

## On My Mind

1/22/10

Though the *Marianas Variety* editor doesn't see it having much effect locally - at least not to the point of anyone's taking action - Fitial's latest folly continues to dominate local conversations, mainly in the form of questions. Where is the boat? Whose was it?

What led to the arrest of the smugglers? Was there a tip-off? Or how did federal agents know to look for it? Why haven't there been interviews with federal officials, quotes from them as to the propriety of it all, their reactions? Why was the initial hearing delayed? Who will determine whether it's appropriate that the CNMI Attorney General defend the governor in a personal matter such as this? If Judge Munson leaves island before the next hearing - as it is rumored he will - who will replace him? Will the hearing be delayed again? Will everyone just get a slap on the wrist? Or will it be seen as a more serious offence, and an example set for anyone else who might be tempted to ignore federal procedures, court rules? Are local agencies holding off in hopes the feds will take care of the situation and they won't have to get involved? Or is it only right that they wait until the federal court issues its findings?

The governor's most recent comments have merely added to the list: What's the difference between a request and an order? Can a request be considered an order? When? Under what circumstances? How does one define request, when it's issued by one's employer? Does the governor really expect to hide behind such an academic distinction?

Then there's the question of how this will affect the CNMI's presence at the annual National Governors Association winter conference, scheduled to be held in Washington, D.C. on February 25th. There's always a dinner at the White House for the governors, offering them a great photo opportunity shaking hands with the President. In addition, numerous federal agencies schedule specifically focused informational meetings, policy discussions, economic briefings, around the NGA meeting to take advantage of the governors' presence in D.C. Will Fitial attend - despite the hearing date of February 17<sup>th</sup>? Send the lieutenant governor, so he won't have to face the media, his colleagues? Or will the CNMI lose out, with no one attending to represent it?

\*\*\*

On to brighter thoughts: this week marks the end of the first in a series of four book discussions led by P.Fred Kluge, former Peace Corps member, author of *The Edge of Paradise*, among others, and professor of English at Kenyon College in Ohio. He's the only Peace Corps member I know - other than those who've settled here - who returns to Saipan again and again, drawn by an attraction he never quite defines.

Under discussion has been *To Kill a Mockingbird*, probably most familiar to those old enough to remember Gregory Peck in the starring role in the movie. For me, Kluge brought an entirely new perspective to the story, challenging me to think of it in new

ways: is it a love story? Is the story of Boo Radley a distraction? An intrusion? Was it written for Hollywood? Did I realize it was written in retrospective first person? Kluge describes the process as not merely eating a meal, but going into the kitchen to find out how it is put together, what the ingredients are. The concluding session in this series is tomorrow, Saturday, at the American Memorial Park theater, at 9:00 a.m., where, presumably, the final touches of this meal's preparation will be disclosed, discussed.

Next week's book is Hemingway's *Old Man and the Sea*, a story of a fisherman and his big catch. There are also similarities between *To Kill a Mocking Bird* and Saipan, but they're right out and up front in the Hemingway book. Next week's sessions are Monday, Wednesday and Friday, from 6:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. at the American Memorial Park theater. There's no charge for the series, and copies of the books are available from the Humanities Council, now located on Middle Road (phone: 235-4787).

It's not too late to take advantage of Kluge's knowledge, insight, guidance. The series runs through mid-February, with *Huckleberry Finn* and *The Things They Carried* as the last two titles, and space is still available.....

\*\*\*

Short takes:

I find the campaign to abolish those illegal taxis counter-intuitive, somehow. They are there in part, it is true, because it's a way to make a living. But they're also there because they get customers, and therefore DO manage to make a living. And they get customers because the legal taxis are so expensive. Where is the free-market competition, here, that would force the "legal" taxis to lower their rates if they want to stay in business? How else can people fight the monopoly that now exists - one that seems to charge unjustifiably high fees - except by using the less expensive taxis? If the "legal" taxis were to lower their fees, seems to me there wouldn't be "illegal" taxis.

\*

It's good to know that CUC operations are improving as substantially as the media has reported they are - what with a decrease in power outages, an increase in power production, improvement in the water systems, etc. What hasn't improved, though, in the way of customer services, is the phone system. I finally called the emergency hot line - just to find out to whom I should provide the answers to a wastewater survey I received in the mail. The form itself provided no guidance as to where, to whom, the answers were supposed to go. And none of the phone numbers you'd expect would provide a response were being answered.

\*

Not that the 17<sup>th</sup> Legislature doesn't have enough on its plate already, but it sure would be nice if someone in the legislature decided to take on the banking industry in the CNMI, and tried to modernize it a bit. After all, there's no reason, in this day of hi-speed telecommunications, why my bank insists on putting a mainland check from a reputable firm that I've deposited to my account on hold for 10 working days (which amounts to nearly two weeks) before I am allowed to draw on it - when confirmation that funds are

available can be had in seconds, when, in all likelihood, the funds themselves can be transferred in seconds. Such practices can hardly be conducive to foreign investors trying to conduct business here.

\*

The Commonwealth Retirees Association is asking everyone who (a) receives an annuity or related benefits from the CNMI Retirement Fund's defined benefit plan; or (b) is presently employed by the Commonwealth government and is contributing to the CNMI Retirement Fund's defined benefit plan; or (c) is a surviving spouse of a person who receives benefits from the CNMI Retirement Fund's defined benefit plan to please sign up and register as a member of CRA. The purpose of CRA is to seek improvement in the operations of the Retirement Fund to better serve the needs and concerns of those who will or do receive annuities under the defined benefit plan. More members will give it a stronger voice.

For more information, contact any of the following Board members: Ron Barrineau at 322-4785, Oscar C. Camacho at 234-6245, Peter J.L. Igitol at 287-7554, Agnes McPhetres at 285-2726 or 234-0310, ext 100, Juan M. Sablan at 287-5877, Juan I. Tenorio at 483-4837, or Richard Waldo at 285-6589.