

8/12/11

The governor has given yet another political crony a position with government - this time a cushy six-year post as associate judge of the Superior Court to Joseph James N. Camacho. Seats on the bench are often given as political rewards, but one would expect at least lip service to judicial qualifications. Yet none of the reports of the nomination include any of Camacho's legal credentials - only his political ones.

In the meantime, the Senate President has introduced a legislative initiative to reduce the number of judges required by the CNMI Constitution from four to three. However, according to an 8/9 *Marianas Variety* story, the governor stated that "even if the initiative passes, it will not have any impact on Camacho's nomination" - though how he expects that to happen is not clear.

The Senate, which must confirm the nomination, could, after all, just let the nomination lapse.....

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Dr. Daniel Lamar, Dr. Bostrom's replacement as Director of Public Health under the Secretary of Public Health, made an interesting presentation to cancer survivors and caretakers last week; he spoke on the virtual epidemic [my words, not his] of chronic, non-communicable diseases in the CNMI.

Chronic non-communicable diseases include high blood pressure, strokes, diabetes, chronic lung disease, obesity, and some cancers, among others. Lamar said that these diseases are the cause of the majority of deaths in the CNMI - as is also true world-wide, according to various web reports on the topic.

According to Lamar, the "cure" for these diseases is not medicines - either prescription or over-the-counter - but changes in life-style. People have become too sedentary - that is, they don't move around enough, don't exercise enough - and they consume too many processed foods.

Processed foods, like white bread and white rice, have most of the healthy nutrients removed, depriving the body and its organs of essential vitamins, minerals, and the like.

In general, he said, 51% of what people eat is processed food; 47% is protein, and the foods that are most healthy - fresh fruits and vegetables - consist of only 7% of what most people eat. [That adds up to more than 100%; I've not been able to reach Dr. Lamar for a correction, but the ratio is significant, nonetheless.] But this can change - if people are willing to change their life-style, their eating habits. Lamar encouraged his listeners to start growing their own foods if they do not already do so, and to obtain more of what they eat from the island's farmers.

He said he hopes to make the decrease of deaths from non-communicable diseases in the CNMI a central goal of his office.

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Does the left hand not know what the right hand is doing? A *Variety* reporter, this past week, did a story on the neglected light house on Navy Hill. She reported that the Marianas Visitors Authority "is sorry for the sad state" of the light house, but cannot do anything about the light house - "supposed to be one of the beautiful destinations on island" because it is not under MVA jurisdiction.

On the other hand, the Historic Preservation Office indicated that the Department of Public Lands and the Department of Natural Resources are working together, gathering documents and other information, to turn the lighthouse into the resource and information center that is supposed to be part of the development of the Marianas Trench Monument.

The lighthouse, on the U.S. National Register of Historic Places, has a unique structure, and a unique history. It could, if properly restored and managed, become a significant point of interest to tourists in its own right - perhaps even a revenue-generating one, if a small fee were charged for admittance to the structure - especially its upper parts.

It does not make much sense to convert it into a museum/visitor/ resource/information center about the Marianas Trench, essentially eclipsing its own claim to fame. It has long been argued that what the CNMI's tourism industry needs is enhancement - more things for tourists to come see, spend time at, engage with. Wouldn't it, therefore, make more sense if the lighthouse could be a separate distinctive "monument," and the Marianas Trench Monument visitor center another separate distinctive "monument" - more for the tourist to come see, spend time at, engage with?

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And at what point does the general public get a chance to provide its input? It's bad enough that the Marianas Visitors Authority has already, apparently, decided what a refurbished Mt, Topachau should look like. According to an article in the *Saipan Tribune's* "Tournament of Champions" insert in its 8/6 issue, MVA has plans to replace railings on the stairs, pathways, viewing and monument areas, installing latte stone pedestals, and topping and leveling hazardous sections of the area.

Present plans call for the use of "metal railings" - with no further detail. Hopefully they will be an improvement on the tacky cement logs MVA has been using on other tourist sites (e.g., Banzai Cliff, Bird Island Lookout) - that then don't get repaired when the rebar rusts out. It's disquieting, to say the least, that Marianas Trench monument plans are being made in apparent secrecy. One would wish that the MVA were also more open in its plans for public monuments, allowed for public input.

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Short takes:

- It's the same old problem: not looking ahead. The governor does not support expanding the local food stamp program to the federal level because of the expense of sharing administrative costs, which is required by the federal government. Does he not realize that as more people receive and use food stamps, more food stuffs will be sold, more people will be needed to serve them, more income tax and gross receipts tax will be paid, and that, as a result, more revenue will be generated? Enough, presumably, to cover the CNMI share of administrative costs, and then some? Seems like some mathematical (re)calculations might be in order here.

- Speaking of which, has anyone done the math on just how many "gamblers" it would take to actually make a casino on Saipan successful - generating enough revenue to meet all its expenses including power, and still make a profit? Where would they come from? How many airline flights a day - incoming and out-going - would it take to bring them all here? How many airlines are there out there willing to do so? Would the airport runways need expansion to accommodate them? Are there sufficient hotel rooms? Is the assumption that the casino(s) would operate 24

hours a day, seven days a week? At least the reality check offered by the "expert" brought in by the governor - that the fees and charges being proposed by the legislature were way too high - was a start.

- While awaiting the official census figures and their implication for reducing the size of the CNMI's House of Representatives, it is instructive to note that Guam, with a population of 183,286, is governed by a unicameral legislature, consisting of 15 Senators, elected every two years for two-year terms, while the CNMI, with a population of only 46,050, is governed by a bicameral legislature nearly twice as large - with 9 senators elected for four-year terms, and 20 representatives, elected for two-year terms. [population figures from the web's CIA World Fact Book.]

- Our deepest condolences to Lt. Governor Eloy S. Inos and his family for the loss of wife and mother .....May she rest in peace. May time, prayer, the comfort of friends, ease the pain.