

On My Mind
3/21/08

It didn't make headlines, as the governor's fairy tales usually do. This time it was buried on page 6 of last Thursday's *Marianas Variety* - the story that the governor had sent a team of three scientists to Pagan to evaluate the feasibility of developing its geothermal energy to produce electricity. To quote the article, "The governor said that if Pagan's geothermal energy could be developed to produce electricity, the CNMI's difficulties in providing a stable power supply will be addressed."

They just might - for Pagan. But for the rest of the CNMI? I don't think so. I've yet to hear of a single installation powered by geothermal energy that has been piped anything like the nearly 200 miles - across or around Anatahan and under the ocean - that stretch between Saipan and Pagan.

What a waste of money! And particularly in the face of the governor's request to all agencies to cut their budgets, to scrimp even more as the fiscal year approaches mid-year without a budget.

And if it was federal money that was spent, the feds should be ashamed of themselves as well, for squandering tax-payer money!

Because it's only fair to look at the Senate as well as the House, I attempted, this week, to at least skim all the Senate bills that have been introduced so far. But I didn't get very far. The legislature's site for access to its bills runs as though honey or molasses has been poured into the system! I have DSL - not the fastest, mind you, but still - but that didn't help. It was painful beyond belief to try and access the bills one after the other of either the house or the senate.

Which makes Representative Joseph J. Camacho's site all the more attractive. It takes jumping through a couple of hoops to get there, but his site < www.camachocnmi.com > is SO much faster than that of the legislature! So, please, won't someone take the gumminess out of the legislature's site, or won't some senator please offer access through an alternative site?

Senators have introduced 20 bills so far - or at least, that's what its page shows on the legislative site. Thirteen of them were introduced by Senate President Pete P. Reyes. I skimmed seven of them before I gave up. Senate Bill 16-1 and 16-5 made no sense to me, due to seemingly poor wording and editing. S.B. 16-2 would authorize the Youth Congress speaker to appoint honorary members to government boards and commissions, and provides that their membership would cease at the end of their term. S.B. 16-4 would relieve first-time home owners from paying fees for obtaining safety-code clearance (It's not clear why only this fee should be waived). S.B. 16-7 would make not

carrying one's driver's licence with him/her an infraction instead of a misdemeanor (so how would the policeman know that you really did have one, but not with you???) S.B. 16-6 would require insurance companies to notify the Motor Vehicle Bureau if drivers cancelled their auto insurance, so the MVB could rescind the car registration. And S.B. 16-3 puts the onus of upholding the employment affidavit on the employee rather than the employer. There are six more.

Senator Henry H. San Nicholas has introduced three bills, Jude Hofschneider has introduced two, and Paul Manglona and Paternor Hocog one each. They can all be found at < <http://www.cnmileg.gov.mp/index.cfm?pageID=321> >. Click on "status" and then on the bill number (in red) to get at the text. Happy waiting!

Kudos to the *Variety* for printing the list of initiatives that have been introduced by the House so far, along with a brief description thereof. They appear on page three of today's issue.

The full text of these is also available on Representative Joseph N. Camacho's web site (see above).

The Senate has introduced eight legislative initiatives, six authored by Senate President Pete P. Reyes, one by Senator Luis Crisostomo, and one by Senator Paul Manglona.

I'm not sure how typical the rate and number of introduction of initiatives is of past legislatures. Judging from Senate Initiative 16-3, introduced by Reyes, some at least are "re-treads" - this one, within the text, reads, in effect, that the members of the 14th Legislature approve the particular initiative at hand.

In any case, except for those affecting the submittal of the budget, the size of the legislature, and the term of long-term public land leases, the rest are not critical and should be set aside until more immediate problems are solved.

It simply defies belief that the majority of those 20 legislators up there on the hill can continue to dawdle away their time and whatever energy they may have on relatively mundane issues while the CNMI goes deeper into debt every day, and unscheduled power outages continue on a near daily basis. What will it take before they address the 'elephant in the room'?

The same, of course, could be said about the governor/the administration, which has once again displayed its utter inability to recognize real opportunity - even when it is offered on a silver platter, as it were.

The governor did not even deign to attend yesterday's briefing on a proposal by the Pew Trust - a large and well-known charitable institution - to bring fame and fortune to the CNMI. The Pew Trust has offered to establish the second largest marine sanctuary in the world in the Marianas around its northern

islands of Maug, Asuncion and Uracas - islands that sit idle and unused at the moment. Establishment of the marine park, or sanctuary, would bring untold economic benefit to the CNMI, as research centers are established and researchers themselves take up residence in the CNMI.

The sanctuary would also bring the CNMI world-wide attention, attracting interest from the entire scientific community - and the accompanying media outlets - to the programs the project would offer.

The governor has gone so far as to say, according to today's *Variety*, that at this time he is not interested. To argue that he must first consider the commonwealth's valuable natural resources and all the options without even listening to this one - which is here and now and real - is foolish, short-sighted, ignorant. There are no other options waiting in the wings. The Pew is no fly-by-night investor. The CNMI has nothing to lose and everything to gain by endorsing the Pew offer.

Most people know and recognize that the oceans are in trouble, and that fish stocks are, in many areas, declining. Establishment of a marine sanctuary in waters known, at the moment, to be still relatively pristine, would constitute a major contribution to the welfare of the entire universe - and Fitial turns his back?

His narrowness of vision, his narrow-mindedness, his "Non Invented Here" attitude, must not be allowed to prevent the CNMI from benefitting from this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

It would make more sense if the governor, instead of turning his back on promising opportunities, would do a reality check, and start developing ways to privatize as much of government as possible, as quickly as possible, so that government employees who were trimmed from the budget could find similar work in the private sector. Of course, this would necessitate allowing increases in the minimum wage so that government workers would accept such jobs.....But at least there'd be jobs.

He could also win brownie points if he were to tell the Commonwealth Development Authority to stop harassing small businesses like Fred Nosek's Seaspray Marines, and force it to accept the Department of Public Land's promissory note in favor of Nosek.

It is, after all, the private sector that provides the revenue that feeds the government.

Coming up this week: a meeting to introduce the Municipal Neighborhood Watch Committee at the Multipurpose Center in Susupe Tuesday, March 25 at 6:00 p.m.; the Humanities Council's 6th annual Covenant Day debate - this year on non-U.S. citizens serving on CNMI juries - on Wednesday, March 26 at 6:30

p.m. at the American Memorial Park Theater; a joint HANMI-Beautiful CNMI! benefit ukelele concert at the World Resort on Thursday, March 27 at 7:00 p.m.

Last but not least, in the Easter spirit, anyone interested in helping others might want to consider volunteering a few hours a day to take the Commonwealth Health Center Volunteers' gift cart around to CHC wards. For more information, stop in at the Volunteers' gift shop at CHC.