

On My Mind
8/01/08

Congratulations to the publisher of the *Saipan Tribune* for being brave enough to take a stance that is opposed by the administration, by some legislators, by WESPAC, and, one would have thought, by Tan interests. The *Trib's* editorial, in this past Monday's issue, was headlined, "Marine Monument: Good for the CNMI, good for the environment."

Calling itself "first and foremost a community newspaper" committed "to do[ing] right by the people," the editorial notes, "And it is in that spirit that we are giving our endorsement to the proposed national marine monument. The proposal is the right plan at the right time, and was put forth for the right reasons. A national marine monument will benefit our local tourism economy and preserve a beautiful environmental gem."

Not to detract from the significance, the import, of the decision by the *Tribune's* publisher, nonetheless, it is interesting to speculate on just what this means in terms of Tan Holdings. Tan Holdings is known to have an interest in fisheries in the area, and one would, therefore, have expected a member of the Tan Holdings - i.e., the *Tribune* - to support those interests. Yet the paper has spoken out in favor of opposing interests. Does this mean Tan Holdings is loosening its grip on what the *Trib* is allowed to cover, report on, say? It would seem so.

It is also interesting to speculate on what effect this will have on the administration's opposition to the proposed monument, given that the administration is known to have close ties with Tan Holdings as well. Will it soften its stance, and agree that negotiations are appropriate only if, as, and when, the President designates the waters around the northern islands a marine monument?

Guess it could be taken as a form of flattery that at least some WESPAC officials read my column - available on the web at < <http://net.saipan.com/cftemplates/omm/index.cfm> > - given that they have responded at considerable length in both of today's papers to last week's column, which was largely devoted to WESPAC.

At their request, and "in the interests of transparency" let me state unequivocally that I have never received payment from the Pew Environmental Group for any of my writings in support of the Marianas Trench Monument.

Beyond that, I offer as rebuttal these sites: < <http://belammc.com/wespac/> >, < <http://www.lostfishcoalition.org/page4.html> >, < <http://mustbethumidity.blogspot.com/2008/05/dark-underbelly-of-wespac-its-all-dark.h>

tml >, < <http://www.monachus-guardian.org/mguard12/1221covsto1.htm> >. As John Gourley has said, "we are not alone in our opposition."

It's interesting that no reporter has picked up on the assertion by Gregorio Cruz, Jr, in his letter to the editor published in the *Tribune* yesterday that the governor's executive order allowing the Commonwealth Utilities Commission to borrow up to \$5 million is unconstitutional. Isn't that of major significance in considering the executive order? Does the print media's silence mean that none of its members attended any of the legislative sessions discussing the order? Or that they did attend, and the legislators themselves did not discuss the Constitutional restrictions? Or that they did attend, and the subject was discussed, but they didn't report it? Any way you look at it, it's a sad commentary.

TaoTao Tano's Cruz notes, in his letter, that Article X, Section 3 of the CNMI Constitution states that "Public debt may not be authorized or incurred without the affirmative vote of two-thirds of the members in each house of the legislature." This would appear to indicate that, despite the law allowing executive orders to go into effect after 60 days if the legislature does not approve them, the executive order raising CUC's debt ceiling could not go into effect unless both houses approved it by a 2/3 vote. So far, only the Senate has approved the executive order.

Section 4 of Article X of the CNMI Constitution, notes Cruz, states that "Public debt may not be authorized for operating expenses of the Commonwealth government or its political subdivisions." In other words, money borrowed under the proposed executive order could not be used to repair engines, for the fuel to run them, for the salaries of employees, for operation of the power plant, or the transmission, or the distribution system, or even the billing system. The CNMI Constitution forbids it. So what is it that CUC is expected to do with that very high ceiling on money it is allowed to borrow?????? It's going to undertake a \$5 million capital expenditure? For what?

Though it's well-known that Filipinos serve as a major labor force in many countries other than the CNMI, it was nonetheless a surprise to me to receive a book from my cousin who resides in Australia and regularly sends me books by and about Australians, that was written by a Filipino, and in which most of the action takes place in the Philippine Islands.

Green Blood and other Stories, is a collection of short stories written by Erwin Cabucos, who was born and raised in the Muslim region of the southern Philippines, first went to Australia on a scholarship, and now lives in Australia with an Australian wife. What I've read so far has taken place in rural areas of the Philippines, and offers a revealing insight into the family life of those who stay home, and do not become overseas workers.

As one reviewer put it, "...after reading his work, one has a better understanding of the Filipino-Australian experience, and of Filipino experience in Muslim Mindanao." A well-written, fascinating book, well worth reading!

Neither the book nor the author are listed on Amazon.com, but its publisher has a web page at < <http://www.manilaprints.com.au/> >, which notes that Cabucos now lives in Queensland, and is a regular contributor to *The Bayanihon News*, a Philippine community newspaper published monthly in Sydney, Australia.

Short takes:

Correction: The Pacific Islands Club is another hotel that went through more than one name change: from White Sands to Surf to PIC. In one of its earlier incarnations, there was talk of having NMC operate the hotel using students enrolled in a hospitality training program as staff. Guests would be given a reduced rate, just as are customers who agree to get their hair cut by students at beauty operator school, or patients who get their teeth fixed by students at dentistry schools. But somehow, as is so often true here, it never happened.

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

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There probably are underlying politics that I know nothing about, but I wonder at the concern being expressed at the proposed Marianas Public Land Trust purchase of private land for its new quarters. Doesn't that provide more stimulus to the economy than using up the increasingly scarce public land still left on island? Shouldn't public lands be used to create revenue for the CNMI, rather than to provide free rent for its government agencies? At the rate the CNMI's public lands are being given away, pretty soon there won't be any left for the use and benefit of future generations.

Not that there seems any great concern for future generations in this administration, judging from its actions - or lack thereof - regarding the Retirement Fund, use of public lands, the needs of the education department.....

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For a lift of spirit in these glum times, and a chance to be heard on some current subjects, at least, readers might want to visit Ed Probst's web page, at < <http://marianaspride.blogspot.com/> > and vote on one or all of his several polls.