

12/2/11

All the noise and bluster and threats and dire pronouncements with which our illustrious leader is opposing the announcement by the U.S. Citizen and Immigration Service that it will provide parole - on a case-by-case basis - to those covered under non-voting Representative Kilili Sablan's proposed H.R. 1466 is not only uncalled for, but also embarrassing.

The US CIS has not even put its announcement in writing - as either a press release, or on its web page. So, in the first place, what is at issue is only "word of mouth," not a formal statement. That is not to discredit the information that Kilili has provided - and was, indeed, verbally confirmed by USCIS officials. But there hasn't been anything in writing, yet. It is silly - if not downright foolish - to take up arms against a poorly-defined target.

In the second place, there is no hard data as to just how many people are eligible for the promised parole. Nor is there any data as to what the USCIS' approval rate will be. Fighting an amorphous foe would appear an exercise in futility, at the very least.

In the third place, USCIS' offer was announced as being good for only until the end of 2012. It is a temporary condition, not a permanent one. And Kilili's bill is just that - still a bill.

Last but not least, neither Kilili's bill, nor the USCIS, offer citizenship.

Under the circumstance, the vehemence would appear totally disproportionate to the facts at hand.

There are, nonetheless, two anomalies in the USCIS announcement. According to a report in the 11/26-27 issue of the *Saipan Tribune*, eligibility for this special USCIS parole includes immediate relatives of native-born U.S. citizens - regardless of the age of the native-born child - living in the CNMI as of 11/27/2011. Kilili's bill has the same provision, but with a cut-off date of 5/8/2008. Ordinarily, immediate relatives of natural-born citizens are not eligible for status until the child reaches 18.

It would appear, then, that non-citizen parents of a baby born in the CNMI on 11/26/2011 would be eligible for the parole, but non-citizen parents of a baby born in the CNMI on 11/28/2011 would not until the child turned eighteen. Whether this was intentional on the part of the USCIS is not at all clear. One can only hope that when the instructions on how to apply for this parole status are issued, these anomalies will be addressed.

Not so much an anomaly, perhaps, as an abomination, is the continued game of war that is being played out in so many theaters all over the globe. War - death and destruction - may help keep a burgeoning population under control, may provide fuel to a nation's economy, but in the end, war, killing, is murder. And murder - unlawful premeditated killing - is wrong. With few exceptions, there is no justification for the killing of a human being, the taking of someone else's life. Certainly, there is no justification for the anonymous mass killings of war - the bombings, shellings, shootings, of human beings who, in other garb, are parents, teachers, doctors, accountants, electricians - solely because one's "mother country" (ironic phrase!) declares them enemies.

Technology has turned what had once been localized conflicts between relatives, neighbors, tribes, or townships - fights it was often possible to settle through negotiation and the paying of tribute - into vast impersonal international battles controlled by political interests, greed, remote radar screens. In the process, costs have escalated to the detriment of national welfare, and gene pools have been devitalized.

The machinery of war is vast, and the challenge of dismantling it is daunting. But as every parent who has lost an offspring in battle, every family who has lost members in random shelling, every child who has lost a father or mother to war can testify, war has no positive values; it brings only pain, disruption, deprivation, suffering, turmoil.

Further, as every pot hole, every rusting bridge, every starving child, every AIDS sufferer, every dying cancer patient, every illiterate adult, every dirty river and polluted water lens can attest, there are millions of uses for the billions of dollars that are spent, throughout the world, on things military.

Thanks to last month's failure of the U.S. Congress' special panel to come up with an agreed-to strategy for reducing the U.S. deficit, the U.S. military is scheduled for a share of the budget cuts that were part of the bargain. While hawks in Congress and the administration are already jockeying for ways out of the agreement, there is no better time to begin to reassess the U.S.' military commitments and expenditures.

A fine example is offered by the situation in Iraq, where many thousands of quasi-military will stay behind as part of a diplomatic mission usually staffed by a few hundred employees.

Short takes:

- Where are the nominations for the Commonwealth Public Utilities Corporation? Why hasn't there been an outcry - loud protest - that a single individual is making all the decisions? Not that I mean to fault the present member, who seems to be doing a credible job, but that's no way to run a business! especially one as crucial as the utility company!
- The dilemma faced by Tinian's stevedore company - a story in today's *Marianas Variety* reports that the company was shutting down because it could not withstand the competition from small boats also carrying merchandise to Tinian - is interesting indeed. One is tempted to cheer the entrepreneurship of the small boat owners. But there is also, presumably, the economy of scale that the larger company can provide, as well as the ability to transport larger items. Where does solution lie? Would there were a way for co-existence!
- Kudos to *Variety* reporter Emmanuel T. Erediano for compiling the lengthy list of bills relating to the Retirement Fund that will be under discussion by Senator Jovita M. Taimano's as she and her special committee look for ways to keep the Retirement Fund alive. The list, which appeared in Thursday's paper, includes two Senate initiatives, five Senate bills and 13 House bills. What it shows, if nothing else, is the legislature's pre-occupation with micromanagement of supposedly autonomous government agencies. Not that the Fund doesn't need help, but help from legislators the majority of whom have no experience with investing, actuarial realities, and corporate management is the last thing it needs.
- Given the decrease in CUC customers due to the shrinking economy, and the consequent decrease in its revenue - as well as CUC's improved performance - isn't it about time that the practice of allowing the hotels to generate their own power was re-evaluated? If they came on-

line, CUC revenues would increase, thus, presumably, lowering the costs for everyone else on the system.....

- With all the criticism this column has heaped on the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service, it would be unfair if praise were not forthcoming for its flexibility in finding an administrative route to accomplish what the U.S. Congress failed to do before it adjourned. Despite the anomalies (see above), its intent to implement the provisions of the CNMI's non-voting Representative to Congress' H.R. 1466 is commendable indeed.