

10/21/11

It hasn't made "Google" yet, but it's exciting nonetheless: this small remote little-known place has its very own WikiLeaks! Who could ever have imagined such a thing? the CNMI - a group of small islands way out in the western Pacific - initiated into the realm of world powers with its own defiant so-far-anonymous purveyor of hidden truths! Spnwikileaks distributed copies, earlier this week, of findings by the Office of the Public Auditor regarding the conduct of CNMI Attorney General Edward Buckingham on or about August, 28, 2010, when he hosted a party for Covenant candidate for non-voting delegate Joseph J. Camacho.

The OPA report found that the AG committed several criminal violations, and recommended that the Governor release the report and publicly admonish the AG for his criminal behavior. Neither of these action has taken place. Instead, the AG has denied the charges and is ludicrously claiming that the leaked OPA report and all its documents are fake.

Describing the report's release as a "Principled leaking of information," Spnwikileaks notes that such principled leaking "has changed the course of history for the better. It can alter the course of history in the present, and it can lead us to a better future." We wait, with bated breath, for the next revelation.....

Tuesday's *Marianas Variety* offered two sharply opposing views on the "Occupy Wall Street" phenomenon on its op-ed page. From London, England's *Daily Telegraph* came a condescending rant against the protestors whom its commentator Brendan O'Neil called everything from hipsters, trendy banker-bashers and a gaggle of rich kids to "slackers cum elitists." They "just almost might be the most degenerate Left-wing movement of recent times;" they are "a tiny self-selected group of self-righteous mostly middle-class activists;" "they spend their time spreading all sorts of demented conspiracy theories about modern political life," he wrote.

Right next to it was a column by Nicholas D. Kristol of the *New York Times*. Kristol is more sympathetic - and more objective. He wonders why people who understood the protests in Egypt's Tahrir Square don't understand the protests in Wall Street. "There's a parallel sense," he writes, "that the political/economic system is tilted against the 99 percent," though the critical issue in the U.S. is economic inequity, rather than political inequality. In support he cites a C.I.A ranking that shows that the U.S. is more unequal a society than either Tunisia or Egypt. This inequality is harmful, slows growth, and can lead to bankruptcies and financial panic as well as early deaths and more divorces. Equality, on the other hand, would appear to promote and sustain growth. Writes Kristol, "I hope that the protestors have lofted the issue of inequality onto our national agenda to stay - and to grapple with in the 2012 election year."

Thank-you, Zaldy, for giving us both viewpoints so starkly.

It is more than a year before people in the U.S. will go to the polls to vote for the next president of the United States, yet the media is already full of stories about this or that candidate, speculation on the candidates' chances, reports on how much money they've raised, what they said in their latest speeches.....

According to former presidential wannabe Newt Gingrich, "As the campaign gets longer, you're asking a person, who's going to be sworn in in January 2009, to tell you what they'll do in January of 2007, when they haven't a clue - because they don't know what the world will be like...." And if they change their mind as circumstances change, they're accused of flip-flopping. "What's the job of the candidate in this world? The job of the candidate is to raise the money to hire the consultants to do the focus groups to figure out the 30-second answers to be memorized by the candidate."

Meanwhile, proposals for reforming the long, costly, drawn-out process, while plentiful - and much needed - are ignored. Gingrich, for example, proposed that instead, a weekly series of 90-minute "dialogues" be conducted among the major party candidates for nine weeks before the elections. By that time, any question of "what would you do" would be more realistic, and candidates could be expected to have a better idea of both problem and solution. The longer "dialogues" would give voters a better idea of where candidates stood than the brief sound bites and flowery rhetoric most candidates now use in their campaigns.

Local politics also needs reform. It is not too early to begin thinking about what most needs changing, and how to make it happen. The clock is ticking, for example, on re-apportionment of House seats to reflect the results of the 2010 census. So far, there's been no evidence that anyone is paying attention.....to that issue in particular, or to the problem in general.

There is much talk about the Retirement Fund's demise, and the inevitable end of pension payments in two or three years. But no one is providing any information about the fate of the life insurance and health insurance that the Retirement Fund also provides its members. At present, the Fund contributes to both programs for its members, with the members also putting in their share. But what will happen to members' life and health insurance coverage when the Fund disappears seems to be a total unknown.

There are bills being filed in the legislature - House Bill 17-77, for example, proposes that the government take over the responsibilities for the Fund's life insurance payments; another, Senate Bill 17-82, that health insurance coverage - if it means no change to existing government employees - be similarly provided. But where funds would come from to do so is not mentioned. And there've been no public discussions, no reports, no hearings; no opportunities offered to provide input, to learn what other options are being considered, might be available. One would think the legislature would, at the very least, invite comments from the Commonwealth Retirees Association.....

Short takes:

- New campaign posters are out urging women to call for help if they've been abused, know someone who is being abused, know of children being abused. The numbers listed are all 800 numbers - where, the posters say, callers will be directed to the nearest source of assistance. How hard would it be to attach locally-printed strips to the posters, listing the local phone numbers and hours of availability so that callers can get immediate help? Why make callers go through off-putting anonymous long-distance calls and a series of referrals first?

- The Marianas Visitors Authority has issued a Request for Proposal for security guards for some of the tourist attractions on island - the Grotto, Banzai Cliff, and Bird Island. It should, as has already been suggested, expand the RFP to include Suicide Cliff, the Last Command Post, Ladder Beach - all sites of recent tourist thefts.

It should also expand the RFP to include, among the duties of the security guards, ground maintenance of the site itself. The guards have little to do most of the time, except sit there. It would break the boredom and give them some exercise were they also assigned to walk around and pick up discarded cups, cans, plastic ware, juice containers, cigarette butts and other trash left behind by inconsiderate tourists (though it should be noted that trash cans for tourists to dispose of their own trash are few and far between).

- According to a story in yesterday's *Marianas Variety*, the mayor's office will be handing out treats on Halloween. No related activities are mentioned in the article. One wonders at the point of it all. Would it not be more fruitful to join with other groups and organizations and participate in the National Park Service's Trunks or Treat program at American Memorial Park? Just sitting there and handing out candies seems so mindless.

- The deadline for input towards the U.S. Navy's Environmental Impact Statement /Overseas Environmental Impact Statement for Mariana Islands Training and Testing is November 7, 2011. Details are available at < www.mitt-eis.com >. The deadline for input towards the U.S. Air Force's proposed Environmental Impact Statement for Divert Activities and Exercises (for improving an airfield on U.S. territory in proximity of the Philippine Sea - Rota, Tinian and Saipan's are under consideration) is November 10, 2011. Details are available at < www.PACAFDivertMarianasEis.com >.

- A recent National Public Radio program featured discussion of the power of prayer, and evidence was cited that indeed, appeals for prayers often did bring results. One of the speakers suggested that since prayer does seem effective, perhaps people should think about praying for the earth - for the protection of rain forests, the protection of endangered species, for the cessation of senseless killings of whales and dolphins and sharks, for preserving the ocean's health and the cleanliness of the atmosphere.

Along those lines, and admittedly long overdue, I should like to express my deep appreciation and sincere gratitude to all who prayed for my health; as the fact that I write these words testifies, they were indeed effective. Thank-you, a million times over!