

On My Mind
5/2/09

Was there ever a project that had so much to offer, that got so thoroughly maligned through mis-, dis-, and non-information, and that got so hastily and mis-guidedly dismissed as the Pew Trust's proposed trench monument? The legislature's joint resolution rejecting the monument is "proof of the pudding," as they say.

Full of baseless fears, ignorance-based defensiveness, and outright prejudice, the joint resolution leaps to conclusions that simply have no basis in fact, or reason.

The biggest piece of misinformation? that the federal government is unilaterally planning on taking over the waters surrounding the CNMI's three northernmost islands. **The fact of the matter is that the federal government has not yet even begun to consider whether it might want to establish a monument in the northern islands.**

According to Jay Nelson, Director of the Global Ocean Legacy under the Pew Environment Group, the U.S. executive branch has let it be known that it might be interested in establishing another monument, similar to the one just declared in Hawaii, sometime this year. Criteria for selection would include the viability of the site, its value, and the existence of local support. The federal administration has not yet taken any further action.

In follow-up to that information, several non-governmental organizations began looking at possible candidates for a monument designation. The Pew Charitable Trust is one of them. Thinking that the Marianas Trench, the only feature of its kind in the whole world, together with the near-pristine waters surrounding the northern islands, would make a good candidate, Jay Nelson came out to the CNMI to assess its potential.

According to Nelson, the time crunch is that the NGO's have now been told that by the end of May the U.S. executive branch intends to begin reviewing and assessing sites that have been identified by the NGOs for their suitability as monuments.

It bears repeating: except to say, "we are thinking about establishing another monument somewhere," there has been no other federal decision, or action.

Nor will there be any occasion for the federal government to take action, or to make decisions, until and unless the CNMI's northern island area is chosen for monument status - at which point negotiations would be undertaken with the federal government on the specific terms and conditions under which the monument would operate.

Another misapprehension has to do with control of the waters surrounding the three northernmost islands. It should be remembered, first of all, that at the moment, the CNMI does not control any of the waters surrounding any of its islands. There has been a court decision that those waters are under federal jurisdiction. The U.S. Congress offered to give the CNMI jurisdiction over waters up to 12 miles out, but the Fitial administration refused the offer in the naive belief that it could acquire control to the 200

mile limit, through, as I recall, litigation and lobbying. There has been no progress on that front, and none is in sight.

The monument declaration would give the CNMI a voice in controlling the waters up to the 200 mile limit in that the CNMI would be, as I understand it, an equal partner in determining what would be allowed to take place within the 200 mile limit.

Moreover, with the federal government officially involved, it is a safe assumption that the U.S. Coast Guard would bring in at least one boat - at no cost to the CNMI - to help patrol those waters.

That a monument designation would deprive local fishermen of their livelihood is disinformation of the worst sort. So far as I know, no CNMI fisherman now fishes there. It's too far away. Fuel is too costly. Few if any boats are seaworthy enough to make such a trip on a regular basis. Manganese nodules? No one I know of is mining them anywhere in the whole world!

On the other hand, designation of the area as a monument would put the CNMI on the map in a big way. It would be the second largest such sanctuary in the world, and allow the CNMI huge bragging rights in the arenas of conservation, environmental protection, preservation of species - rights equalling if not exceeding those of Palau, which has such an outstanding reputation around the world as responsible and accountable conservator of marine resources. A Marianas Trench monument would become the central jewel in the attainment of the Micronesian Challenge. And draw scientists, researchers, tourists, journalists, explorers - as well as necessary support crew -bringing in income as well as attention on an on-going basis.

There are several other misstatements and impressions that need correction - not the least being that the issue is not one of personalities or credibility, but a factual one capable of being judged by objective criteria. These will be discussed in subsequent columns.

In all fairness to all the people of the CNMI and to the future well-being of the CNMI, the legislature should promptly recall its joint resolution against the monument, so that the CNMI stands some chance of being nominated as a candidate. It could file, as a face-saving measure, a substitute resolution expressing some concerns about the control of the northern waters, but nevertheless endorsing further exploration of the viability of declaring the three northern islands and the waters surrounding them a national monument.

Short takes:

The CNMI has fought long and hard for non-voting delegate status within the U.S. Congress. Now that it is imminent, is anyone making plans for appropriate celebration

thereof?

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Can anyone tell me why EIGHT contractors are needed to repair CUC's engines? According to the 4/30 issue of the *Marianas Variety*, the eight are: DCM Group, Inc.; EEI Corp & Partners; Mitsubishi Corp.; SAI Traders; CBM Tech.Pty.Ltd.; South Pacific Eng.Pty.Ltd.; Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, Ltd.; and IMSE BUBA. And, what are they all doing? Why are we still getting unannounced black-outs? More importantly, are the black-outs ever going to stop?

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Ed Probst, in his letter to the editor in today's *Saipan Tribune*, coined an interesting rubric: CARE - Change, Action, Reform and Excellence. CARE could also spell out Challenge, Accountability, Responsibility and Efficiency; I'm sure one could find a number of other appropriate words that would fit his rubric as well. Maybe there should be a contest? For the best rubric for these times?

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Will someone please take the blinders off the Marianas Visitors Authority, and tell it that the CNMI is now getting Chinese, Korean and Russian tourists in addition to Japanese tourists, and that it's time MVA came up with a theme more relevant to the rest of the tourists than Saipanda?

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Having just returned from nearly a month in noisy, busy, densely-packed Honolulu and environs - which I spent tending to my daughter who was hospitalized for 16 days with complications following what had started out as a routine appendectomy (those were the unforeseen circumstances - we were supposed to shop and play, and I was supposed to return two weeks earlier) - another suggestion that MVA might want to consider: putting more emphasis on the CNMI as a place for retreat from the hustle and bustle of the rest of the world, a place to enjoy, at a more leisurely pace, the beauty, quiet and peacefulness offered here.

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Another question: what would happen if all employees traveling on government funds were required to publish a one-paragraph statement upon their return as to what they had learned that benefits the CNMI, or that improves their ability to serve the CNMI?

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Upcoming events: golden oldie "Casablanca" with Humphrey Bogart and Ingrid Bergman at the American Memorial Park Theater Sunday, May 4th at 2:00 p.m. (free!); Chatauqua performance of Martin Luther King at PIC's Charlie's Cabaret Wednesday, May 7th at 6:00 p.m. (\$20 includes light desserts); a second Chatauqua performance Friday, May 9th at 6:00 p.m. at the IBC, second floor above the Dandan Humanities Office (free); Bingo to benefit the Diabetes Coalition Friday, May 30th at 6 p.m. at Garapan Central Park. Bingo cards, \$20 each, can be bought from the Physical Therapy unit at CHC, or by contacting Dana at mcfaddendana@gmail.com or 236-8327/8.