

On My Mind

5/16/08

It was inevitable, but that doesn't make it any easier to accept - Mike Sablan, one of the most ethical members of government, stepping down from the Office of the Public Auditor, one of government's most sensitive positions. Sablan has maintained the highest of ethical standards through the terms of three governors, achieving honors for the office, for his staff, for his own accomplishment. Not the least of these has been the training and promotion he has provided to local members of the staff, enabling them to move up into ever more responsible positions, and achieving an almost 100% local staff. His departure does not bode well for the Commonwealth.

Though he would be the last to admit it, it is certain that one of the biggest frustrations during his term has been the lack of prosecution by the Attorney General's office of the many transgressions the OPA has unearthed and turned over to the AGO. It takes a lot of will and determinedness to keep going in the face of such disregard.

Much is at stake in the selection of Sablan's successor.

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Should anyone still be giving credence to the repetitious, snide and self-serving half-truths being dished out by John Gourley, may I respectfully point out that contrary to Gourley's claim, representatives of the Pew Trust have indeed spoken out, more than once, on "significant justifications" for designating a marine monument in the CNMI's northern waters.

What they have said is that the world's oceans are at risk due to pollution, over-fishing and climate change; that they have formed an Ocean Legacy group to work on ameliorating loss of the world's great marine ecosystems, and that they believe the waters surrounding the CNMI's northern islands are a perfect candidate for just such a "park of the sea" - a marine sanctuary that would off-set and counter the damage threatening the world's oceans. The CNMI's northern area is, in fact, only one of four such areas around the world - and the only one in U.S. waters - that met the group's criteria. I'd consider those pretty significant justifications.

Moreover, Gourley has endlessly repeated that declaration of a monument in the CNMI would deprive its people of 1/3 of its Exclusive Economic Zone. But, so far as I know, the CNMI does not have, or have any control over, an EEZ. The courts have declared them federal waters. Besides, there's no assurance that the waters surrounding Uracas, Maug and Asuncion would ever generate enough of a benefit/profit to bother with.

The CNMI would get far more in profit and benefit if it had bragging rights to the Grand Canyon Park of the Sea - which it would get with the declaration of a Marianas Trench monument. And that would come within the foreseeable future, not at some unknown date decades from now.

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I've learned that there will be two opportunities to negotiate the terms of any monument designation. The first will occur if, as, and when the White House decides to go ahead with an assessment of CNMI's candidacy for monument declaration, at which point there would be discussions with people in the CNMI, visits from federal officials and probably considerable back and forth between the White House and various interest groups before the designation is formalized. It is, furthermore, expected that many areas of the document that Bush signs will be open to interpretation or will be deliberately left vague, and that provides the second opportunity, when the actual writing of applicable rules implementing the monument designation takes place.

At the moment, the only thing "on the table" is the offer to be considered a candidate.

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Hollywood Theater has announced it will return, opening on Friday, May 23. But it has not announced on what terms. Will it still be open seven days a week? Will all seven of its theaters be in operation? Will the prices still be the same? Will it continue to show its mix of mostly second-rate movies full of violence? Guess we'll just have to wait and see.

It would be a mistake, however, to just wait and see whether the CNMI's only public radio station, KRNM, survives. It has been notified by Northern Marianas College, which has up until now provided major support to the station, that that support is no longer affordable by NMC. There has been an on-going fund-raising effort by station manager Carl Pogue to raise \$70,000 to keep the station running until May 31<sup>st</sup>, the "test" deadline set by NMC to determine whether the station ought to be given until the end of the fiscal year to find replacement funding. To date, funding to continue a locally-operated station on Saipan has not been forthcoming.

According to Pogue, "the most realistic and financially responsible way of keeping public radio alive in Saipan is to try to get [another] public radio station in the region ... to acquire KRNM's radio license, then have us re-broadcast their signal. It appears to be the only way we'll be able to keep NPR [national public radio] available on Saipan, given the market size here."

But even this will only happen if the "rescuing" station can be convinced that there's enough of an audience here to make it worth while. While Pogue said that a number of corporate entities have donated towards keeping KRNM alive, the response from the general public has been disappointing - with less than 100 individuals making contributions. To keep the national public radio presence alive in the CNMI more evidence is needed that people listen, that they care, that they do support the station.

Pogue said at the moment, the goal is approximately \$10,000 short of being met to keep the station on the air until other arrangements can be made for its continuance. The funds are needed not only to pay for the programs now being aired, but also to cover the

costs of transitioning to another station.

Public radio will go the way of the movie house - with no possibility of return! - unless more donations are received from private individuals, in addition to continuing corporate contributions. To make sure public radio continues in the CNMI, listeners should mail their check into KRNM/NMC, P. O. Box 5012150, Saipan, MP 96950, bring it to Carl at NMC, call him for pick-up at 234-5766, or call the NMC Finance Office at 234-5498, ext 1013 to make a contribution by credit card.

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Short takes:

The coconut wireless has it that there could be funding through the Department of Interior to help review short and long-range options for solution to CNMI's power problem, to help prepare an RFP for privatization, to help review bids received - but that no one has requested the assistance.....

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Pat Young, the U.S. EPA's CNMI and Palau Program Manager of Pacific Insular Area Programs, is retiring. Her last official visit ends today. We wish her well, and thank her for the many years of patience, concern, diligence, good nature and hard work she has so willingly expended on behalf of the CNMI.

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Here's a new venture someone might want to look at: if gas - and utility - prices keep going up, maybe locals will start using those scooters some tourists use instead of cars. They seem to work pretty well - until it comes to climbing Capital Hill. So the new venture: a shuttle from the bottom to the top - and vice versa - plus parking lots at the bottom, for all the scooters.

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The lieutenant governor seems to be sitting in for the governor rather frequently of late - at proclamation signings and the like. Wonder what it means....

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The *Pacific Daily News* has been detailing just who, on Guam, will be getting the economic stimulus checks, and when they can be expected. CNMI officials, on the other hand, have been totally silent, so far, as to what CNMI's citizens can expect. Maybe they're still trying to figure out how the governor can get his hand on the funds instead?

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- Upcoming events: **May 19, 1:30 p.m.**, Banzai Cliff, unveiling of new Japanese memorial monument; **May 23, 6:00 p.m.** Karidat fund raiser buffet for \$25/per person at Aqua Resort; **May 24, 9:00 a.m. - 2 p.m.**, Koblerville fire station, 2<sup>nd</sup> annual Fire House Open House sponsored by the Baby Pedro Memorial Fund and Emergency Medical Services for Children Advisory Council.