

On My Mind  
5/23/08

What does "a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush" mean? First of all, it's a proverb - a short, frequently-used saying that expresses a basic truth or practical rule or principle.

According to the *Concise Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs*, it means "It is better to accept what one has than to try to get more and risk losing everything." A web site, [www.dictionarist.com](http://www.dictionarist.com) puts it: "It's best to go with what you have for certain than to wait for something better that you might never get." And the *New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, 2002, says it means "The things we already have are more valuable than the things we only hope to get."

Its first occurrence is recorded in the 13<sup>th</sup> Century in Latin, so the principle would appear to have been around, at least in the western world, for centuries. Is there an eastern, oceanic equivalent? I don't know - I've never encountered one. That may well be because eastern and western beliefs are different. At the risk of appearing to stereotype, it would seem that Easterners are more inclined to gamble - and therefore would be more willing to wait for something, hope for something, in the future.

The relevance? HANMI president and *Saipan Tribune* publisher Lynn Knight used the phrase (though she mentioned only one bird in the bush) at this past Tuesday night fishermen's forum at American Memorial Park, in suggesting that the CNMI should take advantage of the on-going efforts to have its Marianas Trench declared a monument, rather than putting it off and hoping for a better offer some time in the future.

But if the Eastern/Asiatic/Oceanic mindset is more oriented towards taking risks, gambling, hoping uncertain future events will bring more benefit than present offerings, the hesitation and reluctance of community members to accept the opportunity to have a monument declared in the northern islands becomes more understandable. It's not necessarily the right or best or wisest reaction, but at least there's an explanation for the stance.

On the other hand, tropic peoples are known for living in the present, for not putting much store into planning for the future - because the present is certain, and who knows what the future will bring. Which would mean that one would expect the local community to say, "Yes! Let's go with what is before us, with what is being offered, and not just hope for more in the future."

What is being offered is an opportunity to develop the islands of Maug, Uracas and Asuncion into a world-famous attraction, an opportunity to boost the economy, an opportunity to look good in the eyes of the world - all with someone else's money.

Will that opportunity be there *n* years from now? Who knows? The bottom line, it seems to me, is whether the people of the CNMI have the vision to see the benefits the offer brings, the willingness to act on it without endless debate, the faith and trust in each other to work together to try make it happen.

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It was encouraging - and refreshing - to hear William Aile, a native Hawaiian on island this week to share the Hawaiian experience with the establishment of its monument, as well as to put to rest some of the misconceptions about it that have circulated here. For example, the much-mentioned seven-year delay was not due to objection by the Hawaiians, but to fighting among federal agencies, he said.

While a few native Hawaiians were not happy with being denied fishing rights in the Hawaiian reserve, they were compensated for the cancellation of their permits. The vast majority of native Hawaiians, said Aile, were strongly in favor of their western-most islands being declared a monument, and were a driving force in getting it done.

He also was quite outspoken about the harm that the Western Regional Fisheries Management Council had caused in Hawaiian waters with its "optimization" approach - as opposed to an approach supporting sustainability. It killed our lobster fishery, he noted.

It was fascinating - and instructive - to watch as Aile made use of the negotiating skills he's developed over the many years he has devoted to the concerns, the rights, the needs of indigenous Hawaiians, in responding to often repetitive and already-asked questions at the fishermen's gathering on Tuesday, at the joint House/Senate session on Thursday, at the evening open session Thursday evening.

He stressed, over and over, that the Hawaii monument should not be used as a model; that the CNMI would be free to - and should - define its own terms and conditions of access and use, should the monument indeed become reality. The url for the Hawaii monument is < <http://hawaiireef.noaa.gov/> >. It is well worth a look.

Unlike the national federal election campaign, which will not end until November of this year, the brou-ha about a trench monument for the CNMI may well end in another two-three weeks. Within that time period, according to Jay Nelson, Pew Charitable Trust representative, also on island, it will be decided (presumably by the White House Council on Environmental Quality) whether or not to officially consider the Marianas Trench and CNMI's northern islands as a candidate for monument status. If the decision is positive, federal officials will begin an assessment of its viability as a candidate. If the decision is negative, the discussions become moot.

In a manner of speaking, it is up to the people of the CNMI to decide whether a bird in hand is worth two in the bush. They can express interest and good will, or they can create so much noise and confusion/controversy that the bird will fly away.

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Short takes:

Speaking of oceans and the need to protect them, whose trash is washing up on Old Man by the Sea? Where is it coming from? Signs, like a not-very-decayed half-eaten apple or whole onion, indicate it might be from not so very far away. Could it be from ocean dumping by passing ships? Left by careless picknickers? From discarded local trash brought by the current? Is it residential? Commercial? Whatever the source, there's lots of it.....

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Would the judiciary agree to a pay cut if the legislators and other exempt officials also took the cut? It would be fairer..... And if it's constitutionally prohibited, what about voluntary cuts? On Saipan, it doesn't take a \$100,000 salary to live very well.

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The legislature is at it again - not only micro-managing, but also once again discriminating against the business sector. If there is indeed a fuel subsidy available, shouldn't it be allocated across all users? The pain small users are feeling is no greater - and indeed may well be far less - than that felt by businesses, small and large, who must now pay a doubled fuel bill. The business community is just as deserving of a break - after all it is a significant source of revenue. Is the CNMI better off if more businesses shut their doors?

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The CNMI is slated to host yet another Island Fellow - a program sponsored by the Department of Interior's Office of Insular Affairs to promote private sector economic development through research and outreach in support of large-scale events hosted by the DoI. This will be the 6<sup>th</sup> iteration. Rather than trying to identify outside businesses that should be invited to "business opportunity" conferences, the DoI might better spend its moneys trying to find ways to promote, facilitate and encourage the establishment of local businesses. Question: can anyone point to outside businesses that have established themselves here as a result of this program?

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Coming events: (*Note: the Karidat fundraiser, originally scheduled for tonight at Aqua Resort has been postponed until Bishop Camacho is able to attend.*) **May 24, 8:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.**, 27<sup>th</sup> Annual Agriculture Fair, Civic Center; **May 24, 6:00-10:00 p.m.**, fund raiser for the Manta Band at Porky's Bar, Garapan. **May 26, 8:30 a.m.**, Memorial Day ceremonies at CNMI Veteran's Cemetery in Marpi; **May 30, 31, at 7:00 p.m.**, showing of the Mt. Carmel Theater Club's locally-made film *Caesar* at American Memorial Park; **June 1, 2:00 p.m.**, free showing of *High Sierra*, starring Humphrey Bogart and Ida Lupino, at the American Memorial Park Theater; Also, Hollywood Theater has re-opened, as of today.

Question of the day: will madness prevail and the Siemer/Willens team be given its last(?) chance to (try) gain glory via the CNMI by asking them to (help the CNMI) take the federal government to court over federalization of immigration?