

February 23, 2009

*"We must believe that it is the darkest before the dawn of a beautiful new world.
We will see it when we believe it."
-- Saul Alinsky*

Dear people of the Commonwealth,

A great yearning has begun to take root in our community.

More than just a dark frustration with tired old-school politics and bad governance, it is a deepening and positive desire for open, responsive, and accountable government. More than just a cynical determination to vote out leaders who represent little more than the status quo, it is a hopeful searching for fresh and honest candidates who are worth voting for, who would represent the best interests and aspirations of all the people of the Commonwealth, and who would place the public good over personal interests. More than just a weary recognition of the insanity of doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result, it is an unflinching faith in the tremendous potential of our islands and our people, and a belief that we can learn from our mistakes and change our course for the better.

This great yearning is the energy behind a brave and expanding vision for change that is shared by many in the Commonwealth, but not yet fully articulated and not yet accompanied by a plan of action.

Most of us know the challenges and the opportunities facing the Commonwealth. We live them every day. And in the last few years, in letters to the editor, public forums, blogs, workplaces, coffee shops, homes, classrooms, and social gatherings, we have collectively done an excellent job of diagnosing the ills of our community, celebrating the wonderful qualities that still exist, and imagining how life could be better here.

Our task now is to get organized, and to articulate, out of the conversations already taking place throughout our community, a cohesive vision of what we want the Commonwealth to be, to define our roles and strategies in bringing that vision to life, and to act according to that plan.

This letter is an open call for all concerned citizens of the Commonwealth to come together in sunrise meetings between February 25 and March 25, 2009. Sunrise meetings are simply gatherings of people who believe that life in the Commonwealth can and should be better than what it is, and who are committed to making it so. Anyone can host a sunrise meeting, and may invite anyone to participate. Sunrise meetings can be held at any time and place of the group's choosing. The groups can be as large or as small as people want them to be, and they can focus on one issue or many.

Here are some suggested questions to guide our sunrise meetings:

February 23, 2009

- 1. What should the role of government be in the Commonwealth?**
- 2. What are the most important opportunities facing the Commonwealth, and what should be done to maximize them? What are the most important challenges facing the Commonwealth, and what should be done to resolve them?**
- 3. What specific government reforms should be prioritized for enactment?**
- 4. To most effectively bring about needed changes in government, should concerned citizens of the Commonwealth focus on: a) organizing a coalition of candidates and supporters behind a common platform; b) organizing a new political party; c) joining and/or reorganizing an existing political party; or d) taking up another course of action? Please explain.**
- 5. What core principles and values should guide the government of the Commonwealth?**
- 6. What should life in the Commonwealth be like five years from today? Ten years from today?**
- 7. What are the names of individuals we would like to see in public office? Please specify the public office, and describe the strengths and potential weaknesses of these individuals.**

Sunrise groups are invited to answer as many questions as they would like, and to add questions of their own for discussion.

Between February 25 and March 25, I will be hosting sunrise meetings on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday mornings. Individuals who would like to sign up for one of these sunrise meetings can reach me by phone at 285-3935, or by email at tinasablan@gmail.com. Individuals who would like to host sunrise meetings of their own may do so, of course, at any time, and are asked to submit the notes from their meetings no later than March 31, 2009.

Notes from sunrise meetings should include the names and contact information for all participants; the question(s) discussed; the answers the group arrived at; and any other issues, ideas, or comments. Notes may be submitted to me by:

- Email: tinasablan@gmail.com ; or
- Mail: PO Box 500994 • Saipan, MP 96950.

These notes will be compiled to develop a long-term vision for our community, to identify promising and viable candidates for public office who share that vision, and to begin mobilizing the resources and support that will be necessary to advance a new movement for good governance in the Commonwealth. The vision and plan of action that emerge from our sunrise meetings will be presented at a public forum in April.

February 23, 2009

These are, to be sure, trying times for us all. But they are not impossible. The challenges we face in the Commonwealth are serious and real, but they are not insurmountable. Our hardships are many, but they teach us much about who we are, and how we need to change.

And change indeed has already begun. At long last we are coming to realize our power as citizens to take back our government, to replace elected leaders who do not represent our best interests or our values, and to determine the direction of our own development as a community. The old political parties and powerful family dynasties that once maintained a stranglehold on local politics are now giving way under the scrutiny and discontent of an increasingly free-thinking and free-speaking electorate. Public discourse has never been more vigorous. Many of us are ready now to be part of a movement for change in the Commonwealth, and ready to organize our power and resources more effectively.

The sunrise meetings over the course of the next few weeks represent only the beginning of a movement for change. The direction and sustainability of that movement depend on us. What is our vision for the Commonwealth? How can each of us be the change we wish to see in our community? And how committed are we to fighting the good fight, now and in the years to come? The answers lie with us. Change begins with us.

To sign up for a sunrise meeting, or to find out more about how to host one of your own, please contact me at 285-3935, or by email at tinasablan@gmail.com.

Sincerely,

Tina Sablan