

On My Mind
8/31/07

If one wanted proof of the conspiracy theory making the rounds, it doesn't seem that hard to find. There are two variations of the conspiracy theory - take your pick! - one being that the administration is deliberately holding back on improving the economy so that when the time comes to vote on whether to do away with Article XII - the provision in the Covenant limiting land ownership to local residents - people will eagerly vote it down in hopes of getting top dollar for their land from outside investors. The other theory is that the administration is deliberately holding back on improving the economy so that voters will, believing all the propaganda about the benefit of casinos on Saipan, cast their vote in support of casinos on Saipan in this November's vote.

Both conspiracies, so the theory goes, are actually being maneuvered and manipulated by arguably CNMI's richest and most powerful entrepreneur and businessman, the almost invisible - of late - "Uncle" Willie Tan, who would be expected to benefit the most from the success of either conspiracy.

Proof of the theory? Take the governor's proposed amendments to H.R. 3079, the bill in Congress that would federalize the CNMI's immigration and labor laws. Initially, he rejected the bill in its entirety - except for the provision for a non-voting delegate for the CNMI. Now he has said that he wants a two-year wait instead of the one-year wait for the bill to become effective. He also wants a 15-year requirement instead of a 5-year requirement for change of status for foreign workers, a move, presumably, to show that he is not unwilling to negotiate, to compromise, after all. How laughable!

That he has appointed the former director of the Commonwealth Utilities Corporation - now the lieutenant governor - to work on improvements to power, water and sewer infrastructure within the newly formed Infrastructure Task Force. As if, after years of bungling the job, he could now do any better.

That the governor had also assigned the lieutenant governor the responsibility for overseeing CUC's operations. As if, after years of bungling, he could now do any better.

That the governor has bounced from a trip to California to a return to Saipan to a trip to Hawaii allegedly to again meet with Senator Akaka, all within a matter of days, despite the fact that it is Akaka who introduced the U.S. Senate counterpart to H.R. 3079, and despite the fact that Akaka has shown no sign of sympathy or support for the governor's position.

That the governor chose to ignore the Guam Industry Forum held on Guam August 23-24, that was attended by over 1,000 business leaders from all over the Pacific and U.S. and Asia. While the administration's Public Information Officer claims that "CNMI representatives were **reportedly** [his word, not mine; emphasis added] present, including members of the CNMI's military task force, including private sector members of our military task force, as well as other CNMI private sector representatives, including Joeten," I've been told that the representative from the Tinian mayor's office - who did attend - saw no one at the forum that he recognized....What with the forum offering a great opportunity to meet, greet and discuss the future interaction of the CNMI with Guam and the military as well as with the many peripheral businesses that will be associated and needed in both Guam and the CNMI, one would have thought the CNMI would be there in full force.... Information about the forum can be found on its web page: < <http://guamindustryforum.com/> >. An excellent

overview is provided at < http://guamindustryforum.com/TR1_Overview_Brief.pdf >.

The conclusion? The CNMI is not suffering from benign neglect (and what is one to make of the fact that with one more letter, benign spells Benigno?). It is suffering from malign neglect.....

On the other hand, one who is not being neglectful is Representative Ray Yumul, who has announced his intention of calling all the registered re-cyclers on island together for a meeting with members of the Department of Public Safety, the Customs Division and House members of the Committee on Commerce and Tourism to discuss the status of the recently-passed law on scrap metal shipping. According to the *Marianas Variety's* story earlier this week, only one of 10 recycling firms appears to have been cooperating with the government in monitoring scrap metal purchases. Among other things, the law, P.L. 15-55, requires that re-cycled materials be held for 45 days at the port prior to shipment to give customs officials time to check documents, etc., for stolen wire.

Of course, Yumul is running for re-election, and it makes a good story. Let's hope, however, that he really means it, and will carry through with his intention. It's high time! It should be noted that it is not the usual function of members of the legislature to check up on enforcement of the law. Normally, that's an executive branch function.....

If the same approach of calling all the players to the table were used, wouldn't it conceivably be possible to reduce the number of homes being broken into? This would appear to be a rampant problem on Saipan - though most inadequately covered in the media. Such a meeting would include the Department of Public Safety, the various pawn-brokers all over the island, the Department of Commerce and Labor and the appropriate House and Senate committees. Perhaps what is also needed is to regulate pawnbrokers more tightly, to prevent thieves from getting quick and easy paybacks for stolen items.

Short takes:

Regardless of what one may think of Bruce Bateman's column, "Sour Grapes," he is offering a great public service at his "Porgy's Bar" in Garapan. Every Friday evening from now until Election Day, he has arranged to have one or more of the candidates running for office come in from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. to meet with anyone interested. This week, District 4 Candidate Joseph "Joe" Camacho, a local attorney, and District 5 candidate Fred Deleon Guerrero, a Kagman High teacher, are scheduled to appear. Independents might want to take special note: a gathering where they don't have to pay for what is consumed!

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The Arts Council is scheduled to open a new show of local arts and crafts in its Capital Hill gallery on September 11. Hours on the 11th: 10:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m. Unfortunately, and despite a recent demonstration that staggered hours for exhibitions are do-able, regular exhibit hours are most inhospitable: Mondays through Fridays from 8:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m. No evening hours, no week-end hours. (And no, the exhibit has nothing to do with 9/11.)

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Can't help wondering if it is true that, the number of people caught illegally trying to enter Guam from the CNMI is only a fraction of those who tried, and made it?

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I saw my first Prius hybrid car this past week, but I've learned that there are actually 30 of them on island, some of them having been here as early as October of 2004! Guess I don't travel the right roads at the right time, or am just too unaware of makes and models to have noticed before. According to Richard Jones, Sales Associate at Microl Motors, the Prius hybrid runs on gas and batteries, but one does not have to plug the batteries into anything to re-charge them - the system is self-contained, self-charging. The car is not cheap, but at least it gets 40-50 miles per gallon - a huge savings when compared to the mileage other cars get - especially considering the price of gas (it requires the lowest-quality gas - not premium, according to Jones) and is kind to the environment. Jones was very enthusiastic about the car; he said that so far as he was aware, none of the owners have had problems with the car - except for its low carriage.

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Some insight into the recent "scandalous" Request for Proposal that went out for privatization of the Commonwealth Utilities Corporation. Seems that the practice of requiring non-refundable premiums - in this case, \$1,000 for obtaining a copy of the "Pre-Qualification Requirements," and \$25,000 as a condition of the CUC's acceptance of a Pre-Qualification Proposal - is not all that unreasonable in the industry. Assistant Attorney General Alan Barak explained that the fees were intended to be used to cover the cost of hiring reputable knowledgeable consultants to evaluate the proposals submitted to the CNMI, rather than having to pay the consultants out of the CNMI's own limited budget.

Barak further explained that the RFP itself was not all that unreasonable, either. It does not provide technical specifications a successful bidder would have to meet, but rather asks for the submittal of a business plan for how the successful bidder would propose to operate CUC.

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As in 'big oaks from little acorns grow,' the first step in establishing a network of trails in a statewide park system will be taken tomorrow, Saturday. Tom Gipson's Boy Scout troop hopes to earn a merit badge by cleaning up and promoting the trail that goes from the Last Command Post in Marpi up to Suicide Cliff and will make its initial "reconnaissance" of the trail Saturday, starting at 8:45 a.m. Beautify CNMI! and the Marianas Resource Conservation and Development Council, with whom the idea for the proposed statewide system originated, will be assisting the project.

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New movies: something for everyone: 2 PG-13's, "Stardust" and "Balls of Fury;" 1 PG, "Daddy Day Camp;" and one R, "Hallowe'en" (Depravity at its worst: using a children's holiday as the name of an R movie.....). Of which only a hold-over, "The Bourne Ultimatum," PG-13, and "Stardust," another PG-13, get good ratings from < www.rottentomatoes.com >.