

November 20, 2009

Dear people of the Commonwealth,

On November 23, many of us will be going to the polls to cast our votes for the governor and lieutenant governor who will lead the CNMI for the next five years. At the end of the day, the decisions we make in the polling booth are ours alone. Our votes do not belong to any political party, candidate, family member, friend, or employer. We owe it to ourselves not to blindly follow the instructions or endorsements of others, nor to simply accept smear campaigns or slogans as substitutes for the truth and our own experiences.

Each of us is responsible for opening our own eyes, doing our own research, and making well-informed and intelligent decisions when we vote.

The tone of the 2009 election season has generally reflected the deep malaise that has afflicted the CNMI these past four years, and the anxiety with which many of us now face the future. But let us not be ruled by fear on November 23 – neither fear of change, nor fear of the status quo. Let us go to the polls with courage and with open eyes, aware of the records, platforms, and characters of both gubernatorial teams, and cognizant of our aspirations for the future of the CNMI and the candidates who would carry those aspirations into action.

After having done my own research on the candidates, and having reflected on my core values, my experiences and quality of life these past four years, and my hopes for the future, I have decided to cast my vote for Heinz Hofschneider and Arnold Palacios. I think new leadership and a change at the helm would do us good. And I would like to now specifically address the common question that has been asked by supporters of the Fitial administration: “Change for what?”

To call for “change” means not only that we must judge the record of the incumbent administration and the implications of extending the status quo, but more importantly that we must articulate the qualities of leadership that we want in our next governor that are lacking in the current administration. It is not enough to vote *against*. We must also know what we are voting *for*.

And so, when I say I want change, I mean that I want a governor and lieutenant governor who:

- Respect the rule of law, and the checks and balances of government, and would never abuse their power and declare emergencies in order to circumvent laws and regulations they do not like;
- Appoint highly-qualified people of integrity to their Cabinet, and to critical government boards and commissions;

- Prioritize decent healthcare for our people, and would never tolerate nor make excuses for the unstable leadership and neglect that have resulted in the hospital's present state of disarray;
- Prioritize stable, reliable, and affordable utilities, and full compliance with the federal stipulated orders for clean water, a functioning wastewater system, and an acceptable system of used oil management;
- Are committed to paying government contributions to the Retirement Fund in full and on-time, and would never have to be sued in order to be forced to finally make payments;
- Take the Open Government Act seriously, and would never have to be sued by any citizen in order to disclose expenditures and sources of public funds;
- Value good working relations with the federal government, and negotiation rather than an adversarial or litigious relationship;
- Believe in decent wages and fair labor standards for all the CNMI's residents;
- Make no excuses and show no tolerance for public corruption, drug use and drug trafficking, human trafficking, and labor abuse;
- Are truly committed to the restoration of the merit-based civil service system, and the implementation of an independent desk audit;
- Value the environment for the sake of public health, our tourism economy, and future generations, and would ensure strict adherence to environmental laws and regulations;
- Respect freedom of speech, and would never pressure a private company to terminate employees because of their political activities, nor terminate or refuse to renew the contracts of qualified public servants who are suspected of "disloyalty," nor tell law-abiding foreign residents who are exercising their civil rights that they are "illegals who must be deported immediately";
- Take public safety and the prosecution of crime seriously, and would never politicize the Department of Public Safety nor fail to formally appoint an Attorney General for an entire year;
- Recognize the importance of fair bidding and hiring for the efficient and effective provision of public services, and would never sole-source lucrative contracts to friends, or use government jobs as a tool to entrench political power;
- Believe in the wise stewardship of public lands, and would appoint a Secretary and advisory board that would prioritize the adoption of a responsible, credible and professional public land use plan, in accordance with the Constitution;

- Understand that proper planning and professional leadership, not day-to-day crisis management, are critical to the provision of essential public services, the implementation of critical infrastructure projects, and the cohesive enforcement of the programs, policies, and laws of the CNMI;
- Possess the ability to listen thoughtfully and respectfully to people of diverse views and backgrounds, to acknowledge past mistakes, and to accept criticism gracefully; and
- Appeal to the best in people, and bring to the table a positive and inspiring vision of good governance, restored credibility, a revitalized and diversified economy, a skilled workforce, a clean environment, a healthy community, safe neighborhoods, excellent schools, and retirement security.

These are all the qualities of leadership that I want in our next governor and lieutenant governor, and that I have used as the basis for deciding how to cast my vote in this election. I have seen very little of these qualities in Governor Fitial and his lieutenant governors these past four years, and I have no reason to believe that anything will change if this administration is given a second term.

Of course, Heinz Hofschneider and Arnold Palacios are not without faults, and I have certainly not agreed with everything they have said and done. But having worked with both of them quite closely these past two years, and having reviewed their records as public servants and their plans if elected, I do see in them the qualities of leadership that I would want to guide the CNMI for the next five years. That is the change they represent to me, and that is the change I support.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tina Sablan', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Tina Sablan