

On My Mind
11/9/07

Since one of the papers has already started a count-down to Christmas, I hope it won't be held against me if I bring the subject up here as well. The governor's latest ploy - not only the unprecedented move of asking for the resignation of his cabinet members, but also his announcement that he will be taking over personnel matters - bodes ill indeed for joyful holidays for government employees!

While he said that he would immediately take over personnel matters, as well as other administrative and government operation responsibilities, he has announced that he will not make his decision on retention of cabinet members until January, leaving them dangling - not sure whether they will have a job after Christmas or not. Merry Christmas, all you cabinet members!

And, of course, his take-over of personnel means that everyone else's job is also now in question. Merry Christmas, government employees!

His timing could not have been more inauspicious. Maybe he should replace some of his "invisible cabinet" with public relations experts? I doubt it's intentional, but his latest move sure makes working for the government - with cuts in pay, cuts in benefits, and now insecure jobs - far less attractive than it's ever been.

This past Monday was Citizenship Day in the Commonwealth, and while the government took the holiday, so far as I could tell there was no formal observance of it - no speeches, no ceremony, no expression of appreciation for the gift of citizenship that was officially bestowed upon the people of the Marianas by then President Ronald Reagan on November 3, 1986.

On the contrary, more people in the CNMI failed to exercise, in the election held just two days earlier, the right to vote granted by that citizenship than in any of the previous ten years. It isn't as though this year's election contests were lackadaisical and non-controversial. Many people believed that a major turnover was needed in the legislature if the CNMI is to find its way out of the economic slump it is now in. It didn't happen.

Of course, the results of the absentee voting are not yet known. That could bring in a few more new faces, but on the whole, the old familiar faces will still dominate - a real challenge to those who hoped to initiate reform and improvements to not only the legislative procedures themselves, but to the government as a whole.

Which goes to prove that political education - trying to wean people away from old customs of relying on family loyalties and obligations to a more reasoned system of voting on the basis of integrity, education, principles, still has a long way to go in the CNMI.

Our illustrious governor didn't help matters much by publicly announcing that he voted only for Covenant Party members. Of course, no one knows how he really voted - no one can view his ballot - but what was the point of even saying that? The Covenant party is dead - at least for the moment. Will that statement endear him to any of the other members of the legislature?

Somehow, his pledge to work with the new legislature sure rings hollow.

His pledge to support a "creationism" museum in the CNMI isn't any more encouraging. First it was that maharaja who wanted to take over Rota. Then it was a marijuana refuge. And now it's a creationism museum. At this rate, the CNMI will shortly be - if it is not already - the laughing stock of the Pacific.

For those not familiar with the term, here's what the web's Wikipedia has to say, in part, about creationism: "When scientific research produces conclusions which contradict a creationist interpretation of scripture, the strict creationist approach is either to reject the conclusions of the research, its underlying scientific theories, or its methodology. For this reason, both creation science and intelligent design have been labeled as pseudo-science by the mainstream scientific community. The most notable disputes concern the effects of evolution on the development of living organisms, the idea of common descent, the geologic history of the Earth, the formation of the solar system, and the origin of the universe."

More antics: Does the governor really think he can get the U.S. Department of Interior's Office of Insular Affairs to back off on its terms for a pending \$420,000 labor and immigration grant to the CNMI? Will he hold up the workings of the entire department in his efforts to do so? It's been reported in the press that nearly \$1 million in grant funds - the \$420K plus another \$500K - are available from the OIA, as soon as the CNMI agrees to the terms of the grant. So far, the governor has refused to do so.

The terms provide that positions funded under the grant not be subject to austerity holidays, pay cuts or similar restrictions. Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Office of Insular Affairs David Cohen has said if federal employee salaries are cut, federal grant payments to the CNMI would be cut an equivalent amount. He said the CNMI would be getting less money and less service just when it needs more service and more money.

Could it be that the governor is trying to save face by turning economic efforts over to the lieutenant governor? So that he won't be seen backing down when the grant agreement is signed?

Short takes:

The initiative to establish a higher education commission passed, despite the concerns over yet another bureaucratic agency being formed and adding to the expense of government. However, how much it will cost is up to the legislature, who will write the enabling legislation. There's nothing that says the commission must have a large, perma-

ment, full-time staff and board in order to operate. We would urge the legislators to exercise prudence, and establish the leanest structure necessary to perform the required functions.

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Unbeknown to most, due to a total lack of publicity, the Pacific Islands Association of Libraries and Archives will be meeting on Tinian November 15 through 17. PIALA provides an opportunity for librarians throughout Micronesia and beyond to get together, share experiences, and learn from one another. Sad to relate, the CNMI is sending only one of its librarians to attend this worthwhile function.

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My letter to the editor in today's *Saipan Tribune* makes a plea for support of the "grandfather" clause in the federalization bill now being worked on in the U.S. Congress. I won't take the time to restate that plea here, except to ask readers to please read the letter - and write your own!

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Another plea: The CNMI's public radio station, KRNM, is conducting its semi-annual pledge drive this week and next. Public radio stations, by definition, depend on public support, and this time the need is more urgent than ever. As listeners know, many programs have been lost due to loss of access to the satellite previously used to transmit National Public Radio's programs, due to some program shifts at NPR, and due to shrinking support from Northern Marianas College, under whose auspices KRNM operates. KRNM is now accessing Radio Australia instead. KRNM broadcasts over 88.1 or 89.1 FM twenty-four hours a day.

In order to survive, and, hopefully, regain at least some of the former programs, KRNM needs to show listener support - not only in dollars but also in numbers. It's almost more important that many listeners contribute a few dollars than that a few contribute larger amounts. If the station is forced to shut down, and the FCC license is lost, it is highly unlikely that the CNMI will ever be able to obtain a license again. Thus, it is vitally important that KRNM manage to stay afloat.

Donations can be made by sending a check to KRNM/NMC, P.O. Box 501250, Saipan, MP 96950, or by calling the station at 234-5766, or 484-2385 to make a pledge. Do it, today!

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Thought for the day: "Societies dominated by tribal, religious, ideological or political values that disparage the qualities needed for broad-based growth will not get growth.

Economic success requires a tolerance for change and inequality, some minimum level of trust - an essential for much commerce - and risk taking." from Robert J. Samuelson's "The Global Poverty Gap," which appeared in the *Marianas Variety* on Monday of this past week.

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New films: only one, "Fred Claus," rated PG, for a total of three R's, one PG 13, and three PG's.