Once again, Governor Benigno R. Fitial has shown that he is flexible, that he can and does listen to his constituents - at least in certain areas. This week, he announced that he will cut work hours to only four a week, instead of eight. That should make it more palatable, certainly, but one still wonders at the size of government as a whole. One also wonders at the underlying paternalism reflected in the sentiment that "You don't want to affect the livelihood of people. Definitely, we don't want a reduction in force," which Acting Finance Secretary Eloy Inos was quoted as saying in this past Tuesday's Variety.</P>

Once again, the governor has also shown, this past week, that he is willing to take on difficult problems, as indicated both by his decision to re-instate the moratorium on homesteads, and his ultimatum - in his determination to make the area less "seedy" - to Garapan businessmen that they keep their girls off the streets during week-ends. It will be interesting to see, however, whether the businessmen will oblige, and if they don't, whether the edict will be enforced.

But once again, the governor has also shown his tendency to act unilaterally, as in his statement earlier this past week that he wants to move Hopwood Junior High School so that the site can be turned over to a foreign investor for development as a hotel. Apparently, no one at the Public School System central office, much less anyone at Hopwood, was consulted before the governor made his announcement.

Not only are there huge problems in re-locating the school per se, as Principal Jim Brewer noted in an interview given to the Saipan Tribune on Wednesday, but there are other issues as well. For instance, given the shortage of public lands - as Fitial himself acknowledged in re-instituting the moratorium on homesteads - why should any of the little remaining public land be used to accommodate such investments? Isn't there enough privately-held land available? There is a big beach-front lot in the Tanapag/San Roque area that has been available for years. There is a large lot on the road going up Capitol Hill that would offer a wonderful view for hotel guests. There must be plenty of other private land available on which a hotel could be built.

If the governor is intent on improving the economy, why not help the community and the private sector, and insist that further developments be on private land? Investors seeking land in the CNMI should be pointed to private land holders, and the small amount of remaining public land saved for future generations.

Moreover, with the continuing reports of a decline in arriving tourists, and CNMI's existing hotels complaining about their low occupancy rates, where in the world does the governor - not to mention the investor - think more tourists are going to come from? Building more hotel rooms when the tourism industry is in decline, when available airline seats are limited, doesn't make much sense to me. Just look at the unfinished large Korean hotel at the airport. The CNMI doesn't need more half-built, abandoned, white elephants.

Moreover, public schools are not like chessmen, easily picked up and moved for whatever reason. The CNMI's public schools form an integral part of village life; in addition, they generate their own connections not only to the surrounding residents but also to the surrounding businesses. Uprooting them will cause disruptions not unlike the disaster that has occurred at Managaha by the removal of those rusted relics that kept its shoreline intact. The moral being: beware of unintended consequences!

<P align=center>***</P>

As was pointed out in Variety editor Zaldy Dandan's column "Variations" today, it is more than a little unsettling to be confronted with one decision after another for allegedly saving money without any details on just how, and how much, money will actually be saved. It sounds good to say phone lines will be cut, answering services cancelled, cell phones returned, agencies moved out of private rentals, the landfill contract cancelled - all in the interests of saving money.</P>

At some point, however, depriving the private sector of all that revenue can't help but hurt government revenue, as business gross receipt taxes, and income taxes, business licences and other fees and charges paid to the government by the private sector all decline. Has anyone calculated the trade-offs? Even the Bank of Hawaii's senior management is quoted as saying, in today's Tribune that the administration needs an economist to help make these decisions. The argument that there is no money to pay an economist is short-sighted. A good economist should be able to save the government enough to pay his or her salary and then some.

Does the governor actually have a plan? Or is he just hastily applying band-aids all over the place? It would be nice to know..... And I would repeat: beware the unintended consequences. <P align=center>***</P>

Regardless of how or to whom she is related, Roselle D. Calvo is a wonderful writer! She's got a great sense of humor, a clever way with words, and, to top it off, she's literate - she knows her nouns and verbs, singular and plural agreements and all those other fine grammatical points. There's a letter of hers in today's Variety and there was another lovely one in this past Monday's edition.</P>

While the letters make some pointed anti-Harry (Blalock) comments, they are neither slanderous nor demeaning - nor are they venomously personal. In fact, I found them quite humorous. Roselle has a sharp wit.</P>

Harry, on the other hand (if you've read or heard his 3/10 comments) is not only mean in his comments, but is also way off target. In addition to taking on Roselle, he takes on the Variety for publishing her letter - as though what her letter said reflected the paper's position and philosophy! He seems to have totally lost sight of the purpose of letters to the editor. The letters to the editor section is meant to offer readers a place where they can air their views about issues of the day.</P>

Many papers print a statement of policy as to what will be accepted and what will not in the way of submissions from readers, some going so far as to make explicit that the opinions of the

writers do not necessarily reflect those of the paper. The Variety doesn't quite do that, but it does print its letters to the editor in its "Forum" section, which is sub-titled, " a meeting place for our opinions...and yours." Most people would understand this to say that not all submissions in that section reflect the opinion of the editor. But apparently, Harry does not see it that way. He seems to hold the Variety directly responsible and accountable for every word in every item in the "Forum" section.</P>

Newspapers, of course, vary in their approach to selecting letters to be published, and one may question, on occasion, the inclusiveness or exclusiveness of their decisions. But on the whole, I would venture to say that both local papers take as neutral a stand as island politics permit. In addition, both have caveats in their policy statements to the effect that they reserve the right not to publish a letter, as well as to edit it "for length, accuracy or clarity" as the Tribune puts it.</P>

While I did not have the patience to track down, on the web, a history of "Letters to the Editor" sections in newspapers, nevertheless, I feel confident in saying they have a long and venerable history. It's only natural that not every letter will please every reader, but that is not the point of publishing such letters. They offer readers a voice they otherwise might not have, and there's no denying they do add spice to the editorial page. Could one say that Harry doesn't like spice? (It should be noted I was not able to access this week's Blalock comments in time for this column.)

<P align=center>***</P>

Short Takes:

- I see Northwest Airlines has announced it will begin charging for seats that offer more leg room a \$15.00 surcharge to passengers for the privilege of sitting in the exit row, or certain aisle seats. What Northwest Airlines hasn't announced is that it is also charging for alcoholic beverages on its overseas flights \$5.00 for liquor, not sure of what for beer and wine. Meanwhile, consumers continue to suffer, without a pay raise in sight. At least it looks like the threatened pilot's strike has been averted.
- The Humanities Council occasionally sponsors Chatauqua performances where actors present talks as though they were famous historic figures we've had Mark Twain and Teddy Roosevelt, among others, come to Saipan as Chatauqua performers. I think it would make for an interesting tourist attraction if the CNMI could produce some Chatauqua performers of its own, starting, for example, with Chief Aghurub, Hurao, some of the early missionary priests, perhaps even Amelia Earhart. The Humanities Council could sponsor contests for scripts, and for actors in conjunction with the Museum, or the Historic Preservation Office, or various school drama groups. Performances could be held in American Memorial Park, or the multi-purpose center and if admission were only by purchased ticket, proceeds could be split among sponsoring agencies. It should be designed, not as a one-time thing, but as an on-going production to relay local history to tourists on a regular basis.
- If you've ever wondered exactly what time it is, there's a place on the web that not only tells you, but does it in terms of "Chamorro time" as opposed to eastern, or pacific, or mountain time. The web site is <a href="http://nist.time.gov/.</">http://nist.time.gov/.</>/P>

Movies this week: 2 R's, 2 PG 13's, 3 PG's. It's nice to see that Hollywood Theaters acknowledges, albeit rarely, that films with Filipino stars, like "Close to You" - perhaps the best of the PG's this week - also have appeal here.</P>