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# Better way to host discussions?

The August session of Nitijela opens next week and, as in past years, local government-national leadership consultations get scheduled. While often it happens in July, just preceding the session, this year it will be held this month over the next two weeks at the ICC.

We have a modest suggestion regarding the agenda. Every year, the format has been almost identical: sessions are scheduled for single government ministries or agencies. And every year there is the same result: the government office spends most of the period introducing its staff and its mission, then questions and discussion gets cut short because another ministry is scheduled to start its presentation.

The one-ministry/agency approach unnecessarily limits the discussion. What we believe would be a more productive way to approach the conversation with the outer island leaders is to make it issue-oriented and involve all the national government players in that area of service.

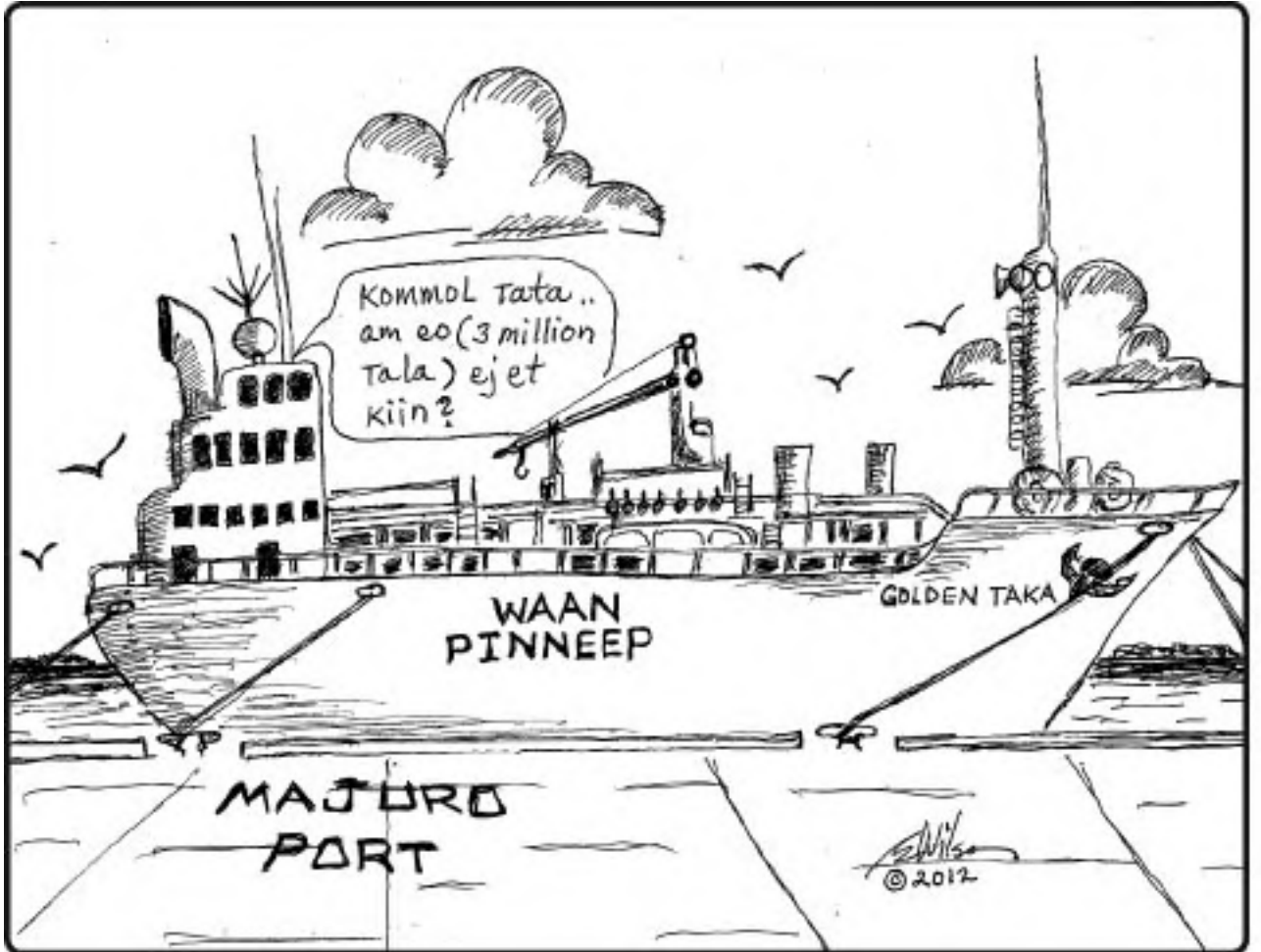
For example, the issue of copra operations: invite representatives from Tobolar, Ministry of Transportation and the Shipping Corporation to be part of the panel. This way the key people who play a role in the issue are there at the same time and the discussion does not get derailed when you realize the person with information is not sitting in the room because it is not yet their ministry's scheduled time.

Another example of the issue approach is aquaculture: Get Ministry of R&D, MIMRA, and CMI Land Grant together for a presentation that also involves Namdrik and Rongelap. Outer islands can learn what Namdrik and Rongelap are doing to develop their pearl industries, and decide if this is an opportunity for them to pursue. All the "stakeholders" would be in the room to inform the discussion.

Another example, grant in aid for local governments. Instead of this being a presentation by the Ministry of Internal Affairs only, bring in the Ministry of Finance including the grant writing office, and one or two of our successful NGOs that are running programs related to grants and outer islands — WAM and WUTMI come immediately to mind.

When we get resource people in the same room at the same time, we can come up with ways to move things forward.

The single-issue, single-ministry game is an outdated approach that, judging by the exodus of people from the outer islands, is not a model that works in the RMI. Let's be bold and change it to something better.



## A great idea is slipping by

Two years ago, students at Marshall Islands participated in a "Youth Nitijela," playing the part of Speaker, Cabinet ministers and senators for a day of passing resolutions and bills. It was an interesting and engaging exercise not only for the more than 30 students involved, but for the large audience that turned out to watch the proceedings. We were reminded of this the other day by MIHS graduate Niten Anni, who was one of the participants in the Youth Nitijela program. "We need to do more of these," he commented. And correct he is. In this type of experience that connects the classroom to the real world giving students an interesting and exciting learning experience. We encourage MIHS to consider making the Youth Nitijela experience an annual activity for the school. No doubt it would gain the support of Nitijela, government offices and businesses for the event that would be a highlight for students. It is this type of school activity that is also highly regarded by the US accrediting body, the Western Association of Schools and Colleges.

## NTA speeds things up



Without fanfare, the National Telecommunications Authority this past week took a big step to improving service to its Internet customers. The development? Significantly increased speed for its home "dsl" (broadband) Internet customers. The "entry level" dsl home connection offered by NTA since the fiber cable was installed two years ago was a so-called 128 line. This was advertised at about three-to-four times faster than the dialup service that was widely in use since inception of Internet. But dialup service is barely functional for Internet use in this day and age of website sophistication. And what many home customers found is that the basic dsl package was often just as slow as dialup, or only marginally faster. Meanwhile, our neighbors in the Federated States start with a 256 line (ie, double the speed) for \$10 less per month than NTA charges.

The new NTA board, led by Chairman Charles Takao Domnick and Vice Chairman Rien Morris, with new General Manager Tommy Kijiner, Jr. have taken the much appreciated step of rolling out a higher speed for its customers without increasing the price.

Given that NTA is still using only a tiny fraction of the actual capacity of the fiber cable, this is an overdue development, but nevertheless one worthy of appreciation. As NTA begins a reform process aimed at making it capable of competition, customer satisfaction is an important goal. It goes without saying that if people are happy with a product, they're less likely to change to a new one.

NTA has much to do to improve customer service and satisfaction, but moves like the increased dsl speed now being provided is a big step in the right direction.

# The Marshall Islands Journal

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