

On My Mind

11/1/02

The coconut wireless has it that some people on island are already experiencing payless paydays: people holding federally-funded contracts. Some have not been paid in so long that they are considering leaving island because they can no longer afford to live here. These people are experts, specialists in their field. Once they leave island, their skills will only be available at a much higher cost, since it will be necessary to pay equivalent experts for their travel in coming here and their living expenses while on island as well as for the work they are asked to do here.

The question is, why aren't these people being paid? Federal funds - in theory at least - are not supposed to be intermingled with local funds. Federal funds are not supposed to be appropriated for other than those activities for which they were specifically granted. So - in theory - the money owed to those holding federally-funded contracts is there. And if it is there, why aren't those people being paid?

Is this a case for the public auditor? or the Federal Inspector General? or?

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There's also some noise on the coconut wireless about late refunds and rebates earning interest - that since the government charges interest to those who are late in their tax payments, it only makes sense that the government, being late in its payments, should pay interest to the payees.

If members of the legislature haven't put that issue on their agenda yet, they might want to do so, now rather than later. If the government is forced to pay interest on all the refunds and rebates it has not yet paid out, that would only add to the indebtedness the government already faces. But a law establishing that no interest would be paid in these cases could save the government considerable money.....

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Hundreds and hundreds of school children - including some very smartly-dressed cadets - many parents and teachers and a handful of government officials - including the governor - marched along Garapan's main street last Friday evening in an impressive show of support for the month's observance of Domestic Violence Awareness.

Unfortunately, the only apparent observers were tourists and other shoppers who were accidentally in the area. Perhaps that was because what was publicized was that Friday evening's observance was to be a "vigil" (something static) when it turns out that what it really was was a parade (something active), with drums and chants and smartly-strutting marchers.

No doubt just the act of participation got the message on all the t-shirts and banners - "It's not my tradition. Is it yours?" - across to those directly involved - all the students, teachers, parents, and members of the Department of Public Safety who provided escort. But the boldly assertive

message could have reached a few hundred more people, if the event had been more accurately described. A pity.

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It is, according to Efraim Camacho, head of EFC Engineers and Architects, a first for his firm, if not for the entire island: the application of acoustic design principles to an auditorium-type structure. Thanks to the firm's resources and knowledge, the multi-purpose center in Susupe has recently been transformed from a noisy, echoing, impossible place to hold a meeting or put on a performance to a model of acoustical design.

Acoustical tile has been added to the ceiling, baffles have been added to the walls, carpeting has been installed, and sound-absorbing banners strung from the ceiling. The difference in sound refraction is impressive. Not only is there less need for a microphone at all, but neither are there the reverberations and distortion that had made hearing anything in that building difficult, if not nearly impossible. In addition, the appearance of the modifications is most attractive, completely changing the ambience of the place.

The change was not cheap, said Camacho, but he also acknowledged that not every situation would have called for as extensive a modification as did the multi-purpose center to provide improvement in noise control.

The change is so dramatic, the improvement so notable, that it would not seem inappropriate to install a plaque honoring the architect who put it all together.

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The tragedy in Moscow, where the poison gas used to overcome the Chechen hostage takers killed more than a hundred hostages as well, is but the latest example of what can happen when hazardous materials are not properly handled. According to a report aired over National Public Radio, the gas was designed to be used in open spaces, and apparently no one, in deciding to use it in the enclosed theater, made allowances for the differences.

Carelessness. The death of more than a hundred innocent victims - not to mention the death of some 50 rebels. Proving once again that no hazardous material is ever totally "safe," under control.

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CNMI Citizenship Day will be celebrated on Monday. It is interesting to reflect that only those born in the CNMI after November 3, 1986, became citizens of the United States at birth. Everyone else has acquired citizenship status later in life - some well after they'd achieved adulthood.