

On My Mind
by Ruth L. Tighe

Well, the hearings (in front of committees of the U.S. Senate, House of Representatives) are over. Now comes the waiting, to see what effect, if any, the CNMI statements and testimony had on Congressional Committee members and on the legislation they are proposing, to see how successful those members will be in persuading the full House and Senate to support their efforts.

Intimidating and chastening as the experience may have been for members of the CNMI delegation - to walk through those historic halls of gilt and marble, to be confronted with such powerful national figures, to see aides and assistants scurrying to provide information, amenities - and regardless of the outcome - the experience nevertheless does have a bright side. It offers an opportunity to begin some much-needed reform of the political scene at home.

It's fairly obvious that it will not be sound reasoning, pure logic that will determine how the U.S. Congress responds to the presentations made by the CNMI, no matter how straightforward, how persuasive, how rational those presentations may have been. Rather, the responses will - to a considerable extent - be determined by the pressures of party loyalties, by the strength of special interest groups and lobbyists, by the debts and obligations the members of Congress owe each other, and even by the content of prejudicial, outdated, irresponsible stories manufactured by the media.

Though members of the CNMI delegation may find this frustrating, nonetheless there is benefit to be derived from the situation. It only requires that the members of the CNMI delegation - particularly its legislative members - take some time to look at themselves, to compare themselves with the members of the Congressional committees, and to ask themselves: is this the way we pass laws, make decisions? Do we ignore the facts, turn off reason, reject advice, and instead cast our votes based on political expediency, on pressure from special interests, on personal or family considerations? Are we as manipulatable as it appears are the members of the U.S. Congress? Do we pay as little attention to those whose concerns and interests we are supposed to protect as do some of the members of those Congressional committees?

Island politics are very intense. And since constituencies are so small, pressures from family, neighbors, special interests can become quite burdensome. But unless lawmakers - as well as administrators - develop the strength, courage, and will to act according to reason and logic rather than political expediency, just as the CNMI is apt to be short-changed by the political expediency of the U.S. Congress, so will the people of the CNMI continue to be short-changed.

The testimony presented by government officials, the statements made by HANMI, the Chamber of Commerce, SGMA constituted a fulsome, pointed and instructive summary and description of the current state of CNMI affairs. No doubt the presentations will all be preserved as parts of the official record of the hearings by the U.S. Congress. It would be useful, however, if those presentations were also collected and published locally as a single volume, for use both as a general reference source, and as a resource in countering similar situations in the future.

Even more value could be derived from the hearings if those government officials in attendance were inspired to become more responsible, responsive and other-directed in carrying out the responsibilities of their positions as a result of their attendance.

Ironically, there is hope that the take-over threats of the U.S. Congress will not materialize - at least during this session of Congress - because of the political make-up of both the House and the Senate, rather than the persuasiveness of CNMI arguments. Wouldn't it be nice if, on the home front at least, we could take pride and comfort in the assurance that our legislature does better?

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Speaking of politics, the final slate of candidates for office that has just been released - now that the deadline for nominations has passed - sure is fascinating! There was a time when running as an independent was certain failure - when only those on either the Democratic or Republican ticket were voted into office. But not anymore! And this year there are not only Independent party candidates, but also candidates for yet a fourth party: the so-called "Reform" party.

Yet, strangely enough, the addition of two more parties doesn't mean that there are, in every case, two additional candidates to choose from. For the single Saipan Senate seat that is open, there are only two candidates: incumbent Republican Juan P. Tenorio, and Reform candidate Ramon S. Guerrero. For the House seats in Election District Two, there again are only the Republican incumbents, Diego T. Benavente and Oscar M. Babauta, and Reform candidates Anicia Q. Tomokane and Vicente H. Sablan. No Democratic candidates, no Independent party candidates.

Whatever the reason for the lack of Democratic party candidates in those two races, no doubt the Reform party expects Democrats to support its Reform candidates. And if Democratic party voters don't support the Reform candidates, that would appear to leave the Democrats disenfranchised. Will they just not vote at all? Or will they switch parties and vote Republican? What a choice to have to make!

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While the Democratic Party may not yet be quite ready for burial, the thought brings to mind an item that appeared in an Israeli newspaper some months ago. The item reported on the burial of a couple, and noted that their two coffins were placed in the same plot, one above the other. According to the article, "this procedure of using one plot for two burials is to become standard in all new Israeli cemeteries," presumably due to a shortage of land.

The CNMI is also short of space for cemeteries. But topographical conditions may not lend themselves to the use of a single plot-double coffin procedure in all areas. Nonetheless, the idea is certainly worth considering. One would hope that the practice would apply only to burials of members of the same family.

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Last week's comments on the 15¢ tax on video tapes and movies was too little, too late. The very day the item appeared, Saipan's local delegation voted to repeal the tax. It now goes to the Governor for his review. There seems little likelihood the Governor would disapprove the action. Nevertheless, my comments still stand.