

On My Mind  
11/07/08

As my daughter said when I picked up the phone, "YYYAAAAYYYYYYYY!!!!!" It is, I think, a rare occurrence when one knows one has seen, experienced, a truly historic event. So often, they become historic only after the fact, after time has shaped the event's significance. This past week, with the people of the United States electing a black man President of the U.S., one knew. There was no doubt about it. And what a feeling of awe, and inspiration and hope it brought - at least to me!

It was an incredible feat - not only overcoming what was thought to be an extensive "red-state" mentality in so many people, but also in empowering so many people who felt they had been, at best, marginal. It does bring new hope. It is a change, and will bring more. It is, and was, awesome!

Will he be able to sustain all that positivism? As has been universally agreed, Barak Obama faces an overflowing pile of major problems, not one of which can be solved with short, simple, actions. They will all take time. It is tempting to say that, in some ways, he has already solved the biggest challenge: he made it into the White House. If he can do that, then surely he is capable of solving the remaining challenges that are now before him. We wish him well.

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History, on a smaller scale, was made in the CNMI as well. The people of the CNMI elected their first non-voting delegate to the U.S. Congress. And what a long battle that has been - with even the people of the CNMI, at first, not at all sure that is what they wanted. It is ironic that the creation of a non-voting delegate seemed almost an after-thought to the far less welcome (at least on some fronts) imposition of federal control over CNMI labor and immigration. (Both are included in the same law.)

We wish Gregorio "Kilili"C. Sablan well in his new post! He has a rare opportunity to set important, meaningful, precedents as the first non-voting delegate for the CNMI - we hope he bears that in mind in taking his initial steps in his new position.

The people of the CNMI did not do as well as did the electorate in the U.S., however. The ranking of the candidates who lost gives clear indication that it is still primarily family that counts, that other factors do not seem to carry a lot of weight when it comes to choosing a representative. That John Davis and Chong Won - both of whom in many ways seemed better prepared, more logical and more rational, and more capable of acting responsibly in the delegate position - came in last is disheartening. It took the U.S. a long time to allow blacks into mainstream politics. One would have thought that, just as so many other changes have seemed to accelerate due to advances in communications technology, this, too, would go more rapidly. Unfortunately, it would appear that the CNMI is still too young.

Nevertheless, we give both of them credit for trying, for being willing to expend so much time and effort in offering the people of the CNMI meaningful alternatives.

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While on the topic of polls and voting, I'm afraid I again have problems with the *Saipan Tribune's* weekly "opinion meter" question. Not to be a nit-picker (!), but the problem - as with so many of these poll questions - is that it is deceptive.

The question asked this week was: "Would you agree to the marine monument proposal if the CNMI regains local control of its submerged lands?" If I agree with the marine monument proposal regardless of whether the CNMI regains local control or not, what answer should I give? Should I respond "no," which would seem to indicate I don't support the proposal, rather than indicating that the submerged lands are not an issue? Or should I respond "yes," which would seem to indicate I'd support it only if rights to the submerged lands were regained?

In which case, one could argue that those who voted yes would support the monument only if the CNMI regained local control of its submerged lands, which would not be true .

While some may believe writing good poll questions is an art - and perhaps it is, to some extent - it is more of a science, and there are, for starters, over 5,000 titles available on < [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) > just on the subject of questionnaire design. It is, by the way, a fascinating subject - I still treasure a book on the topic that I read thirty years ago.

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Still on the subject of front-page attractions, I would submit that a useful "count-down" - like, how many more days until..... - would be a count-down of how much time remains before the one-year Aggrekko contract comes to an end. It went into operation on or about September 15<sup>th</sup>, or 7 ½ weeks ago. If one takes that as starting point, that means there are only 44 ½ weeks, or about 10 ½ months, left for the Aggrekko contract to run. So how much progress has been made in fixing the problem, or at least in arranging for a replacement when the Aggrekko contract expires?

The only effort to do so made to date - passage of Public Law 16-17 - has gone nowhere, with both CUC and members of the legislature already saying the law is flawed and needs major revision. So why, one may well ask, was it passed to begin with????? And when will anyone take action? In the meantime, the clock keeps ticking.....

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Short takes:

The most recent issue of *Island Locator* got by me - I only saw it last week. Editor Alexie Zotomayor has done the community a great service by synthesizing and distilling the 48-page scientific report on the marine monument proposal issued by Pew's Ocean Legacy program into 8 pages of simplified text and magnificent photographs of both the islands involved and the wonders of the above and under-water life found there. Copies of the September-October issue are available from the Pew Garapan office, located next to Asia Scooter Rental, on the opposite corner of Beach Road from

Winchell's, from the *Locator* office near St. Judes' Church in Koblerville, or by contacting the publisher at 288-2677.

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Just released last week was the October issue of the *Commonwealth Register*. Included: 58 pages proposing yet more amendments to immigration rules and regulations, 19 pages repealing and replacing provisions on remittances and remittance companies in the banking section of the Department of Commerce's rules and regulations, and 11 pages of proposed rules and regulations covering re-cycling centers, especially in relation to handling copper materials. Comments on these must be submitted within 30 days of the publication of the *Register* which was October 25.

Two emergency regulations, two executive orders, and notice of adoption of rules and regulations by the Alcoholic Beverage Board, NMI Retirement Fund, and Department of Labor are also included.

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A more exciting addition to the "published" world is the inclusion of House journals on the web page of CNMI House Speaker Joseph J.N. Camacho. In his e-mail, he said, "The public can see and read the House of Representatives' discussion and debate on bills and constitutional amendments as well as other legislative matters. Procedurally, the House Sessions are recorded on tape which is later transcribed by the Legislative Bureau staff. The Journals have to be formally adopted in a House Session before they become Official Journals." I was not able to pull this feature up on my computer, but it did come up on Camacho's office computer. Not sure where the problem lies. Try it! The url: < [www.camachocnmi.com](http://www.camachocnmi.com) >.

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Another exciting event: the Northern Marianas Trade Institute held its first award ceremony on Wednesday evening this past week, handing out certificates of completion to 22 students who completed the core curriculum course, and are now ready to take on specialized training in the trade of their choice. The N.M.T.I. is a private, non-profit institute designed to improve the skills of the local labor force; the intent is that its graduates will, upon completion of their courses, be able to form their own contracting firms and set their own pay scales accordingly.

Further details, a pictures and a full list of students appear in today's <EM>Marianas Variety</EM>.

The Institute was formed by local entrepreneur and businessman Tony Pellegrino; its managing director is former mayor George Sablan. Currently, courses in electricity, plumbing, carpentry are available. Pellegrino said more courses will be added as demand warrants, including car repair, cosmetology, culinary arts and sewing. More information is available from Pellegrino at 287-8310 or via e-mail at [tonypell@saipan.com](mailto:tonypell@saipan.com).