

On My Mind
7/18/08

With all the other suggestions floating around as to how to solve the CUC dilemma, seems it would only add to the confusion to add one more. However, there is one that might provide a solution to all the others, and that is an organization called "Engineers without Borders." It is, to quote from its web page < <http://www.ewb-usa.org/about.php> >, "a non-profit humanitarian organization established to partner with developing communities worldwide in order to improve their quality of life. This partnership involves the **implementation of sustainable engineering projects, while involving and training internationally responsible engineers and engineering students.** (emphasis added)

"The activities of EWB-USA range from the construction of sustainable systems that developing communities can own and operate without external assistance, to empowering such communities by enhancing local, technical, managerial, and entrepreneurial skills. These projects are initiated by, and completed with, contributions from the host community working with our project teams."

In response to a direct query, Luke Pritchard, Project Coordinator, wrote: "I should make it clear that EWB-USA is not a funding agency. We provide engineering services to communities in need, although we will often help with material costs. Also keep in mind the EWB is a volunteer organization, so I would recommend focusing on a project that can realistically be developed by a group of volunteers (our projects generally range in cost from \$30-\$50,000)."

Who better to come in, look over our situation, spell out the solution (settling, once and for all, one would hope, such questions as whether to repair or replace engines, what kind of oil to use, what technology in what proportions, etc., etc.), prepare the Request for Proposal or Invitation to Bid, review and select the successful applicant, and serve as manager of the actual work that follows? Surely that - or a large part of it - could fit within a \$50,000 budget?

All it takes, said Pritchard, is to fill out an application, available on request from their web-page.

It is worth noting that it was more than 10 years ago that the word "impeachment" was first mentioned in public in the CNMI - it was on the floor of the House, during the administration of the late former governor Larry I. Guerrero. Later in the same week, the store front of the representative who made the remark was sprayed with bullets.

Since that time, so far as I am aware, no one has dared voice that sentiment in public again. Yet over the past several months, the word has been uttered, not once, but repeatedly, about the incumbent governor. So far, no spray of bullets has resulted. Granted, it has not been said at the legislature, but it has been said in public, and been reported by the press.

One could ascribe that to the fact that society has loosened up a little since Guerrero's time. Yet, in light of the tight censorship and control the governor has attempted to impose on administration employees in particular, it is all the more noteworthy that no direct effort has been made to suppress talk demanding that the governor step down, that the lieutenant governor step down. Though two other islanders had begun circulating petitions asking for recall of the governor, it was Greg Cruz of TaoTao Tano whose call brought it up front and audible to all, and to whom we should express our thanks for daring to do so.

The final version of the "Economic impact of a proposed Mariana(s) Trench Marine National Monument: an exploratory study" is now available. For those who saw the presentation, or read the draft version, not much in the main body of the text has changed, except correction of a few grammar and spelling errors, one mathematical error. What's new in the final version is a two-page Postscript.

It begins by summarizing the comments and questions received during the various presentations Dr. Tom Iverson made while on Saipan, with a particular note about some of the misinformation being circulated regarding the proposed project.

A good portion of the Postscript addresses what Iverson confessed "was probably the biggest omission of this brief study - an examination of the economic impact of the CNMI American Memorial Park (AMP)." He notes the operation of the marina at the AMP - which is operated by the CNMI - as an example of successful co-management by the federal and local government. He notes as well, the one million visitor-use days "during peak visitor periods" - data provided by former AMP manager Chuck Sayon - and concludes that such facts might reassure island residents who have expressed distrust of the federal government's involvement in the proposed monument.

Iverson also points out in the Postscript the tremendous increase in federal funding that the AMP has received from 1996-2006, going from just \$149,000 to \$1,120,000 per year, not including over \$12 million in construction projects (as of 2004). This, too, should reassure island residents in terms of permanency and degree of federal commitment and funding, he said.

Iverson labeled as a potential weakness of the study the possible underestimation of tourism potential or traffic at the proposed information center, acknowledging that he made a deliberate effort to avoid exaggerating the economic benefits, producing "benefit estimates that were, if anything, at the lower range of possibilities."

At the moment, the Pew Ocean Legacy web page [≤ http://www.pewtrusts.org/our_work_detail.aspx?id=136 >](http://www.pewtrusts.org/our_work_detail.aspx?id=136) does not indicate that it is the final report that is now available on line, but if one goes to the actual text, it is the final report that is there.

Also out, in today's *Saipan Tribune*, is an "op-ed" piece, "The Pew Charitable

Trusts: Committed to ocean conservation," by Jay Nelson, Director of the Pew Environmental Group's Ocean Legacy project. In it, Nelson explains who the Pew is, and why it is on island, making it clear that its interests are neither economic nor political, but solely in the conservation of the world's marine environment.

The Pew Environmental Group as a whole, writes Nelson, also focuses on reducing the impact of global warming, and on reducing the erosion of large wilderness ecosystems; the Ocean Legacy project focuses on the marine environment.

He acknowledges that while establishment of parks and reserves - such as is being proposed for the waters surrounding Maug, Uracas and Asuncion - is often controversial, history has proven that setting aside areas as reserves provides more value to people than if the areas' resources had been extracted or mined commercially. "The great parks of the world, places like Yellowstone or Yosemite in the western United States, or the spectacular game parks of Africa, provide far more benefit to people as parks than they ever would if left unprotected," he writes.

Continues Nelson, "Our goal for the CNMI is to be a constructive advocate for an environmental opportunity that will not only benefit the local and global marine environment, but also the people who live here."

It is a good piece; hopefully it will serve to clarify and defuse the misinformation and misunderstandings that have arisen over the last several months.

Short takes:

Still counting: it's now been one month and two weeks since I turned in the second response to Revenue and Tax's finding that I had not filed what turns out to be a redundant document with my tax return, and I have not yet received my economic stimulus check.....