

On My Mind
11/10/06

Dyed-in-the-wool Democrat that I am (my parents were ardent supporters of Franklin Delano Roosevelt), I am, of course, happy that the Democrats came out ahead in the U.S. mainland elections. But I am even more elated that Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld will be stepping down. Finally, there's hope of a more reasoned and intelligent approach to Iraq than the president's past policy of "stay the course"!

In terms of the effect of the Democratic win on the CNMI, it's tempting to say things like 'you reap what you sow' or even 'I told you so.' The CNMI, in the early years, made no effort to align itself with one party or another. In fact, it stayed uncommitted, neutral, working with both sides, with whoever would listen, whoever would support it, on issues that came before the Congress. It was not all that affected by national partisan politics, and it did not have to start over every time there was a change in party. Moreover, there wasn't that much similarity between what local Democratic and Republican parties represented and what their counterpart on the mainland represented to begin with.

Unfortunately, under recent island Republican administrations, that changed. The local party took great pride in proudly proclaiming that it now was a part of the national Republican party. Of course, that did not make Democrats here, or in Washington - to the extent that they paid any attention at all - happy. Moreover, the closer affiliation has backfired - not only because the CNMI now finds itself faced with having to work with the "other" party, but also because the CNMI has found itself tainted by Republican Tom DeLay's alleged illegal lobbying practices.

In commenting on the outcome of the election, Guam's non-voting delegate to Washington Delegate Madeleine Bordallo is quoted by the *Pacific Daily News* as saying, "To the extent that Guam has friends on both sides of the aisle, our agenda will make progress." The CNMI would do well to make sure it, too, makes friends on both sides of the aisle.

Veteran's Day is being celebrated today. I can remember when it used to be called "Armistice Day," to celebrate the end of World War I and what has turned out to be an evanescent phenomenon called "peace." [evanescent: "soon passing out of sight, memory or existence," according to the *New American Oxford Dictionary*, 2d edition.] The League of Nations was formed to promulgate that peace, and failed.

Now we have the United Nations. And it too seems to be failing, at least so far as keeping the peace is concerned. There is no call for the UN to try settle the disputes in Darfur, in Timor, in Iraq, Lebanon, Tibet, North Korea, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Israel. Rather, it is the U.S. that is being called upon to step in, as though the U.S. should, or even could, take them all on, as though the U.S. were the world's savior.

The UN is not called upon - as it should be - because, according to a professor of international law at Boston University (and my brother-in-law), "The UN is what the members want it to be - governments are in charge of every UN organ, save only for the potential role of the Secretary-General in mobilizing public opinion. Kofi Annan has tried to mobilize the public on many fronts, only to thwarted by recalcitrant governments - including at times & on different issues, all five of the veto-wielding permanent members of the Security Council: the US, China,

Russia, France & the UK."

If governments are the stumbling block, it would appear that the general public- those who elect government officials to their positions of control and authority - must become far more vocal, must demand that its representatives stop the role playing, the politics and the greed, and focus on finding ways of peaceful co-existence. So far, writes my brother-in-law, "the broader public is not engaged; "conservative" leaders have effectively equated multilateralism with weakness in the public perception." There is something called a UN Association that focuses on issues of global concern but its mission appears to be more educational than political.

A more grass-roots movement - similar to Greenpeace, perhaps? - is sorely needed.

Back on the home front, so to speak, one of the solutions to the problem of how to increase CNMI tourism revenues that keeps cropping up is to target wealthier tourists - the point being that per person, they would spend more dollars here than do the younger, less well-to-do tourists. The challenge is how to do that. How does one upgrade a destination that's long existed as accessible to anyone and everyone?

My guess is that accommodations would need to be more luxurious - large, well-appointed rooms with complementary fruit baskets and fresh flowers, great views out the windows, excellent room service, and deluxe special services, such as health spas complete with sauna, hot tub, masseurs, personal trainers, and, of course, outstanding food and entertainment. What little I've experienced of such accommodations, they're usually set off on separate floors dedicated to the well-to-do.

It might even necessitate partitioning off parts of hotel beach front for special guests.

Numerous activities for such people are already available on island - from scuba diving and trail walking to golfing, sight-seeing and museum visiting. Though here too effort would have to be made to cater to a more exclusive category of tourist.

Naturally, all that costs a lot of money. And involves extra staffing. And then it would take intensive targeted advertising - not at the usual trade shows, but in exclusive magazines, like *Conde Nast*, or *New Yorker* or the *International Herald Tribune* or whatever else the moneyed classes read.

Given the high costs, and the dearth of investment dollars at the moment, is this something the Hotel Association of the Northern Mariana Islands could work on as a cooperative project of some sort? Or that the Marianas Visitors Authority could make a last-minute pitch for at the DoI conference in Hawaii?

It's a great idea. And it could work. If money could be found.....

Short takes:

Department of Public Safety Commissioner Rebecca Warfield was the featured speaker at this past week's Chamber of Commerce meeting, and while annual - uncontested - elections, which also occurred at the meeting, received major coverage, Warfield's presentation received very little. And that's a pity. Her description of procedures she is instituting to bring the police force to maximum effectiveness and efficiency, to improve the force's morale and esprit, to meet the community's needs and expectations, was most impressive - informative, open, clear,

sometimes humorous and sometimes rueful, and very heartening. She showed herself to be personable, level-headed, perceptive, dedicated. Warfield's appointment as the first female commissioner, and as she admitted, without a law enforcement background - though with a law degree - was initially greeted with much skepticism, doubt and concern. But based on her presentation to the Chamber, the choice was a good one, and both the Department and the Commonwealth are bound to benefit under her leadership.

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The October issue of the *Commonwealth Register* is finally out. Worthy of note: proposed amendments to the Smiling Cove Marina regulations; proposed amendments to PSS policies regarding Special Education Services; emergency regulations for the control of stray and feral dogs on Tinian and Aguiguan. Copies of the *Register* can be consulted at the Attorney General's office, at the Law Revision Commission.

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Speaking of law, sure wish the legislature would pass a law outlawing those big noisy firework blasts that sound like major explosions. Not only are they dangerous, but the sound is enough to give one a heart attack, to wake sleeping babies. There is no reason for such noisy explosives - it's not cultural! - and the thought of being subjected to them through February is both aggravating and frustrating. Save a life! Stop the blasts! And while at it, please also make it illegal that any such fireworks be set off within 50 feet of a residence, church, school.

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A change of law that is definitely needed is the one that excuses drivers who hit - or kill - pedestrians on the grounds of the "pedestrian's failure to yield to an oncoming vehicle." Excuse me? Particularly here, where there are so few sidewalks, and marked crosswalks are so few and far between, how can anyone uphold such a unbalanced view of car vs pedestrian? It's the car that's lethal. It is the car that should yield way, under every circumstance!

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Maybe it could be done by regulation instead of law, but also needed is provision for allowing pets to be transported to and from the CNMI. At the moment, Cape Air does not allow transportation of pets. Nor does it allow shipment of such things as wheelchairs - unless the person is a "known shipper with an account." Isn't that discriminatory?

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Sure seems ill-advised, to put it mildly, that the Board of Education would require higher Praxis scores of CNMI teachers than do many of the stateside schools. Especially since, for any number, English is a second language. Demoting - and cutting salaries of - those who failed by just a few points seems grossly unfair and unnecessarily punitive, particularly since some of the affected teachers had, up until then, been considered among the best. Perhaps it's time to re-evaluated the whole Praxis process?

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And last but not least, support your zoo! The Saipan Zoo is offering year-long passes - that include special treats and further discounts as the zoo develops - at bargain rates. But the bargain rate is only available through November 31. Contact Maribel or Plumeria at 322-5711 or 322-5118 for further information.

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New movies: One PG (animated humor), one PG-13 (horror thriller). The rest: an uninspiring fantasy comedy rated G, a crime horror rated R, three more PG-13s - another horror

thriller, an action thriller, and an action drama.

"On My Mind" can also be found on the web at <http://net.saipan.com/cftem-plates/omm/index.cfm>, at www.chamorro.com or at www.cnmi.net (just click on "News & Weather"). If you missed a column due to an overfull mailbox or whatever, you can find it in the "Archives" section.