

On My Mind
12/14/07

Now that it's been shown that thousands can peaceably aggregate and parade, make a statement, will there be a similar demonstration against the proposed conversion of San Roque's Fiesta Mall into a mini-casino? Will people be sufficiently angered at the "slap in the face" by the members of the CNMI House of Representatives who passed House Bill 115-322 authorizing gambling on Saipan, right after the people had clearly voted against the very same thing, to aggregate again, and peaceable parade, make a statement? A 3-mile march may not even be necessary. The protesters could just assemble up on Capitol Hill - maybe in the ball park - or just fill and overflow the legislative building, perhaps even as far as the administrative building, to show their displeasure and disappointment. Though of course, a walk along Beach Road is a lot more visible to a lot more people.

It's been thought that given the composition of the Senate, with three Rota and three Tinian senators able to outvote the three Saipan senators, there was little chance H.B. 15-322 would pass the Senate, but the latest word through the coconut wireless has it that Rota and Tinian have been promised their FY '08 budgets would not be cut if they let the bill pass.

And if it passes the Senate, there's no chance, given the clues being dropped by the administration, that the governor would veto the bill. And even less chance that the legislature would let that veto stand.

Who will take the lead in launching the protest? The church? One of the social agencies? A yet-unsung hero/ine? Whoever does, you can count me in - for what it's worth, if I can make it, I'll be there.

Or should one just write this off as one more of the crazy schemes proposed to the CNMI - with administrative endorsement implied - that has been offered as proof to the people that the governor was indeed bringing new investments to the islands? The problem, though, is that this one smells of big money, being lavishly spent....

With the upset over the insult handed the people by House members getting all the attention, the more insidious pattern being followed in the legislature - in not making session schedules and agendas readily available, of not holding hearings on bills, of not issuing committee reports seems - so far, to have escaped any sense of hurt, betrayal or indignity on the part of the people.

If these norms of legislative practice had been followed, would H.B. 15-322 have gotten as far as it has?

Whatever the answer, it is clear that the incumbent lame duck legislature must be watched closely, as it has proved itself completely unprincipled and

untrustworthy.

I rarely agree with actions taken by the governor, but I must admit that I agree with him that dropping all experience requirements and giving people an edge in being hired by the government solely because they have a college degree, is apt to do more harm than good for the CNMI. The legislature, last week, over-rode the governor's veto of Senate Bill 15-14, which dropped experience as a requirement for employment with the government if one had a B.A., M.A. or PhD.

A college degree, by itself, especially on the B.A. level, doesn't qualify a person for all that much. S/he may be better able to read and write and communicate, and may have a better perspective than someone who's never left island, but that doesn't qualify s/him as a police officer, office manager, teacher, human resources director, engineer, or many other positions where actual experience plays an important part in preparing the individual for effective performance in his/her job.

On the other hand, passing such a law as qualification for the legislature would be perfect! One does, usually, learn to read and to reason and to think in college - critical skills for becoming an effective legislator. Too bad there could not have been compromise there.....

Short takes:

Did anyone take notice of the aftermath of Friday's Unity March? There wasn't a speck of litter in sight. Not anywhere. Not along the path, not in the road, not at the starting point at Kilili Beach pavilion, not at American Memorial Park. The participants showed their pride and concern for the island: they made sure it stayed as clean as they had found it. I think that's a remarkable performance, and every single one of the participants deserves congratulations for being so careful in controlling whatever litter they may have created.

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So, what did the governor's doctor say? What was the diagnosis? We were all told about his ailment, and about his trip to the Philippines to seek a cure.

Aren't we going to be told what happened? What the doctor found? Are we, too, only going to be told half a story? It's not as though the governor didn't have a pr person on staff. He does, and that person's been hard at work the last few days, trying to put a spin on the fact that the governor, too, seems to have been bought off in regard to vice-speaker Justo Quitugua's disgraceful gambling bill, suggesting, among other things, that maybe a "compromise" can be found. Or wasn't that trip really necessary after all?????

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Christmas is supposed to be a time of good will and good cheer, but I can't

help taking exception to the island decorations being sponsored by the governor's office, and the first lady. There's been an emergency declared, and as a result agency budgets will be short-changed even more, as additional money is taken from them to pay the fuel bill. Yet what do we see, all over the island? Two huge lighted christmas trees, a host of lit christmas deer, and dozens of lit decorations along the roadside. Very pretty. But who is paying for the power used to light it all? Wouldn't it have been more fitting in this year of austerity, to leave them all unlit, as the government's small contribution to saving power costs?????

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I would also cavil at the Guam Salvation Army's calling for cans of Spam to fill its Christmas baskets (see the story on page 2 of the 12/10 *Pacific Daily News*. Surely there's something a little healthier, more nourishing that could be used instead?

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American Memorial Park offers a number of activities for the holidays. On Saturday 12/15 at 11:00 a.m., youngsters of all ages are welcome to create holiday crafts using recycled materials and bead art; on future Saturdays they will explore new worlds, legends and histories through word and number games, coloring pages, and more! The Park also offers free classic movies at 2:00 p.m. on the first Sunday of each month in the Visitor Center. December's was Holiday Inn; January's will be Philadelphia Story.

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My humble apologies to representative-elect Tina Sablan for my comment in last week's column that she "seems to have usurped leadership from the originators of the idea and the issues." I've since been told on good authority that she was asked by those originators to take on that role. Goes to prove, I guess, that presumptions are always risky!

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Kudos to Taotao Tano for arranging to get the grass cut at the JoeTen Kiyu Library. That was becoming a real eyesore that no one else seemed to see, or care about.... Kudos, too, for pressing for a tour of CUC. We're all awaiting that outcome, and we will all be interested in what you find there.....Now if you'd only see reason and stop needlessly harassing the election commission, which has a solid record of integrity, honesty and trustworthiness.....

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And my heartfelt sympathy to the 400+ plus government employees - just given notice that their employment with the government will cease three days before Christmas -who are shamelessly being used as pawns by the governor in his conflict with the legislature over the '08 budget.

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Two new movies this week: "Alvin and the Chipmunks," rated PG, and "I Am Legend, rated PG-13, for a total of 2 PG's, four PG 13's and one R. I should

note that if the other PG-13's are anything like the one I saw last week ("This Christmas"), an R rating would be far more accurate. Such films are not only unsuitable for those under 13, but for all those who've not yet reached adulthood.