

On My Mind
3/19/10

Reading the local newspapers often leaves more questions than answers. Often, the answers are available, but it takes time, patience and perseverance to dig them out. A couple of examples just this past week:

The story in both papers today about the New Beginnings Ministries International Church apparently having been told, by the Zoning Office, to move out of its location at the Ladera Center because the public land department was going to occupy 11 stalls and didn't want to be next to a church. Questions: Under what provision of the Zoning Code was the church asked to move? What about the "grandfather" provision? Wasn't the church safe where it was under that? What gives DPL, a government agency, the right to demand that the church move out of its leased location? What are the "stalls" it is allegedly going to occupy? And isn't the fact that it is doing so because it doesn't want to be next to a church religious discrimination/persecution? (One might also ask why it was necessary for the church to be identified as a "Christian" church.....)

Time did not permit the digging required to get all the answers. Perhaps by next week.....

An older story reported that Judge Govendo had lowered bail for a kidnapping suspect many thought should have stayed in jail. The obvious question: Why would the court release someone who was suspected of such a crime? The paper made no attempt to offer an explanation. In this case, having pursued the matter, I learned bail has two purposes: to insure that people report back to court whenever they are required to do so, and to protect the general public. But actual punishment starts after conviction, not with bail. I also learned that to ensure that the suspect would report back to court, Govendo appointed two of the defendant's brothers as third party custodians and required that one or the other be with the defendant 24 hours a day at one of the brother's homes. The brother with whom the defendant would be staying is a police officer. The other brother put up as security his land and house situated in Kagman III. Govendo also required that the Dept. of Public Safety conduct routine random checks to make sure the defendant was not left alone and if there was just one occasion where he was found alone, bail would be revoked. Additionally, the defendant was ordered not to have any contact with children and contact with nieces and nephews had to be in the presence of one of the third party custodians. In fact, the police did conduct checks over that first weekend and the bail order was being followed. Govendo also talked to the Commissioner of Public Safety who assured him that the police would be conducting more random checks.

It doesn't do, in other words, to simply read an article in the paper, and believe one has the whole story. More often than not, only half the story is being told.....

A question one would have thought the papers would have looked into but have

not so far: why are there booths being put up at all of the CHC parking lot entrances? Is access to parking really going to be restricted? So far there are only the booths, but no mechanism for barring entry. Does that mean one might need a pass, but that fees won't be charged? The fences - I like the looks of the black ones along the road better than the steel ones around the sides and back - might deter a car trying to enter the parking lot any other way, but they sure don't seem substantive or high enough to keep someone from going in over the top if s/he really wanted to.

Another, older one no one reported on either: The pictures of the farewell party for Justice Alex Munson included all past and present judges and justices except John A. Manglona. Where was he? Why was he missing?

Other questions brought up by reading the paper aren't as easily answerable. For example, another headline in one of today's paper notes that the courts may have to decide whose interpretation on foreign worker rights is correct. What ever happened to Covenant provision 902 - which provides for consultation in good faith on issues affecting the relationship between the Northern Mariana Islands and the United States? Isn't that the logical place to take this issue? Moreover, how come no one is putting the blame for the present disagreement where it really belongs, and that is at the feet of the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service - which has still not issued the regulations that, in theory at least, would have avoided all the perceived ambiguities of the present situation? And where ARE those regulations? Why haven't they been issued yet? Where is the hold-up?

Another example: Representative Stanley T. Torres is reported as demanding that the Zoning Law be shelved because it is hurting local businesses. Instead of recognizing the good things the Zoning Law has accomplished, offering some constructive criticism as to what could be done to make it better, Torres is instead saying the entire structure, the entire process should be scrapped. If his concern is helping the business community, why isn't he, rather, attacking the banking industry, which, it was just revealed, has not loaned any money to any local business in the last five years. (And what happened five years ago to stop it?) Isn't that more harmful to the economy than the relocation of a small church - arbitrary and uncalled for as that decision may have been? More harmful than allowing a restaurant in the middle of a residential zone?

The local banking industry badly needs closer oversight. Its unfriendly attitude and out-dated policies create difficulties not only for businesses, but for individuals. There is no reason, for instance, to hold "out-of-state" checks for some number of "working days," - as is current policy - what with today's instant telecommunications capabilities and international computer networks. An example on a smaller scale: Bank of Guam recently changed its procedures for deposits at its ATM in Garapan without informing its customers. Envelopes were no longer being dispensed by machine, but were, supposedly in a poorly marked drawer. Only there weren't any envelopes in the drawer, either.

A banking bill was introduced in the 16th Legislature. With his concern for local businesses, why doesn't Torres do something positive for a change, and work for passage of a bank reform bill?

Short takes:

One of the books on the list of readings he'd liked that Professor P. Fred Kluge handed out at his last session was "The absolutely true diary of a part-time Indian," by Sherman Alexie. It is written from the viewpoint of a young boy on the Spokane [Washington state] Indian reservation and his experiences in attending a white off-reservation school. Well-written, and intended primarily as a "young adult" book, it is not very long - 230 pages - with lots of blank space and cartoon-like illustrations. Nevertheless, the story of the cultural clashes involved makes it an absorbing, informative, and sometimes painful, adult read as well.

The book, published in 2007, has been widely praised, and won many awards, including the National Book Award, School Library Journal best book of the year, NY Times Notable Book of 2007, Publishers Weekly best book of the year, and Kirkus Reviews Best Young Adult book of 2007. If it isn't there already, it belongs in every school library in the CNMI.

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The extent to which CNMI's legislators refuse to face/accept reality is wondrous indeed! Is there not one - or are there not enough - who see that every day that a budget is not passed results in the CNMI, at the end of this fiscal year, being even shorter of funds than it is now? The government is already forcing its vendors to wait as long as nine months for payment. The later in the year the budget is passed, the worse the situation will get.

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What a pity that the CNMI, and the CUC, will lose its very capable and very effective deputy director for water and waste water, Bruce Megarr, apparently due to intra-management conflict. Good bosses, good managers, learn to recognize, respect and accept ability in their staff, rather than micro-managing, and mis-managing their subordinates' domains.....Now if only CUC were run like a business - as it should be - instead of a corporation - as it is - it would not lose such valuable people for such petty reasons.

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And, finally, we're glad the CNMI Senate finally picked up on the fact that it costs Saipan teens \$350 for the lessons required to get a driver's licence - forcing those who can't afford it to drive illegally - there is no alternative. Let's hope the Senate - and the House - and PSS - come up - without delay! - with a more workable, reasonable solution for getting educated drivers on the road.