

On My Mind
5/31/02

One observer of the local political scene claims that the push to establish a homestead program in the Northern Islands is prompted by the provision in the CNMI Constitution that when the population of the Northern Islands reaches 1,000, the Northern Islands will become a fourth senatorial district and entitled to three senators of their own.

The theory, apparently, is that the Northern Islands senators would align themselves with Saipan's senators, ensuring that the Saipan members' present minority status would not recur.

The problem with this scenario is that there's no assurance that the third "outer island" district will not align itself with the other two (that is, Rota and Tinian), guaranteeing minority status for Saipan's members instead. As a Chinese proverb goes, "Be careful what you wish for!"

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Increasingly on my mind, as the Pope is pictured as an ever weaker, more tired, fragile old man, is why does he not step down, retire. It is, apparently, permissible. Why is he punishing himself so? What purpose does it serve?

According to an article datelined Rome, Italy, in the <I>Marantha Christian Journal</I> (found on the web) the Pope had been told, when he asked Vatican experts a few years ago about retiring, that the Catholic community would be unable to cope with two popes - one reigning and the other in retirement. It was feared that his charisma and strong personality would continue to influence his successor and other church leaders.

Other observers disagreed, speculating that the Pope would retire to a monastery in Poland, where he was born. That would be a lot different than if he stayed in Rome, they said. At the time the article appeared some two years ago, it was rumored that the Pope might consider retirement once Jubilee year celebrations for the Millennium came to an end.

Only four popes in the history of the Church have either resigned from or abdicated their office. The last time was in 1415, when Gregory XII resigned during the Great Western Schism in order to clear up multiple claims to the papacy.

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Another question: It is being alleged that a member of the media is also hiring out as a public relations consultant to politicians, some of whom are currently in office. Is this ethical? Since, at the moment, it is simply an allegation, specifics will not be mentioned. However, it is not inappropriate to restate a few of the tenets of the journalist's Code of Ethics. On the subject of acting independently, the Code states that journalists should:

* Avoid conflicts of interest, real or perceived.

* Remain free of associations and activities that may compromise integrity or damage credibility.

* Shun secondary employment, political involvement, public office and service in community organizations if they compromise journalistic integrity. (emphasis added)

* Disclose unavoidable conflict.

* Deny favored treatment to advertisers and special interests and resist their pressure to influence news coverage.

The Code is promulgated by the Society for Professional Journalists. And while the local chapter is all but defunct, its Code remains a useful yardstick by which to measure journalist conduct.

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How long is long enough? Washington Rep Pete A. Tenorio, claiming that cattle owners who graze their cattle there need more time to find alternatives, has asked the governor to intervene in efforts by the Department of Natural Resources to move ranchers from public land in Marpi that has been set aside as protected habitat. Tenorio mentioned fencing off habitat areas and/or delisting the endangered species as possible alternative solutions.

Though cattle owners once did hold permits issued by the Marianas Public Land Authority to use the land for grazing, those permits have not been renewed since 1998, in implementation of the designation of the area as critical habitat. Thus, not only are the ranchers breaking the law in grazing their cattle without a permit, but - due to inaction on the part of the government - they have already had more than three years to look for, consider, and undertake other solutions to the question of where to graze their cattle.

Guam lost its birds because of the brown tree snake. Will Saipan lose its distinctive birds because politicians don't take the time to understand the value and importance of protected habitats?

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Along the same lines, it's good, I supposed, that the athletic field and gym in Susupe finally have a paved parking lot. But it is too bad that it is so ecologically unfriendly. The black parking lot is already a heat sink; only time will tell how well it will deal with water run-off from heavy rains. As it is, the heat from the parking lot can be felt as one drives by. A better alternative would have been the approach used by the Fiesta Mall in San Roque, where parking spots are done in an open fret-work - letting rain water percolate into the ground - and the grass deflect the sun and heat.

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Last but not least of the questions "on my mind" this week: who is the Japanese billionaire who is reported to have bought Saipan's Nikko Hotel as well as Guam's Cocos Island resort? And how

come there's been no mention in the local media?

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A paragraph was inadvertently dropped from last week's "kudos." Once discovered, it was re-inserted (the marvels of on-line publishing!), but some readers may have wondered what it was that "removed breeding grounds for mosquitos and vermin." The missing paragraph read as follows:

"To Representative Andrew S. Salas, for initiating a beautification campaign in District #2. The judging is scheduled to take place tomorrow, with homes being rated on the cleanliness of the yard, general appearance of the house, foliage, and general appearance of outer surroundings."

Apologies for any misunderstanding that may have occurred!

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More kudos:

To the nameless reporter who wrote the article on U.S. Senator Edward Kennedy's proposed minimum wage bill on page two of the May 27 issue of the <I>Tribune</I>. It was unusually well written, comprehensive, comprehensible. But why was there no by-line?

To the students - and their teachers - on the creativity and execution evidenced in the many impressive works currently on display at the Arts Council on Capitol Hill. It's well worth the time to go see.

To the CNMI Museum's Acting Director for the display at the DFS Galleria. What a great idea! And what a great exhibit!

To the 22 CNMI students who have been accepted into this year's Junior Statesmen program. May their fund-raising efforts be equally successful!

And finally, to the Marianas Visitors Authority for up-staging Guam - a rare occurrence - by hosting the Irish soccer team prior to the World Cup in Japan. The CNMI "coup" made headlines in today's <I>Pacific Daily News</I> sports page (after the fact, of course. The Irish left Saipan a week ago.)