

On My Mind

10/24/03

With elections just eight days away, I find myself in an unfamiliar dilemma: having to make a choice from too many good candidates for not enough vacant seats. Ordinarily, the choice, at least for me, has been relatively easy. But this year, it's more difficult.

Among the five senatorial candidates, there are two I'd like to vote for. I've yet to decide which one it will be. In my precinct, there are again five candidates, of whom there are four I'd like to vote for, but the precinct only has two seats. Again, I've yet to decide which two to vote for.

As is always the case, there are also candidates in the other precincts I'd like to be able to vote for as well!

The large number of choices is due to the fact that CNMI politics are no longer confined to just two parties. In this election, there are both independents and members of a third political party also running for election. And, as it happens, it is candidates in those two components that have caused my dilemma.

I take that as a good sign, though. It means, as I see it, that there are more good candidates emerging - knowledgeable, capable, principled - who are willing and able to serve the community. Providing those are the ones who are elected, that circumstance should, at least in theory, lead toward better laws being passed, and that, in turn, would benefit the entire CNMI.

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Governor Juan N. Babauta's statement that he is taking orders from the Attorney General's office is interesting on two counts. (The governor announced earlier this week that on the advice of the AG, he was vetoing several appropriation bills, including the budget bill, that have been passed by the "rump" Senate.) In the first place, such a statement appears to give the AG more authority than the governor - a disquieting thought if there ever was one. Or is it simply that the governor does not agree, and is hiding behind the AG? One wonders, moreover, where his legal counsel stands in all this.

In the second place, it calls into question the credibility of the AG's office. When the appropriation bills, among others, were first submitted to the governor, on advice of the AG's office the governor "rejected" them, saying that with a court case in process, the AG had advised him not to accept the bills. But now the AG is saying that there's a possibility that bills submitted to the governor by the rump session may be valid after all, and therefore the governor should veto those he disapproves of. At least, one hopes that he is not vetoing them because they come from the rump senate, but because he has valid objections to the content of the bills.

And where does that leave the rest of the bills passed by the rump senate? If the appropriation bills were valid enough to veto, aren't the others valid as well?

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There is also evidence of lack of unity in the administration, in the continuing efforts by Washington Rep Pete A. Tenorio to put the CNMI's water problems on somebody's emergency list. (The latest is his effort to persuade the World Health Organization that Saipan's water woes should be declared a national crisis.) To begin with, the lack of potable water, and the shortage of water, are not new problems for the CNMI. They have existed since the beginning.

Secondly, a water task force already exists, and under the able leadership of the Lt. Governor, it seems to be doing a credible job in identifying priorities, determining solutions, and putting into action the necessary steps to resolve the problems.

Though publicly elected and not directly under the authority of the governor, the Washington Rep is expected to work with the administration and not at cross-purposes. It's true that the Washington Rep's role in Washington would seem to have been usurped by the governor on more than one occasion. And it's also true that Pete A. has a degree in hydrology. But it's too bad that he has chosen this path to get even. As the Lt. Governor has said, at this point, declaring a water emergency won't solve anything.

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Short takes:

- So now it's the salty water that is causing diabetes? So, at any rate, suggests an article in this past Tuesday's <I>Tribune</I>. The claim is based on the writings of a Dr. F. Batmanghelid, but nowhere does the article provide any substantiation of Dr. B's assertions. What are his credentials? Where did he do his purported research? Who published the book? How recently was the book published? Has he published in any of the recognized medical journals - where articles are reviewed by peers before publication?

Yet isn't it true that Saipan's water has always been high in mineral content, and that diabetes is a only a fairly recent occurrence?

- For the second week in a row, our single movie house again offered only "R" and "PG-13" rated films - full of gore, violence, and crudity. What a model, an inspiration, such films are to the populace! For this coming week the ratio has improved slightly - there are three "R" and three "PG-13" rated films, and - surprise, surprise - one rated "PG!"

- The governor is emphasizing the wrong syllable, to quote an old song. It isn't the permitting agencies that hamper development, but rather the unreliability of power, which seems to be getting worse, not better. In my area, there were three outages within one 24-hour period this past week. He ought to get on CUC's case, not CRM and DEQ and F&W and DLNR, all of whom are already working to make the CNMI more attractive through their efforts to protect the environment.

- It's not only the CNMI that gets bashed by misinformed mainland media. As reported in the

<I>Tribune</I> yesterday, AP White House Correspondent Terence Hunt, in writing about President Bush's visit to Bali, referred to Bali as a "bomb-scarred island" - as though devastation from last year's bombing were visible everywhere! The whole island's economy may have suffered, but bomb-scarred it is not.

- Rumor has it that a tourist got bitten by a fish recently, while the tourist was feeding the fish and the fish got eager. Apparently, it was not publicized because the fish in question was a baby shark. Nonetheless, the obvious fact that it is not safe to feed even baby sharks should be made public.

- JoeTen has recently gotten a big shipment of U.S. flags in various sizes and forms - they're for sale at the Susupe store. Would that JoeTen had also gotten in a variety of UN flags! I'd rather fly a UN than a US flag, at this point, but mine is wearing out.

-Last but not least: will the suit brought by Senator Paul A. Manglona against "rump" President Pete P. Reyes become moot after the November 1 election? It all depends on how the issues were defined. Another question: how possible is it, given Rota's present political climate, that anyone opposed to the Mayor's political party could gain a seat? A related question: will the presence of attorneys from the AG's office at the polls be able to make a difference?