

On My Mind
4/16/10

It's one thing to distrust the confidentiality of the census process. It's quite another to question the legitimacy of the census per se. I believe we are all justified in distrusting its confidentiality. The CNMI is too small. Everyone knows everyone else. And the coconut wireless is too predominant a feature of everyone's life. No way will information provided on the census forms remain confidential, so long as the forms are turned in to local census takers.

That is not to say that there are not certain ones among them who can and will maintain confidentiality. There no doubt are. But in the main, the information will not remain confidential, and means must be found to have the forms turned in in some other way. Unfortunately, mailing them directly to the national processing center won't work. The procedures now in place call for the census forms to be assigned a geo-code before they leave island. Without that geo-code, the national center won't know what to do with the forms, and they will simply be lost, wasted.

There is also information on the back of the form that needs to be filled out by the enumerator. Though the forms will be scanned locally, the actual keying in of data will, I've been told, take place elsewhere.

One way to deal with the issue might be to ask the local census enumerator to fill in the geo-code and the last page, and then hold onto the form itself in hopes that a more satisfactory procedure than is now in place will be worked out for insuring confidentiality in the collection and in the processing of the forms once they are turned in. There is some indication that this might occur.....

It is important, nonetheless, that the information collected on the forms eventually makes it into the national data file. As the banner that has just appeared in Garapan notes, "2010 Census: It's how the CNMI knows what it needs. Help us get our fair share." So throwing away the form won't help!

Refusing to fill in the information at all in the belief that the U.S. Constitution does not require it and therefore the census is unconstitutional, or because the information requested constitutes an invasion of privacy, is not nearly so easily justified. Though to this day - more than 200 years after the Constitution was ratified - the U.S. Supreme Court still hears arguments as to what is or is not constitutional, no one has yet been successful in arguing that either the census, or the income tax, for that matter, is either unconstitutional or an invasion of privacy.

The census asks several questions that are also asked on the income tax forms. Since the information is presumably included on the tax forms, why should it not be included on the census forms? If the Internal Revenue Service has it, why cannot the U.S. Department of Commerce? Yes, it would be nice if the two departments could share that

information, and maybe someday some techie will figure out how to do that, but obviously at the moment, that capability is not there.

Among other things, one might need social security numbers as well as names on both sets of data to link the data between departments, to assure the integrity of the data. Data sets without individual identifying characteristics are meaningless.

While other questions may also seem intrusive, the first thing to recognize is that the people of the CNMI are not the only ones being asked these questions. In previous census years, one in six households nationwide were asked to fill out a long form instead of the short form. Starting this year, what is called the American Community Survey will be used to collect the long-form information on a continuous basis throughout the decade rather than only once every 10 years.

In the second place, it isn't all that difficult to figure out why those questions are being asked, the use to which they will be put. "Breathing difficulty climbing stairs?" could be used by the CNMI to determine the need to require elevators or escalators in all new buildings of more than one story. "Having an outside toilet" could determine whether sewer hook-ups or subsidies to provide inside toilets should get higher priority - after all, there's no point in sewer hook-ups if there aren't inside toilets. "Children with development disabilities" could determine the extent of the need for more funding not only for helping the children, but for providing trained personnel to do so. Medicare formulas could be affected by the answers to "have hearing, or seeing difficulties." "How many cars," "how many miles driven" could affect highway construction funding. Food stamp use, employment status, income levels could affect the level of future family support programs.

In short, one need but to recall all the federally funded programs of which the CNMI makes use to find a rationale for the questions that are being asked. What is on record now is what was true in 2000, but much has changed since then. The 2010 Census will bring that data up to date. New funding patterns are likely to emerge that will, one would hope, be more to the CNMI's benefit.

To sum it all up: Should people fill out the 2010 census forms? Definitely! Much of the CNMI's future funding patterns will depend on what this census shows. Should people include their names? Yes - otherwise how will anyone know whether more than one form has been turned in for the same person? Should the forms be turned in to the enumerator who comes to the door? Only if people are comfortable doing so. Others should wait to see if a more secure system for collection and processing will be offered.

More information is available from the federal Census liaison, Rebecca Cartegena,

who can be reached via e-mail at < rebecca.diaz.cartegena@census.gov >. Cartegena has indicated that she will be looking into making one or more public presentations on the census process over the next few weeks. Watch for them!

Short takes:

Those who saw the brief notice in the paper that H.L.B. 17-2, amending the zoning code, was withdrawn from the governor's desk should know that it was withdrawn only to correct some technical errors, after which it will be re-submitted. It is not clear whether the bill will have to go through the whole process again, or automatically return to the governor's desk. This is the bill that allegedly gives the Café Waft the right to open a restaurant on the beach in Tanapag despite protests from many local villagers.

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Having watched the antics of the present Attorney General, I have finally become convinced that this place does need an elected rather than an appointed AG. Of course, then one runs into the problem of popularity at the polls: AG's who are easy on victims will likely stand a better chance of being elected than those who might be stricter. But the AG is also an administrator, and may not necessarily spend that much time in the court room. The more important criterion might well be how well s/he administers, how firm his/her ethics are.

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The Coastal Resource Management Office has resumed posting its permit application information after several months' absence. See the 4/15 issue of the *Saipan Tribune*. It's too bad that the Zoning Office doesn't follow suit, and post its permit application information in similar form, so that people have an opportunity to become aware of and to comment on changes being proposed to their environment.

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Many thanks to the Division of Parks and Grounds for continuing to keep the Marpi path swept! It is much appreciated!

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American Memorial Park is celebrating National Park Week. Among the events scheduled are the FREE showings of the films *The Lorax* Wednesday, 4/21, Thursday, 4/22 at 10:00 a.m. and noon, and Saturday 4/25 at 3:00 p.m. and 4:00 p.m.; and *Wall-e* Sunday 4/18, at 11:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m., Wednesday 4/21 and Thursday 4/22 at 10:30 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. p.m., Saturday, 4/25 at 10:30 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. Also showing will be *Home* on Wednesday, 4/21 at 3:00 p.m. and 5:00 p.m., and *The End of the Line* on Thursday, 4/22 - all free, all at the American Memorial Park theater.

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Update to the Bank of Guam ATM problem with envelopes at the Garapan branch: once the parts arrive on island, the ATM will resume providing envelopes from the machine itself, not through the external box, where the envelopes get mixed up in the trash

people put in the container, and the flaps get glued shut by the heat and humidity.

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I'm not much of a sports fan, but I had enjoyed watching Tiger Woods' climb to fame. Particularly given the image he created, it's been disappointing to learn his private life had/has problems. But I think the bloodthirsty scrutiny under which he's been put since is inexcusable. We all have our shortcomings. And Tiger, like the rest of us, should be allowed to work his out in private.