting forth half truths as though they were the whole truth.....

It's bad enough that CNMI monies are being spent to paint such pretty pictures, but it's even more disturbing to think that people - including U.S. Congresspersons - might be taken in by such hyperbole.

The CNMI voices heard at the recent Congressional hearing in Washington, D.C. all asked for time in one way or another - time to do another study, time to let the proposed labor reform bill go into effect, time to evaluate the impact of the minimum wage - before Congressional action is taken on CNMI labor and immigration reform. But time, I would argue, is exactly what the CNMI does not have much more of if it wants to survive. As has been pointed out repeatedly, no investor is going to come in with the business picture in such turmoil and

confusion, nor will most airlines be tempted to add flights, until the picture becomes clearer.

That South Korean businessmen and airlines are doing so should be small comfort. In the absence of a functioning zoning code, they are building more strip malls all over the place for which there are no tenants, only adding to the inventory of characterless, tasteless, poorly designed and engineered, single-purpose buildings already in existence all over the islands.

If it is correct to say that the larger the investment, the more important is stability, then the CNMI won't see large investments until those studies are done, until the evaluation of changes has occurred, until "the dust has settled," - and in the meantime, it will continue to suffer the consequences of rising fuel and shipment costs, of rising consumer prices and decreased public services.

Yet, the present administration cannot offer stability - in fact, it's not clear that any CNMI administration can do so. The very structure of its government - with such a high turn-over in gubernatorially-appointed positions every four years - makes continuity impossible. Other places have a larger proportion of civil service workers, who stay on the job regardless of a change in politics, and who are, therefore, able to provide continuity in the conduct of the various government agencies' responsibilities and functions. Here that is not the case. Every four years, everything starts all over, with new administrations only rarely respecting or honoring what previous administrations had begun.

It would appear that if stability is to be achieved, federalization must occur - unless the CNMI does a massive turn-about in the structure of its civil service, which is not all that likely, at least in the near future. 'Tis a pity.

There's a difference between stability and inflexibility, however, and the CNMI seems very good at being inflexible. A good example is the Beach Road pathway extension that Bruce Bateman keeps harping on. It is bad enough that it duplicates that part of the pathway that goes as far as the dump, instead of just continuing from there. Apparently because no one knew at the time that the dump would be closed, and that walking by it would not bring unpleasant sights and odors, the original plans were to build the path extension along Middle Road to avoid the dump. Well, things changed and the dump closed - but the plans did not.

Now they've begun to put in lamp posts using not only the same lamps, but as close together as the lamps in Garapan along the former "Island Power Road," now called Garapan Street. When those plans were drawn up, power costs were not a factor, since the costs were government-subsidized. Now that the price of fuel has skyrocketed, costs are a big factor, but again, plans for the lights were not changed to accommodate the change in circumstance.

On Garapan Street, last time I looked, only alternate lamps were lit at night, because it was found too expensive to light them all. So why are the lamp posts being put so close together in the Puerto Rico area? Moreover, the lamps being installed provide so called non-directed lighting - they light up everything above, next to, or below the lamp - which is a waste of power. That may look pretty, but it is inefficient - the lights should be focussed downwards - towards the path.

In addition, that style of lamp seems to be a prime target for copper-wire thieves. Isn't there some way the lighting could be built into the path, and shine upward through glass bricks, or something similar?

It would appear that none of these issues was raised. The plans, approved several years

ago, were just taken off the shelf, and with no further thought, given to a contractor to implement. What should have happened is that the plans be re-examined and re-evaluated, re-assessed, to make sure that the assumptions that shaped the plans were still valid, that the concerns the plans addressed remained the same, that the conditions for implementing the plans were unchanged.

Here is a case where flexibility should have been built into the process in order to accommodate change. And the same is true of all other Public Works projects that are implemented from time to time. If plans have sat for two years or more, they should be re-assessed. Circumstances DO change. Technology changes. Constraints change. Available knowledge increases. What seemed like a good idea, or the best solution, three or four years ago might not seem such a good idea - or the best solution - today.

The same is true of attitudes. As time and circumstances change, as the world around us changes, as issues change shape, as we ourselves age, we would do well to be flexible, to re-assess where we are and what we are doing, and what we ought to be doing.....

I suppose, the system being as inflexible as it is, it would take a major effort to change the position description of security guard to include picking up cigarette butts. But I sure would like to make a plea that that effort be made. I know for a fact that at Banzai Cliff and at Bird Island there are security guards that sit around for hours, looking incredibly bored. I also know for a fact that both sites are littered with cigarette butts, a real put-off in areas that are being touted as beautiful, natural, one of Saipan's major attractions, etc., etc., etc. Well, how can they be, when one just has to look at one's feet to see the area strewn with cigarette butts? What are we telling our tourists? That we don't care?

Think of the health benefit to the security guards as they walk around, instead of just sitting. As they bend and straighten, instead of just walking. But most of all, think of the improvement to the sites, as they become litter-free. Think of the impression that will make on the tourists!

The same of course could be said of security guards elsewhere, like at the Commonwealth Health Center, where they do seem to walk around, but no one does anything about the cigarette butts.

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Food for thought: What the CNMI needs is an industry that creates something that can be exported, so that the container ships coming here don't go back empty.....

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New movies: only one: "The Simpsons Movie" - guess you either like them or you don't (I don't) - rated PG-13, for a total of two G's, six PG-13's, and one R.

- Not being a cable subscriber, I was unaware that MCV broadcasts CNMI Senate sessions, video-taped courtesy of Senator Pete P. Reyes' office, every week-day evening following the

session at 6:00 p.m., and at noon on the Sunday following the session, over channel 41 or 42. Unfortunately, the tapes are re-used, not archived.

There must be an "Emily Post" or other guide to e-mail protocol out there somewhere. Well, I have an addition I'd like to submit: when "today" or "tomorrow" is used in an e-mail, the sender should always indicate the calendar date as well. I've gotten messed up more than once because I couldn't tell which day the sender meant. I never know whether the time indicated in the header indicates when the sender sent it, or when the server forwarded it.

- Seems I've been beating the wrong horse in terms of my complaints about the ugly oversized concrete viewing platform at the Grotto. It was apparently the Department of Lands and Natural Resources that was responsible for design and construction of the platform, rather than the Marianas Visitors Authority, as I had thought.

These are not the same people! Bridge Capital has Nothing to do with anything on Tinian. In fact, there are THREE distinct "Bridge" groups in the CNMI) "Bridge Investment Group" (the gaming license) - headed by Rudy Pamintuan - he's on the president's council of indian and Asian affairs; 2) The "Bridge" group (not sure of the exact title) - the one that wanted to mine pozzolan on Pagan with Mr. Sablan; and 3) Your "Bridge Capital" - winner of several scam awards - as you so correctly pointed out. Please don't let people think that Tinian is dealing with this guy.
E-mail from Arkle, 3/26

As for the U.S. Congressional Budget for USGS for FY 2008 for volcano monitoring projects in CNMI, the EMO Director has been in close contact with **Dr. Jim Quick, USGS Volcano Hazards Program Coordinator** and indications are that the fight is not over yet as EMO will officially request with the consultation of the Governor of both USGS and the Washington Representative Pete A. Tenorio to continue consultations with congressional staffers of Senator Ted Stevens of Alaska to see what can be done to resolve the issue. In the past, the CNMI Emergency Management Office has assisted USGS in providing needed information regarding the seismic network and related field work projects in the CNMI. EMO will continue to provide the information.
from e-mail from Mark Pangelinan, deputy director of EMO (not PIO!) 2/23/07

Back in 2005, when Dr. Quick and Ms. Linda Gundersen, Associate Director for Geology visited CNMI, Dr. Quick made his presentations on the CNMI Volcano Observatory, he mentioned that it will be one of the long-term project for USGS to pursue in close consultation with the CNMI. The visit from one of the high ranking USGS officials to CNMI made it even a promising feat as there are indications that USGS is willing to support and assist the CNMI. The CNMI is one of the areas of responsibility of USGS as we have (9) nine active volcanoes in the CNMI. Since we are a U.S. Commonwealth, it makes sense that USGS is only one of the federal agencies having

jurisdiction over our CNMI. It is prudent that support and assistance from the United States Government will have a tremendous effect on the outlook of the CNMI in times of disaster whether it be natural or man-made. In fact, each budget year's allocation percentage will go to project of installing Seismic monitoring stations on each of the active volcanoes up in the Northern Islands. So that means that for each budget year, USGS will allocate money to the Volcano Hazards Program to carry out tasks of installing seismic monitoring stations on each of the active volcanic islands up North. When all active volcanic islands are installed and the network is up and running, then the next step would be to achieve a central receiving point or station to gather and compile the data received from the seismic stations and that would eventually be the so called "Mariana Islands Volcano Observatory". This will also mean that Northern Marianas College will benefit from this project as USGS makes it a point to collaborate with a educational institution to take in college interns who are pursuing the field of volcanology and geology for a period of time to ensure that the students are taught and practical field work are done with the supervision of the observatory professional staff. In addition, this would also mean grants to the institution from USGS as in the case of the University of Hawaii for example and other states.

1. EMO is also keeping close contact with the Japan Meteorological Agency and the University of Tokyo in sharing seismic and volcanic data that are critical to our region. Whenever there is an Earthquake event or Volcanic event in our region, EMO also makes a call to both of these Japan-based agencies so that we can validate that there indeed was an event and that information sharing is critical so that more lives can be saved from such events. In the past years, both EMO and University of Tokyo have conducted joint field projects in CNMI that is tied into the monitoring of the Pacific and Philippine plates movement using GIS applications to measure the movement. This has been successful and University of Tokyo has indicated a return to CNMI for more projects that will benefit the entire region. This is aside from immediate contact of the Pacific Tsunami Warning Center for tsunami events and the USGS' National Earthquake Information Center located in Boulder, Colorado for all earthquake events that may or will occur in the CNMI. If you would need additional information, please let me know. You may call me on my cellular at: 287-3662 or at work at: 322-8001/8003 or via my e-mail. Thanks and have a nice weekend

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Having said all that, if I had been at the first of Tina Sablan's forums last night, what I would have mentioned as most important, in order to "fix" the CNMI's economy at this stage are, first, the protection of the integrity of the Covenant; second, doing whatever is necessary to bring CUC's systems and operations up to reliable, efficient and cost-effective performance levels; and third, reducing the size of government - not only in the executive, but also in the legislative branch.

The idea of an office dedicated to protection and advocacy of the Covenant has been mentioned here before. I described, then, the function of the office as "to see to it that the provisions of the Covenant were pro-actively protected, adhered to, and defended in any and all legal forums - a need identified by "Honorable Accord" author Howard Willens in the fall-out from the stateless

persons issue. Had it been in effect, it is likely that the CNMI would not have been so unprepared office would also see to it that suitable observations were held on Covenant Day, and that knowledge and understanding of the Covenant and its terms were promoted year-round...particularly in the schools and in government."

The need for the second is, I trust, self-evident. That, and the third - a reduction in the size of government - have already been brought up, I am glad to see, at Sablan's forum.

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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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 terrible.....(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 raised 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 tourists 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)