

On My Mind
12/05/08

No one's talking about it, and I hope I don't jinx things by mentioning it, but it IS on my mind: can the U.S. Secret Service, and bullet-proof vests, and whatever other precautions are being taken, really protect our president-elect until January 20 - and after? There's no denying that there are still people who cannot see that we are all brothers and sisters, that we are all put together the same way, with the same kinds of good points and bad points, and that the color of our skin really does not have a thing to do with who we are, what we can do, and what we believe, or where we belong.

I think that just as there were campaigns all over the country to get Barack Obama elected, there should now be campaigns all over the country to see that he is protected. I'm not talking about adding security guards, or body guards, or the like, though that too, would be good. What I'd like to see is a nation-wide campaign to change people's mind-set, a reaching out to people with such erroneous beliefs and proselytizing, enlightening/informing them in some sort of low-key but organized and ubiquitous fashion. Public service ads on tv, showing people of color as being just as warm and caring, as intelligent and capable, as people of "no color." An increase in articles and pictures in magazines, doing the same thing. Personal visits, social gatherings, web sites doing the same.

Such a campaign won't catch or reach everyone, nor change everyone's mind. Such changes often come slowly. But it would be a start. And I believe it would help. Maybe the easiest way to start would be to ask Democratic Parties around the country to take the lead? They got him elected; they should care about making sure he is allowed to carry out his and their promises.

Attorneys Bruce Mailman and Maya Kara made their presentation on the implications of the implementation of the federal immigration law to an overflow crowd at the Saipan Chamber of Commerce's monthly meeting earlier this week. It seems, they said, that people in the CNMI are standing on the train track watching the train approach and are either hoping it levitates before it gets to them, or that someone else, but not they, will get hurt when it hits the CNMI.

While many details are not yet known, because rules for implementing the federal law have not yet been released, what is important, they said, was for employers to protect the present status of their workers - provided they were satisfied with them - well into the start of the so-called transition period, slated to start June 1, 2009, so that they can survive the confusion that will undoubtedly occur during the initial "shake-down" period.

This can be done by obtaining two-year entry permits for all eligible employees, even if it means cutting short existing contracts. The closer to June 1, 2009, the two-year contracts begin, the better, but on the other hand, employers should not wait until May or

June to make the change, since the CNMI Department of Labor will be swamped by that time, and there is no assurance that it will be able to cope promptly and/or efficiently with a surge of requests at such a late date.

Additional categories of "non-immigrant aliens" will be eligible for two-year entry permits as of January 1, 2009, once proposed changes to CNMI immigration regulations, published in the October *Commonwealth Register* become final.

There are categories of people these rules do not cover, however. A list can be found in the copy of the Kara/Mailman presentation posted on the Saipan Chamber of Commerce web page: < <http://www.saipanchamber.com/> >. Unfortunately, one must download the presentation, rather than being able to view it on line.

The two urged others who might be eligible under one of the existing U.S. visa or green card provisions, to begin the processing now and not wait until the last minute.

As the Boy Scout motto says, "Be prepared!"

Short takes:

The clock is still ticking: it's now only 39 ½ weeks, or less than 10 months, before the Aggreko contract comes to an end. Meaningful progress on an alternative? Zero.

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The second clock still ticks as well: the one set for June 1, 2009, when the federal immigration act is slated to go into effect - that's a little over six months from now. Progress on the promised "working together" on the implementing rules and regulations? Again, zero.

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Those who saw the story in a recent *Marianas Variety* issue about Guam's hoping to hire more off-island doctors through eligibility as a Health Professional Shortage Area as well as a Medically Underserved Area can take comfort in the fact that the CNMI already takes advantage of these two programs. According to Secretary of Health Joseph K. Villagomez, "Presently we have 5 physicians, 1 clinical psychologist and 2 mid-level providers (a midwife and a physician assistant) that are part of this program. They usually have a 2-year commitment once approved by the NHSC to the Medically Underserved Area. Every year we send staff from our HR department as well as representatives from Rota and Tinian Health Centers to attend the recruitment meeting in the states. We have 3 commitments so far for next year's graduating class to come to the CNMI."

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November's *Commonwealth Register* did not appear until December 1st. It contains proposed rules and regs to amend Qualifying Certificates, and for procurement and supply for the Rota Gaming Commission. In addition, it contains three new executive orders, covering the organization and management of the Department of Labor Information System, the CHC Pharmacy, and, of course, CUC, once again. The *Register's* table of contents is back up on-line on the Law Revision Commission site at < http://www.cnmilaw.org/commonwealth_register.htm >, but should be read with reserva-

tions. It says, for instance, that there is no November issue. Well, technically, that's correct, but the 12/1 issue was supposed to be November's, and I'm told there WILL be a December issue later this month.

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There are a number of public hearings scheduled over the coming days and weeks. The most poorly-scheduled one is the hearing on new electric rates - which is set for the Senate Chambers on a FRIDAY evening, at 6:00 p.m (December 12th). At least it's not a government payday, but who wants to hang around after work on a Friday, for heaven's sake? Do they hope no one will attend?

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The Arts Council annual Christmas Show on Capitol Hill has opened - hours are from 8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. Monday through Fridays, and 8:00 a.m. to noon on Saturdays until January 1, 2009. Exhibit Curator Parker Yobei has done a superb job of arranging the exhibit - the gallery seems almost overflowing with the many artfully displayed items on view - though not all of them are for sale. Nonetheless, it's a fascinating array in many different mediums of local art that's been produced over the years - a show that's well worth taking the time to look at.

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Some other Christmas doings: American Memorial Park's Sunday canteen will be showing the holiday classic, "Holiday Inn" with Bing Crosby and Fred Astaire on Sunday, December 7, at the AMP theater at 2:00 p.m. Admission is free.

The Glushko Academy of Performing Arts's annual Christmas program takes place tonight at the Palms Resort at 7:00 p.m. Tickets can be purchased at the door and are \$15 for adults and \$10 for children.

Mount Carmel School 's Theatre Club will present the classic holiday film by Frank Capra "It's A Wonderful Life." tonight. Tickets are \$7.00 for adults, \$5.00 for children 12 and under at Saipan World Resort's Taga Ballroom. For more information see < www.mcstheatreclub.blogspot.com > or < www.mtcarmel-edu.net >.

Next week-end, the Friends of the Arts will present "It's Beginning To Look A Lot Like Christmas," Friday, 12/12, 7:00 p.m.; Saturday, 12/13, 3:00 p.m., and 7:00 pm; Sunday, 12/ 14, 3:00 p.m., at the Multipurpose Center in Susupe. Ticket prices: Adult Member-\$10, Adult Non-member-\$12, Students and Children over 4 - \$5.

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Question of the week: what was Police Officer Florencio Richard's semi-automatic handgun doing in his unattended car, from which it was - surprise, surprise - reported stolen?????