

On My Mind  
8/03/07

Particularly given Washington Rep Pete A. Tenorio's advice in today's *Saipan Tribune*, it seems appropriate to repeat an analogy passed on to me not so long ago. I neglected to ask permission to use the story-teller's name, so the source must remain anonymous, but it is nonetheless, quite fitting and so I offer it herewith: Everyone knows that the pincers of a coconut crab are very strong, and that once it has something in its pincers, it is almost impossible to get the crab to let it go. There is a trick, however, that one can use, and that is to tickle the crab's abdomen. If this is done, the crab will release its hold - or so I was told.

Now, envision, if you will, the U.S. Congress as that coconut crab, having tightly grasped the CNMI in its claws via the proposed immigration act, and refusing to let go, regardless of how hard - or how loudly - or with how many voices - the CNMI may protest. The efforts are of no avail.

However, to apply this analogy, if the CNMI were to tickle the "abdomen" of this particular coconut crab, the crab would let go. In other words, if the CNMI were to show itself as willing to negotiate, the U.S. Congress would be more than willing to offer concessions. That is, in fact, what Pete A. is suggesting - logical, sensible, and good advice indeed.

The Chamber, in its upcoming meeting this week, instead of brandishing absolute demands, presenting an uncompromising position, might better take a more realistic look, and realize that the crab does indeed have the CNMI in its pincers - and if the Chamber wants something other than what is now before the Congress it will only achieve that by showing a willingness to compromise.

Which also applies to the administration - spin doctors and lobbyist notwithstanding.

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Another "story" I've been wanting to tell comes from CNMI historian and NMC faculty member Sam McPhetres, who offered for inclusion in the history section of a tour guide training manual currently being drafted this description of what he has labelled "civilized warfare" among early Chamorros:

"To settle conflicts, Chamorros followed the practices of what has been termed 'civilized warfare,' a convention common in many parts of the Pacific. When the chief of one village decided to attack another village, which could happen for any number of reasons, the attacking chief would send a messenger to the target chief informing him of his intent to attack at a certain time and date. The message would include a warning that the attackers would come with a large number of warriors, and the target chief would have to make a decision as to whether to stand and fight or surrender immediately. If the target chief decided he had enough strength to repel the invaders, he would return the messenger with that information.

"If a fight was to take place at the specified time, the two sides would face off and began to throw sling stones and spears at each other. The first side to inflict a major injury or a kill on the other side automatically won and the losers would lay down their arms. The winning side always received booty/payment from the losing side.

"This process avoided what could have been disastrous demographic changes in small populations if large numbers of the enemy had been killed. The system also contributed to the

exchange of goods and services between communities. It was, in fact, this custom of 'civilized warfare' that led to the demise of the Chamorros as a nation. Europeans believed in killing more of the enemy than it killed of them. The Chamorros, on the other hand, said, in effect, 'you are stronger than we are so we give up after the first casualty.' Neither side understood the other's 'rules of engagement.'"

It would be nice if some version of this type of "civilized warfare" were still conducted today. Alas, it was not to be. But the "disastrous demographic changes" that such warfare averted in ancient times still occur - even now. Warfare as practiced in today's world is a form of population control - it kills millions of civilians - men, women and children - in addition to the members of the military itself. In smaller communities, such as the CNMI, FSM, the Marshalls, Palau, American Samoa, it is the bright young men who go off to war (and occasionally, bright young women as well), who are killed, whose loss will clearly affect the demographics of their home islands.

Food for thought, as they say.....

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Yet another tale: The first time I tried to renew my driver's license, a week ago, I could not, because, on going to the Guma Hustisia to obtain traffic clearance, I found all the court personnel in front of, rather than inside the building. Seems there had been a bomb threat, and everyone was waiting for the police to come to check out the building - making it impossible for me to get my traffic clearance.

The second time I tried to renew my driver's license, this week, I was sent to the far end of the hall at Guma Hustisia to pay my \$1.00 processing fee, and then back to the Clerk's office for the actual traffic check (query: why can't they put those two offices next to each other????). Then I traipsed back to the Bureau of Motor Vehicles, and stood in line to pay my renewal fee. To my horror, I was told, when I got to the counter, that my check was unacceptable! Seems the computer was showing that I had not cleared a previous debt to the government. Knowing that I had paid my income tax in full and on time, that I had paid my CUC bill in full and on time, and that - so far as I knew - I had no other debt, I asked the clerk for a print-out, so I could try track down the problem. She said she could not print it out. So I asked her to re-try, and again, the system said my check was unacceptable. She took pity on me and pulled out a list of what I expect was people who had bounced checks, made some more entries into the computer, but still could not explain why my check was not acceptable. She said she would check further, and for me to check with her the next time I was down there. I said that won't be for a year - when I would again be due to renew my license. She shrugged her shoulders. She did not offer to call me, apparently had no access to e-mail. So now I am left with a blemish on my record that I do not know what to do about.

I paid my renewal fee in cash, and went back to window #1. The clerk there stepped into the back office, came back out almost immediately, and apologetically handed me a form letter while explaining that they had run out of film, and could not take my picture, so I would have to come back in a day or so. Guess now I WILL be back at the BMV long before next year after all.

It's not only that part of government that deals with investors, with developers, that needs to streamline operations and develop one-stop processing centers. So does the Bureau of Motor Vehicles! It's bad enough as it is when all its parts function properly. When they don't, it is

ridiculous - reminiscent, in fact, of TT days.....

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On a happier note, a friend shared with me a thank-you letter he received from one of the U.S. Department of Interior-sponsored Junior Statesmen scholarship recipients; my friend had contributed toward the student's expenses in attending Stanford University this summer.

She wrote, in part, "Within this busyness, I made amazing friends, created precious memories, and most importantly, received A's for both courses. This experience was more than I've previously imagined to be. I've realized how diverse and large the world is and that there are so many things to see and learn. Really, words cannot express how grateful I am for your help in shaping me to be a more arduous, aspiring, passionate, and confident person.

Telling words, aren't they? *"I've realized how diverse and large the world is and that there are so many things to see and learn." "...shaping me to be a more arduous, aspiring, passionate, and confident person."*

As Marianas High School teacher Ron Hodges put it in a letter to the editor in today's *Tribune*, "If I were to select the 100 brightest, most responsible, trustworthy and most competent people to run this island, I would choose the honors students from our local high schools over the last five years." Provided she stayed on island, of course, this letter writer would surely qualify....

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Short takes:

I would respect Congressman Stanley T. Torres a whole lot more if he would only learn to debate, argue, object to others' actions (with which there is nothing wrong, per se) with objectivity and intelligence, instead of stooping to personal attacks, vindictiveness, and name-calling, of which his letter to the editor in this past Thursday's *Trib* is but the latest example. On the mainland, one would say, "Get out of the gutter, Stanley - that's no place for a Congressman." Here, there are no sidewalks, and thus no gutters that collect all the muck from the surrounding road - but I couldn't think of an appropriate alternative - so I'll have to go with what I know: "Get out of the gutter, Stanley. It doesn't become you."

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There've been some really excellent, informative and thought-provoking letters to the editor appearing recently. To name just two: Frank Oliver's "The Addict - a Short Story" which appeared in last Friday's *Trib*, and Philip Mendiola-Long's letter headlined "Investing Wisely," which appeared in this past Tuesday's *Marianas Variety*. I would commend them both to all and sundry!

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This week's movies: Two new ones: "Underdog," PG (incorrectly labelled PG-13 by the *Variety*; the *Trib*'s listing did not appear), and "The Bourne Ultimatum," PG-13, for a total of 2 PG's, 6 PG-13's, no R's. "Underdog" was not yet rated; the Bourne film got rave ratings - if you like action and violence.