

4/27/12

It's all rather reminiscent of the games of brinkmanship played by former Secretary of State John Foster Dulles in the Cold War, and later, former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger in the Middle East - the art or practice, as defined on the web, of "pursuing a dangerous policy to the limits of safety before stopping, typically in politics." Granted the stakes are a little lower - there are not whole nations at issue - but certainly, the game is the same: seeing how far one side can push the other before it backs down.

There's the game between the Attorney General's office and the Commonwealth Healthcare Corporation about access to Marianas Public Land Trustee's life-line of a credit offering; there's also the game between the AG's office and the CHC about the contract for managing billing and collections that the AG's office keeps finding new reasons to disapprove.

Then there are the games between the administration and the Retirement Fund. Unwilling to commit to paying its dues, the governor now claims that he has a solution to its problems - a return to Social Security and a bill that would gut the Retirement Fund of more of its dwindling assets. Today he revealed that he may try to stop the bankruptcy proceedings from continuing - because he is concerned about the costs - never mind the pensions of the retirees.

On a lower level, there are also the games at the Senate, with its members refusing to approve Sixto Igisomar's re-appointment to the Retirement Fund Board, refusing to pass the bill that would allow MPLT to provide CHC with a line of credit, among other things.

A letter to the editor in today's *Marianas Variety* suggests that the whole thing is part of a conspiracy to deliberately bring the CNMI to its knees so that its people will be forced to accept not only casino gambling but also the selling of public land to people of non-Northern Marianas descent. Whether just games, or "for real," the brinkmanship is unsettling, disturbing. The moves appear arbitrary, counter-productive, destructive, rather than helpful or constructive....

The governor's glib assertions that he has plans to fix the Retirement Fund would appear to be yet one more of the many empty promises he has made over the years - enough, now, that have not come to fruition, to make it difficult to give any of them any credence. Re-joining Social Security, for example, is no simple process, and would require substantial outlay of monies on the part of both government and government employees. Whether it could even include retirees is highly questionable. It would take, in any case, many months of negotiations with the federal office - and perhaps U.S. Congressional action - before it could go into effect.

Turning the plans of Defined Benefit members into Defined Contribution plans is also an empty promise. The CNMI's DC plan is a very poor one to begin with; DB members have nothing to gain by putting their money into it.

In the meantime, making the rounds of late: a new health threat to the CNMI:

Tina Sablan Disease (TSD): [tin-uh sey-bl n]

A progressive neurological disease characterized by a strong reinforcement of honesty, integrity, sensibility, respect, bravery, stoicism, and rationality as well as many other similar traits.

Infected hosts have been known to display heightened levels of intelligence. The disease presents itself in rational and sane individuals of any age and is not gender specific.

Patient Care: *All physicians have unanimously determined that the best treatment for Tina Sablan Disease (TSD) is no treatment at all. Letting the disease run its course within an infected patient is the best treatment. Recently doctors have actually begun encouraging its spread to other non-infected individuals.*

Natural Immunities: *Further studies have determined that unethical, self-serving and uneducated individual display a natural immunity to Tina Sablan Disease (TSD) and therefore have no fear of ever contracting the symptoms associated with Tina Sablan Disease. These individuals have garnered greater fear from the medical community than the carriers of Tina Sablan Disease. Accordingly, isolation for these individuals with natural immunity is highly recommended as doctors are still unsure of whether their immunity may be contagious.*

EXTREME WARNING: *If you come into contact with a person who is showing signs of immunity to TSD, please report him/her to the nearest clinic for involuntary confinement.*

It would appear to have been prompted by a remark made by the governor in response to former lieutenant governor Diego T. Benavente's suggestion that in light of the CNMI's worsening crises, the governor should step down. As reported in the 4/20 issue of the *Marianas Variety*, the governor said that Benavente "is contaminated with Tina Sablan disease."

It offers an interesting juxtaposition to the comment by *Saipan Tribune* columnist John DelRosario, who wrote, only two days earlier, "I often quiz why the elected elite and appointed lords are fearful of being infected with the virus of reason."

If it weren't for the fact that it involved Pagan, the Japanese proposal to bring their tsunami debris to the CNMI for re-cycling, and filling their containers with the pozzolan ash on the return trip has a certain appeal. The Japanese could be expected to actually mine the ash up there - unlike past promises - and the income from the venture would sure be a boon to the CNMI. But Pagan, more than being one of the Northern islands, is a very special island, with its pretty little harbor and black sand beach, former village, and many remnants of prior occupations. Debris and Pagan just don't go together!

Too bad there doesn't seem a way to dump the debris on Farallon de Medinilla! or that there aren't approachable shore lines on one of the other Northern islands! But rather than reject the plan altogether, the CNMI should, nonetheless, take the offer seriously. Certainly 'a bird in the hand is worth more than a bird in the bush' as they say. Instead of waiting for some "perfect" development scheme, the CNMI should work with the Japanese to see if there weren't some way to accommodate CNMI concerns while meeting Japanese needs on one of the other islands. Presumably, the debris will not be permanent, but will only remain there until re-cycled or otherwise disposed of.

Short takes:

- The Senate's on-going refusal to approve Sixto Igisomar's reappointment to the Retirement Fund Board is sickening. As Charlie Brown says, "a good man is hard to find." And Igisomar, from all reports, is, indeed, a good man - knowledgeable, conscientious, hard-working. His re-

appointment received the full support of members of the Retirement Fund Board and the administration - yet the Senate chooses not to listen. To use politics as the criteria for determining board appointments is shameful, especially for so critical a board as the Fund's.

- "Telling it like it is," as reported in today's *Variety*: the governor's statement to KSPN that he likes Kagman Elementary School principal Ignacia Tudela Demapan as the Republican candidate for non-voting delegate to the U.S. Congress because she is willing to be his candidate and she has a large family.

- More "telling it like it is:" Fred Kluge's new book is all about Saipan. It's not clear to what the title, *The Master Blaster*, refers. According to Wikipedia, there are not only song titles, but also fiction works of the same name, or it could refer to cricket or water coasters. Nonetheless, it's a fun read - trying to figure out who, locally, served as the model for which of his various characters. Though throughout, the book refers to the pull Saipan has on people, to the love of the island it engenders, it isn't really a kind book - it reads more like foils jousting everywhere, in all directions. Kluge's picture of the playing field is pretty accurate - and is described in pungent prose writ by a masterful hand.

- Tonight: Commonwealth Cancer Association fund-raiser Marianas March Against Cancer, 6:00 p.m., at Hopwood Junior High School.

- Tonight: 1st Annual Environmental Film Festival and Zero-Waste picnic at American Memorial Park's amphitheater, with the film *Addicted to Plastic* showing at 7:00 p.m.

- Tomorrow, all day: films at the American Memorial Park Visitor's Center in observance of Environment Awareness Month, starting with Dr. Seuss' *Lomax* at 10:00 a.m. and ending with "The Voices of Laolao at 5:30 p.m.

- Next week-end: The Friends of the Arts production of *Sleuth* on May 4th and 5th at 7 p.m., May 6, Sunday at 3:00 p.m. at the Dolphin Black Box Theater (Marianas High School T building).