

On My Mind
8/24/07

I know this isn't the best time to launch a tirade about the power problem - what with the Governor off-island, the legislators either out campaigning or letting up because they are now "lame ducks," and legislative hopefuls making all sorts of campaign promises they may have no intention of keeping. But having to cope with all the power outages - be they scheduled or un-scheduled - is getting downright tiresome. It also gets more and more depressing to realize that the economy is not going to improve until the CNMI is able to provide a reliable source of power, because legitimate investor are not going to want to have to generate their own power. Not to mention how depressing and frustrating it is that no one seems to realize how critical it is to actually fix the power problem. Or how depressing it is to think that it may not be until after the new legislature is sworn in and gets organized that anything will be done at all.

How difficult would it be review the many previous requests for proposals and invitations to bid that have been issued for power generation over the years, and put together one that was fair and reasonable, and that offered a workable solution in a minimum amount of time? Now that the Office of the Public Auditor has finally found the last proposal as unworkable as was obvious from the beginning, what are people waiting for?

And while it appears that formation of a Public Utilities Commission is also an issue, no progress is being made there either. What were the legislators thinking of, setting up such stringent requirements that they can't be met? When are they going to fix that problem?

Six more months before there's hope of improvement. Sigh.

One businessman on Saipan feels that the federal government ought to come and "bail us out." With a monthly power bill in the neighborhood of \$40,000, he's getting pretty desperate. The feds, he believes, should make CNMI's power situation their priority, not immigration reform. He believes that if they do not, the CNMI's high power rates will cause greater and greater hardships, causing more and more businesses to close, revenue to go down further and further, the Commonwealth Health Center to shut down, the Department of Public Safety to cease functioning - until chaos erupts and the feds, including the Army Corps of Engineers, are forced to come in to "rescue" the CNMI from total collapse. Wouldn't it be cheaper, he argues, for them to step in now, rather than later?

If it weren't for the poor reputation of the Army Corps of Engineers, I'd be all for federalization of the CNMI's power system. Unfortunately, I don't think there's any way that could be done. As for more money from the federal government, I'd have to argue, that that's not a very reasonable expectation, or a very likely one. After all the money that has already been made available to the CNMI? Not to mention the technical assistance and management training and grant aid that's already been given to the CNMI? Give more to an administration that is openly hostile to the federal government? That refuses to negotiate? That shows no sign of accountability, credibility, responsibility? To a government whose legislature is as unstable and inconsistent and weak as that of the CNMI? Not very likely!

Lack of power may seem a bigger crisis than the plight of foreign workers. But the federal government isn't really responsible for seeing that the CNMI's power plants work as they

should. That is up to the CNMI. The feds have done their share by providing considerable amounts of funding, training, assistance. The federal government is, however, responsible for the nation's security, for upholding international treaty responsibilities as to citizens of foreign countries, for protecting the rights of those foreign citizens as well as its own. Because the CNMI has failed in an area for which the federal government is responsible, its "intervention" is legitimate. And besides, under the Covenant, that's always been within the federal government's rights.

Short takes:

The August issue of the *Commonwealth Recorder* contains the usual notice of extension of the emergency declaration regarding volcanic activity on Anatahan; proposed regulations for the Commonwealth Board of Accountancy; an Office of the Attorney General Legal Opinion on the Application of P.L. 15-71 to Federally Funded Positions (it says the law does not affect them); Executive Order 07-09, Re-organization Plan #1 of 2007, which removes the Labor and Immigration Identification System Office and all functions related to certificates of identity and U.S. passports from the Office of the Governor to the Division of Immigration; and notice and certification of adoption of amendments to Procurement Rules and Regulations, to rules and regulations governing the Group Health Insurance Program and to rules and regulations governing the NMI Retirement Fund.

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Besides the power problem, a not-so-minor aggravation facing investors trying to do business in the CNMI (as well as local businessmen) is the policy, on the part of island banks, of delaying access to check deposits not written on their own bank. For an overseas investor, in particular, the delays banks impose on crediting "outside" checks can become a major inconvenience. It is particularly aggravating, since with present technology and wire transfer capability, confirmation of deposits can be obtained practically instantaneously - there is no need to hold checks for weeks at a time.

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Interest has been expressed in forming the equivalent of a League of Women Voters organization in the CNMI. The League is a non-profit, non-partisan body dedicated primarily to educating voters on election issues and candidates. If you are interested, please send me an e-mail, and include a preference for day of the week, and time of day for at least an initial meeting. Information such a group could be expected to collect and publish might include how many people each legislator running for re-election has on his/her staff, what their functions are, how they voted on bills that passed; what candidates think of the initiatives on the ballot; where they stand on CUC privatization; where they stand on making employee payments to the Retirement Fund; how they think the budget shortfalls should be handled.....

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I erred again, but only one sharp-eyed reader caught it. I referred to the American Samoan member of the U.S. House Committee on Insular Affairs on island last week, Eni Faleomavaega, as a "maitai," when what I should have written was "matai."

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In my recent mention of the number of magazines published in the CNMI, I forgot about

Island Locator which has undergone a dramatic change since last I saw it - for the better, I might add - but is still hard to find, and the rather insipid tourist-oriented *Beach Road Magazine*. *MP* is still the most readily located, accessible, substantive, though I confess I found *Island Locator's* cover story on Paul Jacuolet quite impressive.

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I thought the media coverage of the valiant English Channel swim by the Perez family pretty myopic. You'd think something that unusual and for such a worthy cause deserved more than merely sport-page placement. It was a relay race, held on August 9, with six Chamorro swimmers making the effort in support of a campaign to fund the rebuilding of an ancient flying proa. At least the *Saipan Tribune* gave over a full page to color pictures yesterday.

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The *Trib* also deserves a kudo for printing the full text of each of the witnesses' testimony at last week's U.S. Congressional hearing held on island. The statements - in full - have been appearing over the last week.

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Not being a cable subscriber, I was unaware that MCV broadcasts CNMI Senate sessions, video-taped courtesy of Senator Pete P. Reyes' office, every week-day evening following the session at 6:00 p.m., and at noon on the Sunday following the session, over channel 41 or 42. Unfortunately, the tapes are re-used, not archived.

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Another media event worth noting: the *Pacific Daily News* has begun labeling the islands in its weather map. Heretofore, one had to guess where the islands were in relation to the weather elements depicted. Thank-you, *PDN*!

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To all writers and editors confused about end punctuation and quotation marks: according to my grammar book, commas and periods always go within the quotation marks; the placement of all other quotation marks depends on context.

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There must be an "Emily Post" or other guide to e-mail etiquette out there somewhere - to which I'd like to submit this addition: when "today" or "tomorrow" is used in an e-mail, the calendar date should be included as well. I've gotten messed up more than once because I'm never sure whether the time indicated in the header indicates when the sender sent it, or when the server forwarded it.

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Lastly, seems I've been beating the wrong horse in terms of my complaints about the ugly oversized concrete viewing platform at the Grotto. It was apparently the Department of Lands and Natural Resources that was responsible for design and construction of the platform, not the Marianas Visitors Authority, as I had thought.

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New movies this week: None!