

10/5/12

For some inexplicable reason, it seems to have been the CNMI's best kept secret: that the House committee's impeachment hearings are being broadcast live over TV channel 60 - AND they are available on-line - being streamlined via Glen Hunter's Facebook page. Why that piece of information has not been included in the newspapers' coverage of the hearings is hard to understand. Surely it isn't because they are jealous of the competition?

Another piece of information one would think the newspapers would provide to their customers - though admittedly not nearly so critical - is why both papers are running so late in their daily delivery schedule over the past several days. Is it late-breaking stories? Are the drivers on strike? Maybe it's their computer systems? But both at the same time? Surely the presses that they each use haven't both gone down? Makes the cynic wonder if they're being sabotaged.....

Yes, one can always read the papers on the web. But for one who regularly reads the paper with breakfast, doing so by computer just isn't the same. An on-the-web reading also causes one to lose all the paid notices of deaths, of federal documents availability, of agency meetings (which really should be run as "PSA's" or Public Service Announcements - that is, for free as a public service of the newspaper).

So much for the efficacy of the coconut wireless!

Similarly, one might think that there should be no charge for attending the upcoming debates of candidates for office being conducted by the Saipan Chamber of Commerce - since they, too (the debates) can be seen as a public service. On the mainland the costs for candidate debates are paid for presumably by the broadcasters (or the political parties themselves?). With no equivalent in the CNMI, the Chamber has taken on the costs, and then charged attendees to help cover them. Should there be a surplus, the Chamber applies it to its scholarship and educational programs. Though this year's debates will be held at the Multipurpose Center and not one of the hotels, the costs remain high, since the Chamber is footing the bill not only for extra chairs and for the PA system, but also for all the time and equipment involved in video-taping the debates, and for the airtime to replay the debates on tv.

The debates: Wednesday, October 10th, for senatorial candidates; Wednesday, October 17, for Congressional delegate, both at the Susupe Multipurpose Center. According to a note from the Chamber, though the debates [will] actually start at 7:00 p.m. sharp, the multipurpose auditorium doors are[will be] closed at 6:30p.m. "so as to not disrupt the candidates or the audience." There will be no debate for House candidates, because the large number of candidates just couldn't be accommodated, according to a Chamber staffer.

It would appear that those opposed to impeachment of the governor are doing their very best to drag out the House committee's process of identifying and confirming the charges by any and all means available to them. Some say that the goal is to delay it beyond the November 7 election, though it's not at all clear how things will fall out if that does happen. The same people will still be holding the same positions for another two months. How will the fact that some will not be

there in the next legislature affect what they do between October and January? Will it help or hinder impeachment efforts? Not being a political animal, yours truly can't tell.

But the fact of the matter is, that it is all such a waste of time. What the committee is doing - confirming the evidence, pinpointing the problems - is a process that will all have to be done again when - and if - the impeachment goes to the Senate. That is where the "trial" occurs. That is where evidence will be submitted, and countered, where the subpoenas will be served, testimony given. It serves no purpose to do all of that now. The House is only required to draw up the list of what it considers impeachable offenses; it is up to the Senate to decide whether or not they really are.

On the other hand, if exposing all of the background and all of the evidence manages to persuade the hold-out members of the House that enough impeachable offenses have occurred, dragging it out may be worth it. One would hope that the availability of the proceedings on line and on tv will help persuade the hold-out members' constituents as well

. At stake is another two years of the present level of corruption, incompetence and autocratic arrogance.....

Short takes:

- An astute observer has pointed out that impeachment, like an indictment, only means one or more charges have been made; that it doesn't necessarily follow that the person being impeached will be found "guilty." That's all very well for the purists, but the overwhelming amount of evidence to the contrary in this instance makes that unlikely - provided politics don't skew the results.

- A story in the 10/3 issue of *Marianas Variety* about the Department of Public Work's "Adopt a Highway" program neglected to provide a contact point for those who might be interested in joining the program. It's a worthy program. The numbers to call to join, help, or get more information: 235-9570, 235-5827.

- It was given only half a line in the middle of a long story in both papers: the 2013 budget, as passed, provides an increase in funding for the legislature - at the same time that the legislature cut all sorts of funding elsewhere. There's been no follow-up on just how much of an increase the legislature gave itself, or what it is supposed to be used for.

- Politics as usual: Facebook reveals that a CNMI government worker was ordered to remove the pro-Kilili bumper sticker from his car, which was parked in a government parking lot [or he'd no longer be allowed to park there], even though several cars on the lot sported "We support Governor Fitial ♦ and ♦ Ben & Eloy" bumper stickers.....

. - Yet another "mystery:" with whom does the Commonwealth Health Corporation's Chief Executive Officer have a contract? A story in the 10/5 issue of the *Saipan Tribune* notes that "The governor has not executed a contract for CEO Babauta." It also noted that CHC Board Chair Joaquin Torres said, "the current board is not a governing commission." Nor is the Finance office involved, according to the story. Yet the article said that Babauta is collecting a salary - and that he "was appointed the corporation's chief executive officer on October 24 last year." So, who's paying? And who appointed him CEO????