

On My Mind
5/09/08

The biggest news of the week: the U.S. President has signed S. 2739 into law!!!! That, for those who may have lost track of the numbers, is the "package" bill passed by the U.S. Congress that includes the bill to federalize CNMI immigration and to grant the CNMI a non-voting delegate in the U.S. House of Representatives.

There's no time stamp on the press release from the White House announcing the event, but it obviously occurred after the two local papers last checked the news wires before going to press last night, and this morning.

In any case, seems like celebration is called for - among foreign workers because the end is finally in sight in the long struggle for assured fair and equal treatment, and among islanders because the CNMI will finally have an official voice in the U.S. Congress.

Also called for is praise, recognition, and honor to those who made it happen: Wendy Doromol, former CNMI teacher and strong, brave, determined, persistent, tireless leader in the fight for immigration reform; and Pete A. Tenorio, persistent in his own right, who steadfastly fought for the status of non-voting delegate for the CNMI.

What comes next? As Doromol put it in her blog < <http://unheardnomore.blogspot.com/> >, "It is time for the CNMI government to work in unity with the federal government to set the CNMI on a path towards prosperity; to work to unify all of the people who call the CNMI home.

"We have to work to monitor the progress on setting policies to ensure that they are in the best interest of every person who calls the CNMI their home. Everyone deserves to have a seat at the table in negotiations, including representatives and advocates of the guest worker community. "

We would hope that the governor - and his advisors - will see reason, and decide to funnel the money, the time, and the effort that would be consumed in filing suit against implementation of the law, or in seeking amendment to the now-passed law, and instead direct that money, time and effort towards working with the various federal agencies in writing implementing regulations that would be acceptable to all parties.

The controversy over the proposal to designate three of CNMI's northern islands as a monument continues hot and heavy - such long letters, and so many, in both papers! Let me try to dispel some more of the misgivings. There is concern that not enough time has been provided for a thorough discussion, that people feel pressured. It is true that not enough information has been made readily available. Much has been there, but one has

had to dig for it. But can the issue be postponed? Will the opportunity still exist months or years from now? In theory, yes. In actuality, I doubt it.

What we have, at the moment, is an out-going president who wants to add a jewel to his crown, so to speak; a respected, moneyed, international non-profit dedicated to the environment willing to underwrite costs; and a site not yet spoiled by greedy commercial fishing interests. Will those three factors occur simultaneously again? Not likely.

There is concern that the declaration of a monument through the Antiquities Act is the wrong mechanism. The alternative is a declaration by an act of Congress. Don't we all know how long that can take? How hazardous, risky, the route is? How many detours and false trails, how much excess and unwanted baggage, that can bring with it?

It may seem backward, but in this case, as I understand it, the time for negotiation comes afterwards. The President declares a monument, and the rules and regulations follow. And that's where the CNMI will have its opportunity to define what it will or will not accept.

Perhaps the offer was not made in the most appropriate manner, did not include some of the key people, did not take the traditional approach, was not sufficiently forthcoming. But that is not reason enough to reject the project. It is, after all, the project that is important, has meaning, that offers hope, not others' missteps.

What is being asked of the CNMI is that it be open-minded, flexible, creative and imaginative, willing to grasp a golden opportunity when it presents itself, to take advantage of an offer that would bring the CNMI international recognition and attention, attract tourists, stimulate the economy, help fishermen, and last but not least, help preserve and protect the marine environment so critical to the earth's health.

The CNMI can be, do, all those things - if it wants to.

Among the headlines this past week: announcement that yet another contract for lobbyist services has been handed out by the administration - this time to the tune of \$25,000 for six months' work - "to secure at least \$15 million in congressional appropriation to help a devastated local economy cope with ... economic losses" due to the garment factory closings and federally mandated minimum wage increase, according to the [Marianas Variety](#). Of course, that's a lot less than the 12-month contract for \$180,000, that has just lapsed, that was issued to keep Congress from passing the minimum wage and immigration federalization.

But one has to wonder whether the new lobbyists are going to be any more successful than the previous ones were [not], how much more, in one form or another, the administration paid out in that failed effort, and how much more the administration plans to pay out this time. One has to wonder where all that money is coming from - and how much better spent it might be on-island, on un-paid local obligations to CUC, to the Retirement Fund, to the Commonwealth Health Center, to the Public School System.

One also has to wonder - radical thought! - whether giving that money directly to

our Washington Rep to spend on lobbying from and through his office wouldn't be far more effective.

Short takes:

Because unsolicited proposals are, apparently, unacceptable to CUC, Telesource's offer to provide one of its generator to CUC is being ignored. So, apparently, is the Arkle proposal to install a self-contained nuclear power generator. When circumstances are as dire as they are, wouldn't you think CUC, the legislature, the administration, would welcome, and give serious consideration to all viable offers????

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The silence about what will happen to the CNMI Washington Rep's office building-cum -residence is deafening! Since the U.S. Congress provides office space for its members - including the non-voting delegates - there'd be no point in the CNMI's continuing to pay for its house there. Even though the real estate market is weak right now, the Marianas House was bought many years ago, and one would expect appreciation over time would still provide a satisfying rate of return for the CNMI. The challenge is to make sure the profits are wisely used, and not left for the governor to expend irresponsibly, hiring yet more people.

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A must-read is the March/April issue of MP magazine, particularly the first article which offers not only useful information but even a map about the monument proposal, and the second, a fascinating article by former Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Interior for the Office of Insular Affairs David Cohen, in which he recounts what changed his mind about the federalization of immigration in the CNMI. Great issue, Ed!

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All those used rubber tires everyone is fussing about. Couldn't they be used on island? Like, shredded, and used in roads? Cut, punched or stamped into floor mats, belts, gaskets, shoe soles, dock bumpers, muffler hangars, shims, washers? As artificial reefs? In retention walls? What if the money used to ship the tires off island were used to help someone local buy a shredder, and find applications for the stuff on island? Wouldn't that be better for the economy? CDA, are you listening?

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Upcoming event: May 10th, 10:00 a.m., NMPASI parking lot (on Middle Road, the first building north of the Guala Rai Road traffic light), Garage Sale to fund provision of shade and other improvements to the courtyard at the CHC Psychiatric Unit; \$5 raffle tickets are also being sold with original sculptures by Barry Wonenberg as prize.