

On My Mind  
8/21/09

Short takes:

Correction: The new Retirement Fund membership organization is called the Commonwealth Retirement Association, not the Commonwealth Association of Retired Persons, as it was referred to in my previous column.

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Given the violence, the killings, the damage that can come from large groups of people getting together either in favor of or opposed to some cause or other - an event reported all too frequently in the news - we should all be doubly thankful, and grateful, for the democratic tradition that allowed this past week's peaceful gathering of guest workers - and others like it - to happen. Such democratic traditions are not part of the CNMI's cultural history, yet its people have adopted the principle of "peaceable assembly" - even when the assembly is rather large, even when the islanders themselves may not all agree with the position taken by those assembled. I think that's admirable, and something everyone on either side of the fence should be proud of.

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I like Representative Ed Salas' stance on House Legislative Initiative 16-11, which would give the governor and members of the legislature an extra year in office in order to align CNMI elections with national elections. In a story carried by the *Marianas Variety* on August 13, Salas is reported as saying it was far better to give the governor and legislators a year less - rather than giving a year more to those elected officials who are doing a poor job in office, as the initiative does. He said if the elected officials were doing a good job, they would be re-elected - assuming they decided to run again, so nothing would be lost. Unfortunately, the initiative does not provide that option.

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While the CNMI may have accepted the democratic tradition of peaceable assembly, unfortunately it has not adopted the principle that good government comes from qualified employees, rather than party sycophants. The present administration seems to be going out of its way to prove how far away it is, in fact, from anything related to good government. The non-renewal of Henry Hofschneider's DLNR contract, the retention of Pete Untalan as CHC administrator, the rejection of the CRA's recommendation for Retirement Fund board member being but three examples.

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The comments re Dr. Cornett's letter to the editor made in a previous column brought forth responses that Cornett was not well-liked at CHC, In this regard, that does not matter. More important is that no one has disputed his accuracy in describing the dire straits within which doctors at CHC are forced to function. I know it's an election year, but postponing a change in management and operation at CHC until next January or later is downright criminal. How can the legislature, the administration, be so cavalier, so arrogant and uncaring?

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The reports of 110 - or was it only 109? - candidates filing for office, of some 14,000 registered voters to date are all very interesting, but they are without context. It would be far more interesting if those numbers had been compared, for example, to the previous gubernatorial election. A call to the ever-cooperative Election Commission reveals that, in fact, there were 106 candidates for office in November of '05, and that the total number of registered voters reached 15, 113. Thank-you, Election Commission.

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Too bad there's not a body that makes laws governing the legislature. There ought to be a law, for example, that requires legislatures to use some of their money to join an organization known as the National Conference of State Legislatures. NCSL is a bipartisan organization that serves the legislators and staffs of the nation's 50 states, its commonwealths and territories and provides research, technical assistance and opportunities for policy makers to exchange ideas on the most pressing state issues for the purpose of improving the quality and effectiveness of state legislatures. There ought to be a law that the NCSL, together with, perhaps, NMC, or in conjunction with the Association of Pacific Island Legislators - maybe held in Hawaii? - conduct a new legislator orientation program every two years. There ought to be a law limiting the number of bills any legislative session may generate, and requiring that before a new bill is introduced, all similar bills already introduced be reviewed and disposed of. Given that such a body does not exist, one can only hope that maybe a new crop of faces in the next legislature will see the introduction of at least a few more reform-oriented measures.

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And a plethora of public hearings coming up! To wit:

Tuesday, August 25: 6:00 p.m., at the multi-purpose center in Susupe, Zoning Board hearing on the **Beach Road Corridor Improvement Plan**. More information from the Zoning Board at 234-9961.

Tuesday, August 25: 6:30 p.m., at the CRM Conference Room in Oleia, Public Works hearing on preparation of an **Environmental Assessment Report for the proposed Lake Susupe Educational Boardwalk Trail project**. More information available from Public Works Technical Services Division at 234-9828 or 664-4455.

Wednesday, August 26: 3:00 to 5:00 p.m. Not exactly a hearing, but worth mentioning: **release of the *Directory of Traditional Healers and Medicinal Plants of the CNMI*** at the multi-purpose center in Susupe, a project funded by an Administration for Native Americans grant and sponsored by several local individuals and organizations;

Wednesday, August 26: 6:30 p.m., **Retirement Fund hearings** on Res. 09-002, which "restricts the Fund from processing any amendments or additions to originally

filed Applications for Retirement that would add beneficiaries arising through adoption for purposes of the computation of survivor benefits," and Res. 09-003, which "proposes for the Fund to cease processing refunds of employee contributions." More information available from the Retirement Fund at 322-3863.

Friday, August 28, 6:30 p.m., at the San Roque school: hearing on the **Environmental Assessment Report on the Kalabera Cave Development project** prepared for MVA by Herman B. Cabrera and Associates. More information available from his office at 234-1778.

Thursday, August 27: 6:00 p.m., at the Zoning Office in Dandan on "**conditional**" **use of a former garment factory building in Koblerville by Pancy, Inc.** More information available from the Zoning Board at 234-9661.

Monday, August 31, 1:00 p.m. at the Senate Chamber **on leveled energy adjustments** proposed by the Commonwealth Public Utilities Commission. More information available from Kyle Cabrese, CPUC Commissioner, at 233-7150.

Monday, August 31, deadline for comments on Senate Bill 16-60 "**To enhance enforcement powers and authority under the Alcohol Beverage Control Act and for other purposes**" - which would give Board members the same powers as peace officers in enforcing ABC laws and regulations. More information from Congressman Joseph C. Reyes at 664-8836.

As the saying goes, "the squeaky wheel gets the grease," so if readers have an interest in any of the topics mentioned above, here's their chance to be heard.....