

On My Mind  
4/6/01

With a Legislature that has not hesitated to be defiant, arbitrary and capricious whenever it felt in the mood to be so, it comes as no surprise to see the Senate playing all sorts of games with the House proposal to repeal P.L. 11-69 - the law that requires all foreign workers who have worked here for three years to leave the CNMI for six months before their work permits can be renewed.  
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Still, it would be nice if someone would provide a rationale for the Senate's arbitrary and capricious behavior in this instance, when so much is at stake. So far, none has emerged that has any real merit.

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Concerned about threats that U.S. Immigration policies would be imposed on the CNMI, CNMI Senators are saying, "We don't want to appear wishy-washy, as though we were changing our minds again about the use and presence of foreign workers in the CNMI." It is the same fear that prompted the passage of P.L. 11-69 in the first place.

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There comes a time, however, when the CNMI Senate - as well as the House - must be willing to be honest enough to acknowledge that imposing U.S. Immigration policies on the CNMI would be disastrous to the local economy, and to be courageous enough to stand pat on the issue. There is, after all, incontrovertible evidence of the need for foreign workers, amply supported by all components of the private sector. There is even growing evidence of the reliance on foreign workers by the U.S. mainland economy itself.

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But if the CNMI's Senators need further support for reversing their position, they have only to look at the actions of the Bush administration since its inauguration. There, reversals of policy - such as the denial of healthcare coverage for repetitive task injuries, the withdrawal from peace-keeping negotiations between Israel and the PLO, the refusal to honor the Tokyo protocol limiting emission of green-house gases, and cancellation of aid to foreign agencies that support abortion have affected not only the entire country, but also the entire world.

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If Bush can change his mind, what are the CNMI Senators afraid of?

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As this "goes to press," seems the Senate has agreed to a compromise bill that would postpone the effective date of P.L. 11-69, but word is that the House may not accept the Senate compromise, in which case all of the above remains pertinent.....

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The headlines about unpaid government power bills have receded, but the questions linger. Not the least of them: Are CNMI agencies metered? And if not, why not? Particularly as many government agencies now occupy separate quarters in what were once individual homes on Capitol Hill, metering should present no problem. Electric - and water - meters should, in fact, already be in place.

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While some form of electric metering is said to be possible from the pole, the only reliable way to monitor use of power is through meters. If agencies are to be held responsible for their own power consumption, they must be provided with accurate recordings of that usage on a regular basis. Which is possible only if the agencies are properly metered.

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Reduction in power costs, as well as reduction in power use, will only occur if each agency is not only given an accurate record of its own power consumption - but is made to pay for that consumption out of its own budget. Only then is there any likelihood that office thermostats will be raised to reasonable levels, that the absurd sight of government employees in long-sleeved sweaters will no longer offend the eye, defy logic.

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Many people refuse to read the <I>Tribune</I> because of its relationship to the Tan Holding Companies, and its consequent bias. There's no question about it, the paper's content is decidedly one-sided. Nonetheless, it is often worth reading anyway. For example both papers issued supplements in observation of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Northern Marianas College's establishment.

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But only the <I>Tribune</I> made mention of the college library, its archives and its Pacific collection. The <I>Variety</I> supplement said not a single word about what some would claim is the most crucial component of any educational institution - the references, research materials, texts, and commentaries, housed in libraries, that form the backbone of higher education.

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The choice of editorial commentary and feature stories taken from the news wires also reflects well on the <I>Tribune</I>.

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On the other hand, the editorials in the <I>Variety</I> are far stronger, far more thoughtful and cogent than those in the "other" paper. The <I>Variety</I>'s willingness to speak up and speak out - intelligently and thoughtfully - against the powers that be is admirable. Of course, the paper also has a bias of its own.

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I would take exception, however, to the position taken by the <I>Variety</I>'s editor-in-chief in his "Variations" column in today's paper. In the column, Zaldy Dandan supports House Local Initiative 12-7, which would increase the terms of House members to four years, raise their salaries, and have them run on an island-wide basis. Dandan quotes, with a straight face, the text of the proposed initiative that says the result of the Initiative would "attract the very best and most competent citizens in the commonwealth to become candidates for the Legislature."

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Yet the members of the CNMI Senate already have four year terms, already have higher salaries, and already run on an island-wide basis. Can anyone honestly say that the Senate represents "the very best and most competent citizens in the commonwealth"? And if it doesn't work for the Senate, how can it be expected to work for the House?

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Moreover, if one house of the legislature is already elected on an island-wide basis and already has members with four-year terms, what's the point of having another house with the very same characteristics?

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Four-year terms in the House also eliminate the opportunity to make mid-term changes to its composition, should that become desirable.

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The Governor seems to be finding it necessary to veto more and more bills sent up to him from the legislature. In the past, he seemed more willing to sign even weak bills, pointing out to the legislature the bills' shortcomings, and identifying needed corrections. At least that way, time and effort spent by the legislators was not entirely wasted - at least the intent of the bills made it into law.

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But apparently neither have members of the legislature taken the necessary corrective actions on bills the governor did sign, nor have they made any effort to improve the quality of the bills they continue to send to the governor for his signature. With four legal counsel available to members for help and consultation, the continuing stream of sloppily-drawn-up bills is more than troublesome.....