What a grim week! The titular head of the CNMI, at a formal press conference, announces to all and sundry an adamant refusal to negotiate with members of the U.S. Congress, and as if that were not enough, the CNMI Supreme Court hands down a botched decision on redistricting. Poor people of the CNMI! Victimized by the legislative branch when it failed to pass an initiative allowing for an extension of Article XII leases; victimized again by the executive branch's inflexibility; and victimized yet again by a poor decision from the judicial branch. When all three branches of government fail, where does one go from there?

Apparently, Governor Benigno R. Fitial does not read the papers - or else he is insensitive to what they reveal. As headlined on the front page of the August 6th *Marianas Variety*, only seven of the twenty-one candidates for the legislature in the upcoming election this fall are campaigning as Covenant Party members - clear evidence that the Covenant Party's stance is no longer supported by either its former members or any new ones. Yet despite the lack of support and endorsement, our illustrious leader persists in taking a position that, it is increasingly obvious, is counter-productive to the best interests of the CNMI. Not only that, but his unwillingness to compromise also violates cultural norms. Such an attitude on the part of the head of the CNMI is dismaying, indeed.

The CNMI Supreme Court, inexplicably, did an extremely shoddy bit of work in reaching its decision about redistricting. It said that because it realized the need for an early decision, the essence of the ruling was being released now, though a detailed analysis would not be available until later. Yet it released its decision - that Saipan should field an extra election district - the day AFTER the legally-established cut-off date for the filing of candidacy for office. Seems no one involved in reaching that decision did his/her homework, checked to find out what the deadline for candidate filing actually was.

As told to me by the court clerk, rulings of the court ordinarily go into effect upon their issuance - unless specifically stated otherwise. With no "otherwise" stated, that means the ruling is now in effect. Which leaves the Board of Elections - not to mention hopeful aspirants - in a dither.

The gist of the court's decision - that a new election district should be established, thus adding two more members to the 16-member House of Representatives - is also disheartening. Given the state of the economy, the profligate spending of most members of the House, and the intent of the petitioners in this case to reduce the number of House members, adding two more instead is bitter medicine indeed. Unless the 18 members would be forced to live under the budget established for the existing 16 members......

Nor does it help that the coconut wireless has it that the new district's lines were drawn to provide opportunity to a former legislator residing in that new district to run in the upcoming election. It should be noted that Chief Justice Miguel S. Demapan formally dissented specifically from that part of the decision that deals with the creation of the five districts.

Last I counted there were 9 candidates running on as independents - an interesting turn of events where not so long ago, running as an independent was unheard of. Some of the

independent candidates have bigger families behind them than others. With the separate viewpoints among the independent candidates, I doubt they'll come together and pool resources to campaign as all being on the same "Independent" ticket.

I've heard at least one such candidate tell me - if my memory serves me right - that he does not intend to mount a huge campaign, with pocket meetings and beer flowing every night and other such inducements to vote-getting, but will be low key, trusting to the voters to distinguish between the good and the bad, the productive and the non-productive, the reasonable and the unreasonable, the do-ers and the do-nothings.

With all the other breaks with the status quo that seem to be in the air, let us hope that it is not too much to expect that voters, themselves, will also act more independently - and vote not for family or free beer or handouts of one sort or another, but for candidates capable of doing what legislators are supposed to do: promote and protect the interests of the CNMI and its people.

Short takes (in no particular order):

Frank Oliver, author of the "The Addict - a short story," which characterizes the CNMI Government as the addict, the CNMI's "ordinary people" as the children of the addict and the drug to which they are addicted as artificially cheap foreign labor, and which appeared in both local papers two weeks ago, told me last week that he'd written that item eight years ago! Pretty astute observer!

*

The Marianas Visitors Authority has once again revealed its inability to grasp basic principles of tour site management by objecting to the charging of fees by Tinian for access to its wildlife park. As Tinian resident Dr. Arkle, Jr., points out, the charging of fees is the rule, not the exception, for most tourist attractions around the world, and it certainly does not keep them away. Rather, it engenders in them an appreciation of the value of the attraction. While it might be difficult to charge tourists for access to beaches along CNMI's shoreline, there are a few places where collecting a fee would be logistically simple on Saipan - such as access to the Grotto, where the CNMI should long ago have instituted an access fee. And, after all, the CNMI already charges for access to Managaha. So why not Tinian? It's the economically feasible way to go. Wake up, MVA!!!!!

*

The CNMI could stand to take lessons from its southeastern neighbor Kosrae. As reported in the *Marianas Variety* this past week, to cope with its anticipated budgetary shortfall, Kosrae's leadership has agreed to (a)implement a sales tax, (b) eliminate 102 government positions, and (c)impose a 5% across-the-board pay cut, leading to a balanced budget for FY 2008. The CNMI has only half-heartedly taken one of these steps. What is it Kosrae leaders have that CNMI's leaders lack? A spine, maybe?

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Also in the *Variety*, a report that another Micronesian neighbor, Palau, is about to install 196 pre-paid power meters, with another 125 on the waiting list. The power works only so long as money is in the meter; when the money runs out, the power cuts off. Pre-paid meters have been discussed for use in the CNMI, but that's as far as it ever got. Again, what is it CNMI leaders lack?

While it does have some "bumps" (due to insufficient editing), Sportscaster Bob Coldeen's new book, *Bumps in Paradise*, makes for interesting reading. The old-timers will nod fondly at memories the book evokes; for all others, it might bring more appreciation of the paradise of which he writes. The book is for sale at Hamilton's, or by contacting Bob directly at KSPN, 236-2222.

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And while it isn't new, it was to me: Juan N. Babauta's unfelicitiously-titled *Homeland* magazine, which I saw for the first time this month, though it has been out since January of this year. I'd like it better if it had a more traditional table of contents, and if all the articles clearly indicated authorship. In general, Babauta himself, associate publisher and editor Charlene M. Tudela, and contributing writers Andrew Salas and Catherine U. Sheu write most of the articles. While not political per se, the articles tend to focus on government issues, such as PCB's, the minimum wage, immigration, and, in the latest issue, an interesting take on medicaid in the CNMI. Copies are free, come out the first of every other month, and are available in JoeTen stores as well as at Tudela Enterprises.

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On the other hand, the magazine *MP* sub-titled "CNMI's premier magazine," IS new - the first issue came out in early July. Considerably more substantial than Babauta's magazine - with about three times the number of pages - publisher Ed Probst's first issue covers a wide range of topics from tattooing, land ownership, island challenges and wedding tips to blogging, betel nut, martial arts and dining out. Comparable in price to *Pacific Magazine*, the magazine is for sale at various outlets, including JoeTen and Bookseller.

If one also counts *Beach Press*, the CNMI now has more glossy magazines than it has local newspapers. An interesting turn of events.

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If you missed it, you might want to go back to the August 6 issue of the *Trib* or the August 7 issue of the *Variety* and read entrepreneur and long-time resident Tony Pellegrino's "Acres of diamonds under our feet (2)." In it he offers to personally counsel and assist anyone genuinely interested in setting up a new business for him or herself. It is a most generous offer and those willing to make the commitment should run, not walk, to get in line. In what could only have been co-incidence, entrepreneur Walt Goodridge's column in the August 8 issue of the *Trib* spells out "how to be an effective coach." Funny juxtaposition!

*

In the interests of open government, it should be noted that it is not the regular staff of the Department of Labor that has enabled it to clear 3,000 old labor cases, as was implied in the 8/7 issue of the *Variety*. Deanne Siemer, wife of Howard Willens, and also an attorney, has been working for several months on reducing Labor's backlog of cases, and it is largely due to her efforts that those 3,000 cases have been resolved.

*

I've been asked to note that Argosy University, Hawaii campus, is having an informational meeting on Tuesday, August 14 from 5:30-7:00 p.m at Café in the Park. The University offers on-line courses leading to degrees in business administration and education. Web site: < http://www.argosy.edu/hawaii >.

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New movies: only one, another serial: "Rush Hour 3," rated PG-13 and ranked low on the

performance scale, for a total of 6 PG-13's and one PG.