

2/10/12

Two opposite effects have been reported recently in efforts by various government agencies to cut costs. The Public School System is reported to be cutting its hours of operation, and raising thermostats to 78 degrees. Given that PSS doesn't observe austerity Fridays, cuts in the daily schedules would appear only parts of the general pattern, and so long as the results don't short-change students - as the Commissioner has assured that they do not - would not appear objectionable or particularly notable.

The decision to delay turning on the air conditioners, and to raise the thermostat in schools would not, however, appear to be part of the general pattern, and therefore is more noteworthy. All government agencies should be encouraged, if not required, to do the same!

Yet, turning off the aircon early in the afternoon, as is also being done in the schools, would appear rather Draconian. Couldn't this be done on a case-by-case basis, to accommodate after-school activities?

On the other hand, the recently aired proposal to eliminate scholarship funds for certain fields of study - again, due to a shortage of funds - would seem neither helpful nor noteworthy. In fact, the whole issue of who gets scholarships and why could bear re-assessment, reconsideration. The CNMI no longer has funds to continue underwriting everyone's college costs, as the subsistence allowances do. It is high time to take a more realistic approach, and award scholarships only to those who qualify as to both merit and need.

Providing subsistence allowances to all aspiring college students, as is done now, may keep the students out of the labor market - which is supposedly a good thing - but when funds are short, it makes more sense to focus on students in need who are able to maintain high grade levels, and thus are more likely to complete their college studies and contribute toward the community upon their graduation.

At any rate, it would be interesting - as well as helpful - to see a public posting, somewhere, of the actions, strategies, ideas that not only the various government agencies, but also individuals and families, have come up with for cutting costs in their daily lives, in their operation.....

Of late, it seems like almost every week there's another new restaurant opening up somewhere on Saipan. Some that have opened don't last very long, but there always seems to be another ready to take its place. Most of them have pretty good food, at least, and there are now enough restaurants that it almost seems one could go out to eat for days and weeks on end, and never hit the same one twice! Which is very nice as far as being a diner goes, but with only a limited number of diners, most of those restaurants aren't exactly over-flowing with customers. Every new restaurant that opens, after all, takes customers away from an already existing one.

Are restaurants easier to open than other kinds of businesses? Are there more skilled cooks than other kinds of retailers or service people? Since K-2 store closed, so far as we know, Saipan has no shoe repair place. It has no venetian blind repair place. It lacks a central source of "green" merchandise. There is no place to buy craft materials, like knitting wool, jewelry fixings, blocks of balsa wood, pieces of leather, and the like. Yet no is opening one of those.

Is it just that restaurant stock is easier, less expensive, to acquire - vegetables, meats, seasonings, etc?

There also seem to be several new grocery markets opening. There is no expanding customer base here either. There already are markets all over island. In fact, in the San Roque area, one was forced to shut down for lack of business when a new one opened a few blocks away. Here, it's not a question of locally available stock. Markets have to import most of the goods they sell. Where, what is the rationale?

Short takes: - The very first question casino supporters need to be able to answer - **and to date, have not** - is where they expect casino customers to come from. Furthermore, they also need to be able to tell the rest of the CNMI just how many casino customers they expect, and how they expect those customers to get here - given the CNMI's limited airline connections. Without answers to those questions, their claims that casinos will save the economy have no merit whatsoever.

- An idea whose time has come? They may not be available on island yet, but catalogues nowadays are offering small solar lamps for outdoor use along paths or driveways or on porches and patios. A reader forwarded an article that told of a family who, when they lost power, would bring those solar lights indoors at night, and then set them back outside to re-charge during the day. There are also kits available that provide small solar panels for installation outdoors in bright sunlight, like on a roof, together with wiring, LED lights and a switch that can then be strung to provide a light indoors. A good starting place for exploring possibilities is < <http://www.solarhome.org/solarlighting.html> >.

- Another suggestion submitted by a reader: why not have Saipan's Chamber of Commerce visit corresponding Chambers of Commerce in various cities throughout Asia, and have its members describe the benefits of setting up a small manufacturing and/or office center on Saipan to support their operations - be they in Hong Kong, China, Malaysia, or where-have-you. Among the benefits that could be mentioned: the application of American rule of law, comparatively low wages, vacant factories, an English-speaking work force, tax advantages, availability of transportation to Asia and USA, access to broad band communications, established supply chains, a trainable work force.....Of course, we all know there are disadvantages as well: a burdensome bureaucracy, a fickle law-making body, a floundering economy. But perhaps an influx of new businesses could at least improve the economy.....

- The *Saipan Tribune* did a funny thing with its Opinion Meter for this week, which asks readers to rate the crises facing the CNMI. Among the crises that were listed in what was originally submitted to the *Trib* were: "Legislative meddling" and "the administration's suffocating control." For reasons of its own, the *Trib* chose not to list those two "crises," however, and substituted, instead, "the economy," and "other."

- A correction and an apology: The correction: while the governor has 40 days within which to decide whether to approve or veto a bill submitted to him by the legislature, he does not have to wait the full 40 days to act. He can do so at any time after the bill arrives on his desk. The apology: we had envisioned the wrong race track when praising the mayor's idea of building four more baseball fields on island for use as professional training fields. We had pictured the area near the Marpi swimming pool - an area on the perimeter of Marpi, and already served by CUC. What was intended, however, was apparently the area near Cowtown and the new landfill. There are, it seems, significant archaeological resources in the proposed ball field area, not to mention the fact that it is part of the National Historic District. That we do not support.

- And an elaboration re the number of lawyers in the CNMI, mentioned in a previous column: a member of the Bar wrote, "There are indeed about 300 members of the CNMI Bar Association. However, about 100 are inactive, and another hundred are off-island. Of the approximately 100 active members in the CNMI, about 50 work for the government, leaving about 50 in private practice. That's about one lawyer for every thousand people, not an outrageous number."
- A resourceful reader reports that the Law Revision Committee is now putting the full text of court decisions on line, at < http://www.cnmilaw.org/court_opinions.htm >. Both Superior and Supreme Court decisions are available, beginning with the year 1996 for the Supreme Court and 1989 for the Superior Court.
- Another reader feed-back item, this time regarding parking problems at CHC: the reader wrote of an Arizona clinic that uses golf carts driven by volunteers which circle the parking area, and pick up anyone needing a ride to the clinic entrance, and vice versa. The key question: how many CHC clinic patients come to the various clinics alone, on their own? Enough to make such a service worth while?
- Reminders: Deadline for commenting on the National Ocean Policy Implementation Plan, at < www.whitehouse.gov/oceans > is February 27; deadline for commenting on the "National Fish, Wildlife and Plants Climate Adaptation Strategy," at < www.wildlifeadaptationstrategy.gov > is March 5.