

On My Mind
6/25/10

It's nice to know that some members of the House and Senate are finally actually talking to each other about trying to resolve the present budget crisis, as was reported in today's *Saipan Tribune*. Whether or not it's accurate, the picture being painted is that the House is interested in cutting costs, but the Senate is more interested in increasing revenue. Whether all nine senators support that approach is not clear. What is clear, however, is that the bottleneck is in the Senate, and that unless senators are persuaded to change their position, the budget crisis will only worsen.

There is no other alternative than to cut costs, to cut the workforce. That is where the largest expenditure lies, and that is where it must be cut. True, if one is short of money, one solution is to try find more. But when the money would only go towards supporting bad habits, continuing destructive life styles, feeding greed and corruption, more money isn't the answer, won't solve the problem.

The Senate view is patent nonsense. Where would the money come from to pay the additional fees, charges, taxes, rate increases that its members seem to favor? Are they so unaware - what with their liberal allowances, etc., - of how costly many people are already finding such transactions?

There's no doubt that being the legislator who calls for workforce cuts would be difficult - since friends and relatives are bound to be affected. Perhaps the best way to start down that road is to agree that all votes on the matter would be cast by secret ballot, rather than by hand or voice. That way, those who are brave and sane enough to recognize that the work force must be cut will gain some protection. If present legislative rules don't allow secret votes, perhaps it's time they were revised. Though keeping the vote secret may go against the "transparent government" we all claim we want, there are times when the only solution may lie in holding votes confidential. This may very well be one of those times.

It would be interesting to know how many people in the CNMI read both newspapers. Circulation figures would show that not everyone does. And that is a pity. There are thought-provoking editorials taken from the newswires in both papers, informative and educational articles by syndicated writers are in both as well. Stories that appear in one don't always appear in the other. And the takes on the stories - the information provided - often is different as well; one still might not get the whole story, but by reading both papers, one certainly gets more than by just reading one or the other.

I loved Ed Stephen's take on zoris in today's *Trib* and especially the bit on how the CNMI could get into the zori-making industry. I like its letters to the editor - it publishes far more than does the *Marianas Variety*. The *Variety*, on the other hand, includes stories about the rest of Micronesia, so one learns of Palau's ardent and on-going support for environmental protection of its waters, its natural resources, the many similarities in

issues facing Guam as well as the CNMI. While the *Variety's* editorials are mostly conservative, mostly from the NY Times, the Washington Post, the *Trib's* go further afield, running editorials from Philadelphia and Dallas papers, from the Institute on War and Peace Reporting.

The *Variety* has its Raquel C. Bagnol, the *Trib* its Walt Goodridge, the *Trib* its Environment and LifeSyle pages, the *Variety* its special feature pages. In short, to be more informed, it really is necessary to read both papers. (DISCLAIMER: this is not an exhaustive comparison - merely passing thoughts based mostly on this past week's issues.....)

Fans of Fred Kluge may be interested to know that a four-page account of his recent trip to the CNMI and the lectures he presented while here appears in the latest edition of *Humanities*, the magazine of the National Endowment for the Humanities. I could not find the article, "Talking to Saipan: American Lit in a Pacific Outpost" on the web other than as an item in the NEH mag's table of contents, but perhaps more experienced searchers will be more successful.

It was fun to read his side of the story, so to speak, his observations, his responses to those of us who attended his lectures. He also talks about his Saturday writing class for high school students.

His most recent book, *Gone Tomorrow*, is available for purchase on the web. A word of advice: buy the paperback edition! The hardback is full of proof-reading-type errors because the corrections were made to the wrong copy of the galleys. All are caught and corrected in the paperback.

Having met Kluge, and gotten to know him - at least a little - this book struck me as intensely personal, full of likely details about Kluge himself, and I found this so intriguing - not to mention well-written - that once I'd finished the book, I immediately returned to the first page to read it again - something I don't think I've ever done before. Nor did it pall on second reading! In typically wonderful language, Kluge writes with humor as well as apparent apprehension about the imminent retirement of a professor at a small mid-western college. (Kluge is, for those who don't know, a professor at a small mid-western college.....)

Short takes:

A proposal to develop an underwater trail of historic relics will be presented at the American Memorial Park auditorium this evening, beginning at 6:30 p.m. The project involved conduct of an underwater survey to locate, assess and document objects associated with the World War II battle for Saipan. Identified sites include three tanks, four airplanes, two landing craft, a possible sub-chaser, a freighter and an LVT (Landing Vehicle Tracked). The planned heritage trail will consist of site brochures, diving and snorkeling guides, and a website that tourists and divers can use to learn about the history of the sites. The trail will promote sustainable heritage tourism and stimulate the economy

of Saipan while showcasing historically significant heritage sites in Saipan lagoon. Dr. McKinnon will also discuss management strategies to ensure the long-term protection of these significant historic resources.

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The Mariana Islands Nature Alliance (MINA), Division of Environmental Quality (DEQ), and American Memorial Park are together sponsoring a series of environmental films on First Fridays. The first will be shown next Friday, July 2, 2010 at 7:00 p.m. at the American Memorial Park Visitors Center. Showing will be *Black Wave*, a film about the 20-year legacy of the Exxon Valdez oil spill in Alaska. A discussion will follow about the ongoing oil spill disaster in the Gulf of Mexico. Though the full schedule of films is allegedly to be found at the DEQ web site, it is not.

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Members of the Retirement Fund who have not yet registered with the Commonwealth Retirees Association are urged to do so, and to obtain a CRA identification number so that they can vote on issues before the Association Board. Let your voice be heard! To register, send an e-mail to David M. Sablan at < davemsablan@gmail.com >. To learn more about the CRA go to its web page at < www.cnmiretirees.com >.

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Kudos to Judge Ken Govendo and his Family Court, reported in today's *Trib* as having won a national award as the 2010 National Justice Association Outstanding Justice Program for "best practice" evidence-based programs. The award will be presented at the NCJA National Forum scheduled to be held in Ft. Myers, Florida August 3.

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Did anyone catch the story in the *Variety* that American Samoa is holding its first constitutional convention in **26** years?

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Question of the week: would the fire(s) that burned those very same Marpi areas that underwent Brownfield clearing last year have burned so extensively if the clearing hadn't occurred?

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Quote of the week, from Jaime Vergera's column in Thursday's *Trib*: "The new paradigm that we have taken for granted comes from the temperate zone that requires homes to be built like bunkers...[that] have to be air-conditioned.... **We then mimic the cultural trappings of another clime.** We require neckties and jackets for official attire....Judges sashay to their chambers in black gowns....while grads troop down the Commencement tableaus under sweltering heat in cap and gowns." [emphasis added]