

OPINION PAGES Send letters to PO Box 14, Majuro, MH 96960 or email journal@ntamar.net

Hospital design company claims 'unfair' reporting

This is in reference to your news article in the July 27, 2013 edition with the headline, "Hospital Design Firm fired."

This article is unfair, biased news reporting and an unjustifiable attack to our firm's professional integrity.

While we acknowledge that the government has the right to terminate our contract agreement, the decision of the new Cabinet to discontinue the current design was not based on our firm's performance.

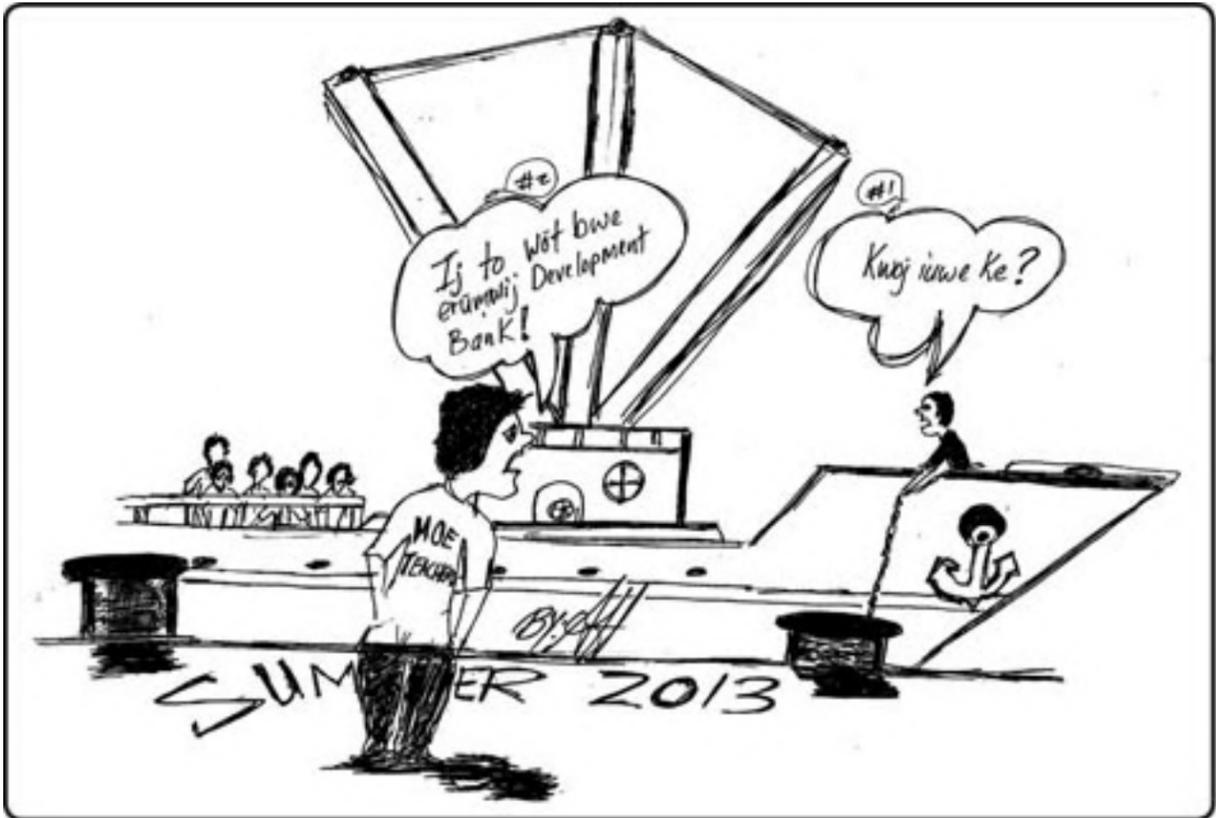
There were several factors beyond our firm's control that contributed to the current situation, including US Department of Interior's approval, DOI's requirement to hire a third party consultant, RMI procurement process, constant changing of key personnel and decision-makers, and election of a new government.

Presented below are the timelines of our account of the significant dates:

1. Notice to Proceed: Jan 2008
2. Schematic Design Approved by Ministry of Health (MOH): May 2008
3. US DOI Review and Approval: July 2008–Jan 2009
4. DOI Requirement of third party consultant: Jan 2009 to Dec 2010
- (Design was on-hold pending RMI procurement of a third party consultant)
5. Hiring of Leo A. Daly Co. (LADCO) as third party consultant: Dec 2010
6. 35 percent Design Review with LADCO: January 2011
7. 60 percent submittal: July 2011
8. Awaiting decision from MOH regarding 60 percent review comments from LADCO
9. 60 percent review in Honolulu with LADCO: June 2012
10. 60 percent OBR in Majuro: Aug 2012
11. On-hold awaiting decision of new Cabinet.

We trust that on behalf of your commitment to a fair and responsible media we therefore request that a follow-up article to explain the facts and sequence of events which led to this outcome be published.

**EMPSCO-Engineering Consultants,
Ernesto A. Capulong Jr., P.E.
Vice-President/Principal-In-Charge**



NGOs provide RMI with bright spots

Some of the most interesting developments are the result of NGO action to re-engage people who have dropped out of school and had little hope of improving their lives. Life and practical skills development by the Waan Aelon in Majel (Canoes of the Marshall Islands) program, which focuses on outrigger canoe building to teach carpentry, math and work skills, has changed the lives of dozens of young men and women, most of whom dropped out of elementary school. The University of the South Pacific Campus has revived the nearly lost art of "jaki ed," the fine weaving for which Marshall Islands women were known until the turn of the 20th century. Through an annual auction started six years ago and the roll out of intensive weaving trainings throughout the country over the past year, USP has brought back this once dying art and in the process showed the income generating potential of traditional skills.

The NGO Juren Ae (steering paddle of a voyaging canoe) has run numerous skills trainings for young women in craft making and sewing that have developed marketable skills for people who had mostly dropped out of school and had few prospects. And Youth to Youth in Health and Women United Together Marshall Islands

lead training and advocacy work for marginalized young people and women, respectively, with WUTMI doing exceptional work in awareness work on violence against women.

The Marshalls Energy Company, the government's utility company, has come back from the brink of bankruptcy four years ago. In 2010 it produced a recovery plan and has managed to implement many of its objectives, with welcome results. The U.S. Rural Utilities Service, to which MEC is paying back a long-term loan, gave it a two-year loan deferment and a grant to overhaul one of its two main engines — a financial package worth \$4 million. With government backing, it obtained a loan from ADB for a debt swap from a commercial, high-interest loan to the ADB's one percent interest rate. And it recently signed a fuel supply deal with Taiwan-based Winson Oil, which provides fuel on consignment — ending the requirement of upfront payments that were undermining the company financially in this era of high global fuel prices. Finally, Winson is providing a \$5 million loan for MEC to refurbish an aging, but valuable six million gallon fuel farm in hopes of turning it into a sub-regional supply base.

Fisheries revenue continues upward, thanks both to the Marshalls membership in the Parties to the Nauru Agreement (PNA) and its joint venture deal on one purse seiner with Taiwan-based Koo's Fishing Company. The fishing JV is anticipated to produce close to \$2 million this year, while PNA-generated income has about tripled in three years. Unfortunately, not much of this new revenue stream has been reinvested in the domestic fisheries sector because the national government has needed money to fund Air Marshall Islands plane repairs, electricity bills, and other government recurring costs. The Marshalls has also gained international attention for establishing a shark sanctuary in its 200-mile exclusive economic zone — and enforcing the ban on finning, which has netted it several hundred thousand dollars in fines.

The country's ship registry is the third largest globally in tonnage behind only Panama and Liberia. Its continued growth has stepped up the revenue the registry is injecting annually from \$2 million a year in the 2000s to \$5 million starting with fiscal year 2014.

The Marshall Islands Journal

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