

9/28/12

The unscheduled inspection of the CNMI's only hospital by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid services could not have come at a better time. The hospital is in a shambles, as the oversize headline of one paper put it, yet there's no sign that anyone is concerned, that any action is underway to resolve the situation, that there's even a plan for how to fix its many problems. Hopefully, the findings from Medicare and Medicaid officials will be scary enough to force the powers that be to act - and act fast - to begin to restore sanity to the operation of the hospital. That may, in turn, make a shambles of the budget, but the proposed budget - however it is put together - isn't much more than a fantasy in any case.

It seems clear that the first thing that is needed is to replace CHC's CEO - to put someone in there who knows how to administer an agency. The second thing is to replace the Board's chairman, and put someone in there who is able to put a concern for CHC above a concern for his ego. Those steps are up to the governor's office.

The third thing that is needed is to pull the private medical providers together and ask their assistance in keeping the hospital functioning until it can build its own staff again. It would be in the interests of the private medical providers to do so, one would think, since they make use of the hospital and its services for their own patients. This, too, in the absence of a functioning CEO, would be up to the governor's office.

Next, and this would be up to the House, would be to identify and turn over to CHC enough funding to allow it to operate. Likely sources of funding: de-activating the many offices of special advisor to the governor, cutting the legislature's generous allowances, an across the board cut of all government agency budgets. The latter may be drastic, but not nearly as drastic as is a non-functioning hospital and medical services center.

It is inconceivable that the powers that be have allowed the hospital to reach its present stage of non-service, where foods are not available for patients, chemicals are not available for blood tests, instruments are not available for diagnoses, where even doctors and nurses and x-ray technicians are not available, when the hospital is the only source of medical care for so many of the people on island.

As the coconut wireless has it, the problems have been building for some time, but clearly the magic math that said \$5 million was enough to operate on as a "private" corporation when it took \$38 million to function as a government operation was the crowning blow. Though a true private corporation may still be the best answer for the CNMI's hospital, this version clearly isn't working

. And if the governor doesn't take immediate action to begin to correct the problem, that's one more impeachable act the legislative committee can add to its list - the endangerment of the lives of every one in the CNMI.

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The budget crisis may have taken the impeachment process off the front page of the papers, but one hopes it is only temporarily, and that, once the budget is disposed of, focus on the House committee's efforts will once again be spotlighted.

It was more than a little disappointing to have Commonwealth Utility Corporation's attorney nit-pick the House subpoena for CUC officers to appear before the House committee, leading to the

non-appearance of said CUC officers. The attorney could, in the spirit of cooperation, have allowed the CUC officers to appear - since it was, after all, at their request that the date had been originally been set. To not do so was mean-spirited and extremely uncooperative.

The House committee is undertaking a serious and major task, for the first time in CNMI history. Though said to be unnecessary, it is attempting to hold hearings and to solicit testimony. It is attempting to do so with care and fairness. It needs all the support it can get - not stone-walling, delaying tactics or similar counter-productive responses.

Every day that the present administration is allowed to continue is another day of degradation of the CNMI's economy and welfare. The empty promises, the underhanded deals, the placing of inept people in high places that are the "trademark" of this administration hurt the CNMI not only locally, but around the world. Investors visit, but don't come back. Those that do come back eventually leave, disheartened and disgusted. Doing business in the CNMI is simply not attractive any more.

One feels sorry for the members of the House, and their families, who fear retribution if they were to speak out against the governor. But those members should know that if they do speak out and the governor is impeached, their lives will be better, because government will no longer be as corrupt, and the economy will turn around - and that those who helped that happen will, in turn, also be helped.

And those House members who are unwilling or afraid to speak out - for whatever reason - should also understand, should also realize, that by not speaking out they are condemning the CNMI to further corruption, mismanagement and lawlessness. These are a cancer in the government structure, and their perpetrator must be removed if the structure is to survive. To delay this process only allows the cancer to get bigger. The sooner it is removed, the sooner the CNMI can look towards meaningful recovery.

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- Another impeachable offense is the refusal by the governor to allow the Garapan fishing basin to be the site of the Garapan farmer's market for which federal funding has finally been approved. The fishing base has long been talked of as the appropriate site for such a market. It is centrally located. It would offer tourists a new attraction. Tourists would be able to walk to it from Garapan hotels. It has lots of space - for parking, for tents or booths, for kiddy rides. It would provide farmers and fishermen - and artisans - with a permanent base from which to sell their produce. It has an existing building that can easily be converted for use as part of the market. What's not to like?

But the governor, always intent on getting his share, has blocked development of the site as a farmers' market because he wants to pander the site to a major investor - who, over the past six years, has yet to appear.

The Garapan fishing base is the logical, natural, popular, ecologically feasible and widely-supported place for a central farmers' market. It could be expected to provide a real boon to the economy - which the governor is deliberately blocking. The Department of Lands and Natural Resources should not give up its position that it is the only place that makes sense for the market.

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Short takes:

- A good example of why monopolies are bad: IT&E has announced that it will be increasing its Internet fees because it is upgrading its baseline access speed. "Amateur" users of the Internet, who've been getting Internet at a speed of 768 kbps, as of January 1, 2013, will be charged an additional \$10.05 and get a speed of 1.5mbps. IT&E offers no choice in the matter. Either the customer pays the extra \$10.05, or s/he doesn't get Internet. Many customers, including yours truly, don't need the extra speed - and can't easily afford the extra fee. But an appeal has, so far, not been responded to.

- Robert and Gigi York, former curators of the Marianas museum, are on island to talk about their just-completed book, *Slings & Slingstones: The Forgotten Weapons of Oceania and the Americas*. A presentation will be made Wednesday at American Memorial Park, presumably at either 6:00 or 6:30 p.m., though time of presentation was not known as of this writing. It is expected that copies will be for sale at a reduced price that evening.

- Retirees are fortunate that NMI designated judge Frances Tydingco-Gatewood is so pro-active! Let's hope she is successful in finding a way to force the CNMI government to start paying its large and long-standing debt to the Retirement Fund.....

- The *Marianas Variety* reported earlier this week that Lt. Governor Inos referred to tax rebates as being "already committed to tax payers" and therefore unavailable for use in budget calculations. There has been no clarification as to what, precisely, was meant. Rebates haven't been paid in several years. What makes this year different? Is rebate payment another of the empty promises being made as part of the election campaign?