

On My Mind  
3/07/08

Last week I promised a more thorough look at the 54 House bills already introduced in the 16<sup>th</sup> legislature, expecting to find some easy targets for criticism.

Having spent hours poring over the information provided by Representative Joseph J. Camacho's great website < [www.camachocnmi.com](http://www.camachocnmi.com) >, I have to confess that I've been unable to analyze or categorize the bills into easy groupings of worthy, unworthy, or somewhere-in-between, or any other logical arrangement. I also found it difficult to assess the bills without delving into their previous history - which I was not about to do.

The bills cover a wide range of subjects, with some setting policies or re-apportioning funds, others correcting past shortcomings, dealing with health issues, protecting island interests. With the disclaimer that I intend no harm, it did seem that the easiest way to deal with them was to discuss them by author. Many bills had co-sponsors: they are identified here by whoever introduced them; if co-sponsored, by the first name on the list.

Representative David Apatang takes the cake for introducing the most - 11 so far. Three have to do with using Office of Public Auditor funds to ease CUC's financial woes, a fourth proposes giving poker machine returns to CUC. Four more would re-appropriate assorted funds to Northern Marianas College. All would appear to be band-aid approaches, depriving one agency for the benefit of another.

His House Bill 16-29, which proposes a formal process businesses going out of business must follow would, however, appear to merit more serious attention.

Minority Leader Oscar Babauta takes second place - he has introduced 6 bills that are difficult to quantify. He wants imported bottled alcoholic beverages to meet the federal health warning requirement, educators who spend their own money to get tax credit, cigarette cabinets in stores unlocked, the mechanic's lien provision strengthened, the definition of alien clarified. Most significant is H.B. 16-40, the election reform act that would, among other things, qualify computer screens as "ballots."

Representatives Joseph J. Camacho, Victor Hocog, and Stanley Torres have each introduced five bills. Three of Hocog's deal with Rota's casinos, Torres' range from parking for the disabled and providing for "silver club" retirees to prohibiting animal cruelty. Most important - and indeed, most significant of all 54 bills, is his H.B. 16-10, which amends the law to allow the use of nuclear energy as a power source, as Tinian's Dr. Arkle has been so ardently advocating for some time.

Camacho's bills reflect his legal background: each one of his five bills refines, strengthens, enhances rules, requirements, that are already on the books, with his most notable one being H.B. 16-46, which would open all rules,

regulations, statistics, etc, dealing with CUC to public access.

Miscellaneous other bills worth noting: Representative Heinz Hofschneider's H.B. 16-9, establishing a public corporation for hospital services; Ray Tebetub's H.B. 16-6, which would simplify the recording and maintenance of vital statistics and H.B. 16-11, which would tighten control over dive shop operations; Justo Quitugua's H.B. 16-5, providing for an incremental increase in income taxes over \$50,000; Raymond Palacios' H.B. 16-38, revamping the Civil Service Act in its entirety.

Some would appear "non-brainers" but one wonders whether they will get lost in the shuffle. Others appear to require considerable study. A number seem to be "robbing Peter to pay Paul" - offering only temporary solutions - at a price. Only one struck me as urgent - Torres' H.B. 16-10. Geothermal is not going to cut it, but nuclear might.

The number of bills and the range of topics introduced so far - and mind you, this is only in the House - seems daunting, especially if the rate of introduction continues. There simply will not be time to deal with all of them with anything nearing intelligent review. It's high time the House instituted some means of limiting their number.

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On another tack entirely, the book *Three Cups of Tea* by Greg Mortenson and David O. Relin starts off innocently enough as a story of mountain climbing, progresses through the trials and trauma of bringing modernization to isolated Pakistani villages, - in the form of building schools where there were none before - and ends with a compelling plea not only for change to U.S. foreign policy, but also for funds to further the school-building program.

The climbing occurs in Pakistan's remote northern Karakoram mountain range. After failing to reach the summit of a glacier-covered mountain known only as K2, Mortenson spends some time recovering (he got lost twice) in a primitive village of mud and stone huts. He finds himself taken with the simple life, the vitality of the villagers, the beauty of the surroundings, the peacefulness.

In time, he discovers that his paradise is not so ideal - that "the nearest doctor was a week's walk away," that there were no schools, that lack of knowledge is a major cause of illness, the high rate of infant mortality. And he decides that the best way to show his gratitude and appreciation for the villagers' care is to bring them a school.

How he does this, and the problems he encounters in the process form a major part of the book.

Other villages hear of the school, and beg for their own, which Mortenson, now totally involved in the welfare of the northern tribes, continues to do, eventually gaining support from a number of U.S. benefactors. Then comes 9/11, the arrival of Taliban and their competing madrasses, putting Mortenson at

high risk as a rare American in north Pakistan.

By the time the book ends (it was published in 2006) Mortenson has built more than 50 schools - focussing on educating girls in the belief that it is educated mothers who most influence the welfare of entire villages - brought better medical treatment, better access to remote areas, and loyalty to and admiration for Americans - despite Taliban bombings - to northern Pakistan, as he turns his attention to nearby northern Afghanistan.

More information about the book, about Mortenson himself, about the not-for-profit institute Central Asia Institute which has steadfastly sponsored Mortenson's work, can be found at < [www.threecupsoftea.com](http://www.threecupsoftea.com) > . The book's co-author, David O. Relin, is an award-winning journalist who accompanied Mortenson on many of travels. It is a moving, engrossing tale, well worth reading.

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Short takes:

Kudos, again, to Representative Tina Sablan, for her very well-written, well-reasoned and persuasive statement in support of continuing minimum wage increases as provided by (U.S.) Public Law 11028. Requests for copies can be sent to < [tinasablan@gmail.com](mailto:tinasablan@gmail.com) >.

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Update on the Bush economic stimulus refund: I've been told that the IRS is indeed differentiating between the CNMI and the 50 states in that CNMI recipients will not get their checks directly. Just how they will come, though, is apparently still under negotiation. And yes, it's odd that CNMI federal tax payers, whose money does not go back to the federal coffer, are included, but I've been told that this was achieved through the efforts of Madeleine Bordallo, Guam's Congressional Delegate.

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Japanese businessman Kazuyoshi Miura has inadvertently provided his own stimulus package to the CNMI economy - thanks to the horde of Japanese and other media who've come to Saipan to cover his arrest and imminent extradition to California for allegedly murdering his wife in LA in the late 1980's.

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For those who might have forgotten: there's still a vigil every Friday evening at 5:30 in front of the Court of Honor in American Memorial Park. It's a silent protest to end the war in Iraq, to stop the killing and bring the troops back home ...NOW.

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A busy week-end with, in addition, the student mock trial competition today and tomorrow at the Guma Hustisia in Susupe, the dedication of a monument to Ben Concepcion at the Grotto on Saturday at 3:00 p.m., and performances of

Barbara Sher's *The Play Buffet, a Little Something for Everyone's Taste* tonight and Saturday at American Memorial Park Theater at 7 p.m.....

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In contrast, Hollywood Theater has **three** R-rated movies this week, and not a single PG or G!