

On My Mind  
9/07/07

Well, well, well. The governor is finally doing something right! Or, at least he is saying he is about to do something right. It's hard to know, given all the other empty promises he has made to date. One can but hope. The something right? According to a *Marianas Variety* story earlier this week, the governor is promising to take action that would go a long way to help restore the economy: to push ahead with the privatization of the Commonwealth Utilities Corporation. On that, he's got my vote - 100% - providing the RFP itself is rational, the process legitimate - fairly and openly done.

Though some are concerned that privatization would cause an increase in utility bills, if properly done, it won't happen. A private entity would have the means to diversify power generation, so that there would be less dependency on expensive fuel. A private entity would assure a greater level of efficiency than government can. A private entity would not allow government agencies to get free power, as is now the case. And finally, the private entity should be willing to use innovative approaches, like pay-as-you-go meters, that CUC has not been willing to do. After all, thirty years of failure to provide reliable power should be enough proof that government control is not the answer.

It would be nice if the governor would take the next step as well: find a way to curb the seemingly irresponsible behavior of CUC's collection arm. The horror tales are many - of cutting off power three days before the final cut-off date and refusing to re-connect without payment of the full reconnect fee; cutting off water when only the power bill is overdue; unwilling to wait an extra day if payday falls the day after the cut-off date, to mention just a few. There is no reason for such insensitive, irrational, and punitive practices on the part of CUC. No, favors should not be shown friends and relatives. But reasonable flexibility should be possible nonetheless.

It's not clear to me whether remedying this situation - which would sure ease the lot of many now without power - can be done by executive order, by re-writing some regulations for CUC, or whether it would take somehow forcing CUC to re-write them itself, but it should be done, and the sooner the better.

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While on the subject of CUC: shouldn't power bills be LOWER, when rolling power outages - with everyone using less power - presumably use less fuel? So, how come our bills don't reflect that?

And when will that temporary restraining order be lifted, so that government agencies will be forced to pay their share of the power bill?

Maybe people should adopt Brian Jones' strategy, and hold a silent vigil in front of the administration building once a week, until the power situation is brought under control? (Brian Jones, for those who missed it, is conducting a silent protest against the Iraq war every Friday, rain or shine, from 17:30 to 17:55 hours (5:30 pm to 5:55 pm) at the Court of Honor Circle by the flag poles in American Memorial Park, to support the troops until they come home. Supporters are welcome.)

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I don't know whose advice the governor actually takes, from the gaggle of advisors with which he has surrounded himself, but it sure isn't helping him. I was just stunned to see, on Labor Day, a brief message announcing that not only would there be no government Labor Day celebration - duh! - but also, that there would be no recognition of government employee of the year. How's that for boosting the morale of government employees, and rewarding those employees whose performance merits recognition? (And yes, there are such employees - not everyone in government is un-productive.)

How much time, effort, cost would it have taken to ask each agency to (s)elect an employee of the year, to (s)elect from among them a government-wide employee of the year, and to hold a brief ceremony - on Labor Day - to honor that employee with a modest check? No one suggested to the governor that surely he could afford to, should do, that?

Then there was the fiasco this past Thursday, when a National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration official from Hawaii, and two from Guam, were kept waiting in front of an expectant audience for 50 minutes at the Hyatt's Sand Castle until the governor finally arrived after officiating at the signing of a proclamation for National Disability Employment Awareness Month at the Susupe Multipurpose Center, both of which had been scheduled for 11:00 a.m.

So where was the Lieutenant Governor? Or perhaps the President of the Senate? Or some other person on the Governor's staff? Couldn't one of them have been delegated to represent the governor at the NOAA event, so it could get started on time - especially since the governor wasn't expected to make his remarks until some 45 minutes later?

Where is the governor's public relations guru?

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Concern has been expressed that despite the CNMI being declared tsunami-ready by NOAA, there are no signs along the road indicating where one should go in case a tsunami hit, no maps available, no information along the beaches about appropriate "evasive action," no information about how an alert would be signaled to residents.....

Granted, the CNMI may have met the criteria set up by NOAA as published in the both papers this past week: a community must establish a 24-hour warning point and emergency operations center; must create a system that monitors local weather and ocean conditions; must develop multiple ways to receive tsunami and severe weather warnings and alert the public in a timely manner; must develop a formal hazard plan and conduct emergency exercises; and must promote a public readiness through community education.

Some residents, however, aren't reassured by the NOAA rating. Perhaps the community education will be forthcoming.

Interesting sidelight: the *Saipan Tribune* article, prepared by NOAA, reports that the CNMI has had three tsunamis that caused damage at more than one location - in 1849, 1892 and 1993. The article goes on to say "and up to six other locally-generated tsunamis have been observed in the islands in the past 200 years."

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There has been no public acknowledgment that I am aware of, but the CNMI appears to be undergoing a major shift in its tourism industry. It's hotels are coming under Korean owner-

ship and management, it's restaurants are full of Korean tourists, and more and more flights are bringing it tourists from Korea. You'd think with such a significant change, someone would take notice, and perhaps even hang out a few welcome signs here and there.

There is also the steady flow of tourists from China, which offers local residents the additional benefit of short excursion-rate trips to China, so that the chartered flights don't return empty.

To what extent these events may be discouraging Japanese tourists from coming here - among them, the various ethnic groups have long histories of dislike and distrust - to put it mildly - is unknown. And no one seems to be looking at the situation, either.

Hostilities die hard. But they can be overcome, as the acceptance of Japanese tourists by Americans, and the extent of travel by Japanese to American soil, clearly proves. The CNMI could earn itself widespread acclaim if it could find a way to help the conflicting ethnic groups come to terms with each other, find ways of interacting. If the Marianas Visitor's Authority didn't have such a history of ineptness, it might be useful for it to hire a specialist in conflict resolution who would help establish programs, projects and venues where such interactions could take place.

But seems like no one wants to recognize that particular elephant in the room.....

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Short Takes:

- Correction: There were several people from the CNMI at the Guam Industry Forum - I had said, based on information that turns out to have been incorrect, that no one from the CNMI except a representative from the Tinian Mayor's office was there.

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- Wow! Did everyone see Tony Pellegrino's latest article - where he traces the meandering path that the CNMI's labor laws have taken over the years? It appeared, appropriately enough, in both papers' Labor Day, 9/03, issue. An impressive bit of research! And a fascinating story.... Thank-you, Tony!

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- Will the reader who wrote me about a CUC rate scheme that would penalize the small user please write again? I can't find the original, and wanted to check whether it is that rate scheme that is now in effect, or whether it died by the wayside.

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- Want a painless way to contribute to help those in need, to help protect the world's environment? Click on < [www.hungersite.org](http://www.hungersite.org) >, and go from there to the rainforest site, the literacy site, the ecology site - just clicking on them triggers a donation of food, or books, or conservation of threatened species, threatened habitat, paid for by sponsors of the sites. There's also < [www.goodsearch.com](http://www.goodsearch.com) > which will provide a donation to the charity of your choice.

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New movies: none.