

On My Mind
6/04/09

An interesting anomaly in this past week's papers: Monday's Marianas Variety, on page 13, ran two WIC (Women, Infants & Children) documents, neither of which is dated, and both of which bear Joseph Kevin P. Villagomez' signature block as Secretary of the Department of Public Health. But the signatures themselves are vastly different - they bear no resemblance to one another - and while one purports to be that of Villagomez, the other clearly is not, but no indication is provided as to who may have signed the other document.

On the very next day, Tuesday, the Saipan Tribune ran the same two WIC documents on its page 9, again not dated, but in this appearance, both documents again bear the Villagomez signature block, and this time both signatures are clearly by the same person - presumably that of Villagomez.

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Scams are a dime a dozen, as the saying goes - more than enough, no doubt, to fill at least one thick volume. One that seems to be making the rounds at the moment has to do with jury duty, and I'm not sure it would work in the CNMI, but here's how it works: the scammer claims to work for the court, and tells the person answering the phone that s/he failed to show up for jury duty, and that an arrest warrant has been issued for his/her arrest. When the person called denies that s/he ever received a jury notice, the scammer asks for a social security number and date of birth, sometimes credit card numbers or other personal information, allegedly for verification purposes, but enough information to now enable him to commit identify theft.

Most people eligible for jury duty probably know court staff well enough to be able to tell whether the caller does work for the courts, and I don't know a single instance where someone has been threatened with arrest for not showing up for court duty.

Nevertheless, be forewarned. As "snopes" says, this is but the latest in a series of identity theft scams people use to try obtain personal information, reminding people once again never to provide such information to someone who calls over the phone. Snopes, the prime site for determining when a scam is for real, is on the web at <
<http://www.snopes.com>>.

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The latest non-informative public notice generated by our government is the notice, in the 6/3 issue of the Trib, of a Request for Public Comments on House Bill 16-248, without any information as to what the bill is about. This leaves the public without a clue as to what House Bill 16-248 does, whether it affects them, whether there is a need for them to be heard on this bill.

Granted, the notice, issued by the House Standing Committee on Commerce and Tourism,

does list ways of obtaining a copy of the bill, but how hard would it have been to add one more line that says, "the bill would exempt businesses with an annual total gross revenue of less than \$50,000 from paying gross revenue taxes"?

All the information would be there - without anyone having to take any extra steps unless they were involved in small businesses or what happens to gross revenue.....

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More bad news - at least if you like tuna: In the past half-century, Pacific stocks of tuna have shrunk by 50% to 80%, except for skipjack. During the last decade, the problem has been aggravated by the movement into the western Pacific of fleets that had depleted the tuna stocks in the Atlantic and the Eastern Pacific. "The United States alone has expanded its fleet from 11 to 40 ships in the past few years, mostly by allowing Asian ships to take the American flag," says Sylvester Pokajam, managing director of the National Fisheries Authority of Papua New Guinea. "These ships, which don't even supply the American market, now fish without limits in our waters. The U.S. talks about conservation but behaves differently."

Proposals were made by the Western and Central Pacific Fishing Commission to reduce take by 10%-30%, but fishing nations - including the U.S. - resisted, willing only to accept a compromise of 10% over a period of three years. Several fisheries experts warned that that was not enough. "If you don't cut 30% of the take when you need to, it usually means you'll have to cut 50% later," said Kelvin Passfield of the Pacific Ocean fisheries program of the International Union for Conservation of Nature.

Says James Joseph, a fisheries scientist who for decades managed the commission that regulates the eastern Pacific, most of the world's tuna stocks are being fished at an unsustainable rate. "Bluefin is a catastrophe, bigeye and yellowfin are in trouble in most places, and so are some albacore," he says. "Only skipjack are still in good shape."

In the past, fish species survived only because some of their ranges had been inaccessible to fishers. But now that fishing methods are so much more efficient, there is a need to create a deliberate sustainability mechanism because the natural sustainability mechanism no longer works. In consequence, representatives of western Pacific island nations also decided to set up two more no-take zones in two pockets of international waters; the resulting area stretches from French Polynesia to Palau for a total 1.2 million square kilometers.

The measure, which takes effect in January, would reduce by 10% the number of fishing

days in these surrounding EEZs for most of the 225-ship international fleet of purse seiners, says Pokajam. The ships, which use huge nets to take out entire schools of tuna, account for three-quarters of the catch.

Will it be enough? Some fisheries experts are doubtful, but at least it is a start. Further details can be found in Protecting the Last Great Tuna Stocks by Christopher Pala at <http://www.sciencemag.org/cgi/content/short/324/5931/1133> >.

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Another arena rife with politics is the "democratic" process of nominating and electing candidates for public office.

Representatives of Western Pacific island nations decided to bar fishing in two huge pockets of international waters, creating the largest ever no-fishing zone. The result: four no-take areas totaling 1.2 million square kilometers stretching 7000 km from French Polynesia to Palau. Combined, the no-take zones are more than three times the size of California and dwarf the 360,000-km² reserve in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands, whose waters contain far fewer fish.

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Hearings are another matter. Take the hearing on the "Territorial Transportation Improvement Plan for Fiscal Year s 2009-2011" that was announced several months ago. How is anyone supposed to know what that includes? You have to go to Public Works, and dig through the paperwork to find out. How hard would it have been to list the projects included in that plan? Not until after the closure of the comment period was it revealed that the plan included Route 36, the Kalabera Cave road. Why couldn't the original notice have included that information?

"WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP! From Wendy's column You can help the guest workers. Ask members of Congress to: • **Grant an unobstructed pathway to U.S. citizenship through green cards to guest workers who had been working lawfully and legally in the CNMI for at least five years;** • **Grant a pathway to citizenship for the immediate relatives of the guest workers who acquire U.S citizenship;** • **Grant immediate U.S. citizenship to parents of the U.S. citizen children in the CNMI;** • **Require future**

foreign guest workers to complete exit interviews to ensure they have no unsettled labor and/or criminal cases; and • Properly fund and staff the U.S. Departments of Homeland Security, Justice, State, and Labor in the CNMI to ensure the safety and human rights of guest workers and the community. Please be a voice for the voiceless guest workers. Please contact key members of Congress, members of the House Natural Resources Committee, members of the House Subcommittee on Insular Affairs, and members of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee. Ask them to enact legislation to grant the disenfranchised guest workers rights."

While the predictions and gloomy forecasts contained in the recently released Fitial-commissioned study of the economic impact of federal laws on the CNMI are generally exaggerated, incorrect and deceiving, nonetheless, negative impacts will occur if no allowances are made in the law for the CNMI's unique circumstances.

These impacts would appear to fall largely on immediate relatives of U.S. citizens and of FAS citizens as well as on long-term foreign residents who were eligible to stay in the CNMI under the Covenant, but never obtained U.S. citizenship.

debt, is, simply put, irresponsible.

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From Wendy's blog: "unheard no more" < <http://unheardnomore.blogspot.com/> >

The report is a piece of politically charged propaganda masked as an economic report. It was crafted to support Fitial's lawsuit against federalization. It won't work, because it echos the false arguments that the federalization fighters promote and anyone who is familiar with the real meaning of PL 110-229, and the issues relating to the CNMI will see right through the politically charged rhetoric. The authors, like Fitial and the federalization fighters, are promoting the false notion that PL 110-229 will result in the exit of the foreign workforce by 2014. Since this is not true much of the biased report is based on a faulty premise, and is clearly propaganda meant to support the federal lawsuit.

1.

The report emphasizes the need for a foreign workforce controlled by the local government. It is not a foreign workforce that is needed, as the report claims. It is a stable workforce that is needed. An objective analysis would also suggest that if the CNMI needs a stable workforce then the U.S. should grant green card status to the long term guest workers in the CNMI, and provide a pathway to citizenship for any new workers brought into the CNMI. That way a stable

workforce would be ensured, and labor abuses so commonly inflicted on the foreign workers in the underclass of the two-tiered society would be eliminated. This is clearly a politically motivated report that reflects the interests of the party that commissioned it.

2.

Federalization will not harm the tourist industry. The CNMI could attract more tourists by eliminating the sleazy clubs, massage parlors and decaying abandoned factories and buildings. More tourists would come if there were attractions like a cultural center and a Marine Sanctuary. The CNMI should look to Hawaii as a model. The attractions in Hawaii are the culture and the natural beauty, and the CNMI has both.

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call-waiting etiquette - who's got priority?

The "private sector privatizes the gains, while government socializes the losses" - from a 9/16/08 Boston Globe op-ed piece on financial woes.

- Off the wall: Is there an entomologist out there who can tell me why cockroaches die on their backs? I've never yet come across a dead or dying cockroach that wasn't flat on its back. Why is that?

"There are good reasons to begin with a presumption against government action. As coercive monopolies that spend other people's money taken by force, governments are uniquely unqualified to solve problems. They are riddled by ignorance, perverse incentives, incompetence and self-serving." From "Don't look to gov't to cool down planet" by John Strossel in opinion column in MV, 11/21/07, p 12 from "Townhall")

WESPAC members are chosen from a list of candidates submitted by each state governor to the Secretary of Commerce in Washington, D.C. They appear to be highly political appointments. The current council chair, according to the web site < <http://www.lostfishcoalition.org/page4.html> >, is the owner of one of the largest longline fleets in the Pacific, has been chair a number of times in the past, and has allegedly been convicted three times of violating the very regulations he put in place.

The Council's executive director, Kitty Simonds, has been director for close to 30 years, according to the web site, and is allegedly one of the highest paid persons in the U.S. government, "right up there with the president and vice-president."

Though most states control the first three miles of water extending from their shore line, the CNMI does not as a result of the stance taken by Governor Fitial that the CNMI should get more than a mere three miles, which he took to court, and which the CNMI lost.

The Magnuson-Stevens Fishery and Conservation Management Act, which established and defines the fishery councils, has recently been amended, ostensibly in support of better management, increased conservation. However, proposed regulations implementing the Act have been found to have many loopholes, thus weakening the Act's effectiveness, and President Bush is now being asked not to bow to the powerful fishery lobby and to demand that the spirit of the law be followed. In addition, he plans to build on his legacy of ocean conservation, benefiting generations of Americans to come, by declaring additional national marine monuments that offer sanctuary to threatened marine life.

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More on Pew Trust:

ask for a plan. There is none! Comes later.

Compare to Hawaii. Different folks, different parties.

Feds do some good things - American Park, U.S. Post Office, FDIC, military.....

If non locals for the project are suspect, what about nonlocals against the project?

Cruz re talking to the feds directly.....

MVA - military and clearing harbor

It is somewhat dismaying to realize, however, that the last [15th] legislature passed 128 new laws. Surely that sets a record of some sort?

Department of Corrections Lino Tenorio was quoted in the Trib earlier this week as saying that the new prison could accommodate up to 500 inmates, based on a projected of prison population. Wouldn't it have been nice if he'd said, instead, that the

Will be interesting to watch which of the outgoing members of the House find new positions with the government....

Then there's Lower Base. Along the shore of the lagoon. More potential prime real estate on public land, which is instead being dirtied, polluted, abused, kept out of the market. Yes, it's convenient to have container yards and oil storage tanks close to the harbor,

but "close" is, after all, relative. To move some of those facilities inland, away from the lagoon, would mean a distance of only a few miles. Rehabilitating the area might take some doing, but it makes no sense to keep it dirty just because it always has been.

Public land should be used for the benefit of everyone, but much of the public land that comprises Lower Base - especially along the shore - does not. Isn't it time this was re-evaluated as well? Not all commercial dock space has to be ugly, after all. In some cities, they have been redeveloped into profitable tourist attractions.

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Some of those, who'd been there before, even expressed their pleasure at being re-elected in terms of how much they liked their "job" and how happy they were to have their "jobs" back.

Excuse me, but when did being a legislator become a "job"? Aren't legislators, who make the laws the rest of us must live by, supposed to be representatives of the people who elected them? Aren't they supposed to be working on laws that help the community, that represent the people's best interests, that improve the lives of their constituents, and the economy? Aren't they supposed to be answering to the people? Serving the people?

Perhaps it was just a poor choice of words, because doing all those things could be considered a "job" too, but I would have much rather heard those legislators say they were happy to [again] be in a position to work towards helping their people and their community prosper, towards improving education, towards improving the infrastructure.

Prime real estate on Capital Hill another neglected asset....