

On My Mind

7/03/08

There's far more at stake in the disagreement between those who support the Marianas Trench monument and those who don't than the issue of whether federal involvement is good or bad, whether future mining of manganese nodules will provide more revenue than a sea park and a visitors center, whether local fishing will be permitted or not, whether local custom will be ignored or not, whether the respect for land will be honored or not, whether commercial fishing should be allowed or not, whether locals will have a role in its governance or not.

Which is not to say that those are not matters of real concern, worth researching, discussing, debating, worth trying to resolve.

However, the underlying issue is far more crucial, with far broader implications, than such localized concerns. At the heart of the disagreement is the question of whether our grandchildren, and their grandchildren, will ever see a whale or a tuna or a dolphin or a sea horse or an eel or a porpoise or an anemone or a swordfish or a manta ray or a turtle or a starfish or a conch or an oyster or a salmon - whether they will ever see marine life - except as pictures in a book, in a film, on a video.

The seas and their marine life are being raped, if you will, destroyed and decimated, by people who are more interested in earning a dollar today than in what happens in the future. Commercial fishing has become so technically efficient that the normal life-cycle of marine life is no longer able to replace what's been taken, and fish stocks are declining, world wide. The "by-catch" (turtles, dolphins, non-target fish) from the use of long-lines, purse seines, drift nets has been equally destructive. Reports from all over the world report on the disappearance of marine species, the smaller size and shrinking numbers of survivors.

In the U.S., commercial fishing is controlled by regional fishery councils who set catch limits, define boundaries, specify fishing techniques. In theory, these councils, established under U.S. law, were supposed to "manage" marine life in a sustainable manner, so species did not disappear, fish stock did not diminish. But there have been few, if any, conservationists, among the councils' members. The councils, backed by major financial interests, are concerned only with maximizing "take" - how many fish can be taken from the sea and sold at a profit, and have managed to form a wealthy and very influential lobby to support their interests.

In the CNMI, the Western Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Council, one of only a few whose entire membership represents fishing interests (rather than including sport fisheries and conservation interests) is opposed to the designation of the waters surrounding the CNMI's three northernmost islands as a marine monument because that jeopardizes its control over those waters. Thus, WESPAC members have lobbied extensively both here and in Washington against CNMI's proposed marine monument. Unfortunately, CNMI's leaders appear to have succumbed to that lobbying and have gone on record objecting to the monument declaration - which does not bode well for positive

action from the federal government - unless the President and his advisors can be made to realize just what is happening.

The issue, in other words is whether fishery councils, WESPAC among them, should be allowed to continue their destructive practices of destroying the world's marine resources, or whether ocean areas should be set aside as sanctuaries - as is being proposed for the CNMI - where fish stock and marine life could re-establish healthy populations.

Letters to the President, to his Council on Environmental Quality and its director, to the Secretary of Commerce, the Secretary of Interior, voicing support for the Marianas Marine Trench Monument, might help. Some useful addresses: **President George W. Bush**, The White House, 1600 Washington Ave, NW, Washington, D.C. 20500; **James Connaughton**, Chair, Council on Environmental Quality, The White House, 1600 Washington Ave, NW, Washington, D.C., 20500 e-mail: < [Http://www.whitehouse.gov/government/connaughton-bio.html](http://www.whitehouse.gov/government/connaughton-bio.html) >, or < James_L_Connaughton@ceq.eop.gov > or < comments@whitehouse.gov >; **the Honorable Dirk Kempthorne**, Secretary, Department of the Interior, 1849 C Street, NW, Washington, D.C. 20240, e-mail: < www.webteam@ios.doi.gov >; **Dr. Gerhard F. Kuska**, Associate Director, Council on Environmental Quality, Director of Ocean and Coastal Policy, Washington, D.C., e-mail: < Gerhard_F_Kuska@ceq.eop.gov >; **the Honorable Carlos M. Gutierrez**, Office of the Secretary, Mailstop 61, U.S. Department of Commerce, 14th & Constitution Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20230.

Last week's column suggested that maybe the CNMI should declare bankruptcy. Several readers wrote to say that as a "sovereign" entity like the states, the CNMI can not declare bankruptcy. However, none were able to give a definitive answer when I asked how the fact that the Covenant describes the CNMI as being "under the sovereignty of the United States" would affect a CNMI claim to that sovereignty.

It would be simpler, of course, if CUC were to declare bankruptcy. One could bring in a bank-appointed receiver to take over, which would solve all the problems of who will run the show and how, in one fell swoop, as they used to say. The receiver would have full authority to do whatever it takes to make CUC functional again. And presumably, a court-appointed receiver WOULD be knowledgeable, with experience, with integrity.

Maybe all those in favor could try persuade their representatives in the legislature to call for a declaration of CUC bankruptcy?

In all seriousness, with the power system in as poor shape as it is, with no coherent plan in place to fix it and none even on the drawing board, and with power such a central, crucial part of every business, of every individual's life, why is it that the legislature isn't meeting non-stop to find and implement a solution? Why is anyone up there still mucking about drafting new bills, new initiatives, new resolutions? Where do they think solution is going to come from? This is not a problem just for the Public Utility

committees! This is a crisis. And if it isn't solved soon, it could become a downright disaster!

Leaving it to someone else will end up costing everyone, as those "somebodies" commit resources that aren't there, make promises that can't be kept, enter contracts that are unenforceable, create more debt that no one can pay.

Short takes:

We all know that nepotism - "the practice among those with power or influence of favoring relatives or friends, especially by giving them jobs," according to the *New Oxford American Dictionary*, 2nd edition - exists on island. It would be pretty hard not to indulge in some nepotism, given how many people are inter-related within the small local population. Nonetheless, it was amusing, shall we say, to read that Acting Governor Tim Villagomez recently appointed former senator Tom Villagomez to the CPA Board, as well as Manuel Villagomez as the Tinian representative to the board.

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Also amusing was the statement from Press Secretary Charles P. Reyes, Jr., that one reason the CNMI's ability to handle emergency situations is better than expected could be because of all the help available from the federal government. "We have the advantage of having many resources available, like assistance from Homeland Security, other federal agencies and from the U.S. military," he is quoted as saying in Monday's *Marianas Variety*. This from the PIO whose boss is about to sue that very same helpful federal government?

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June's issue of the *Commonwealth Register*, the skinniest issue in my experience, in addition to the on-going extension of the volcanic emergency declaration for Anatahan, contains a notice of adoption of the latest amendments to the NMI Retirement Fund rules and regulations (as published in the May issue), and emergency regulations imposing fees on foreign airlines for use of the airport incinerator facility, and on all airlines for use of the airport triturator waste handling service.

The latter is confusing to say the least. The introductory text states that while these proposed amendments to CPA rules and regulations are being issued on an emergency basis, they will nevertheless be adopted as permanent regulations as well, and that comments thus are not required. As to be expected, the former fee amounts are not shown, so it is unclear how much of an increase is involved. And while it appears that the fees for the incinerator facility were first proposed in 2006, the same is not true of the triturator fees, yet no distinction is made regarding the opportunity to submit comments.

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American Memorial Park's Visitor's Center is featuring TWO free movies this week-end: Friday July 4th at 2:00 PM, James Cagney in *Yankee Doodle Dandy*, and on Sunday, July 6th at 2:00 PM, *Looney Tunes Cartoons*.