



Razor's Edge

By
Joe Mari Mercader
Executive Editor
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Speaker Nograles in Hot Seat

NEW YORK, NY June 8 (PinoyGlobal) - First, let me remind our readers that this column (Razor's Edge) is also in the Internet - filamimage.com of Pinoy Global Online. It is one of the most prestigious and well read Internets. Pinoy Global Online is a legend for years now. Its following is so vast around the world, especially in the Philippines. So remember, if you don't get a copy of Filipino Times go to your Internet filamimage.com and you will not miss this column and the previous ones. You will also be delighted to read the latest news from the Philippines and the world.

The Freedom of Information (FOI) bill did not meet its demise in the post election plenary session of the 14th Congress. Lawmakers under the baton of Speaker Prospero Nograles went out of their way to keep the information bill in a suspended animation, so to speak, because they dreaded burning in hell if it was enacted into law.

The bill itself was stillborn when it was first conceived nine years ago. Many House members did not relish rallying behind a measure that could verily be the death certificate of their political careers.

Exposing their wrongdoings, for that is the gist of the measure, would be foolhardy. Hence, its enactment was a dreamer's fantasy to weed out rogues with official trapings. Many of them have gained so much on crooked deals and contracts. But does it pay to be corrupt? They would not be that apprehensive if they had a clear conscience.

Lack of quorum was a squid tactic, a smokescreen to cover the real motive why FOI was not enacted on that day.

Manila Representative Bienvenido Abante, keenly observed that in the past "bills were passed even in the absence of a quorum." With this revelation Speaker Nograles cannot anymore duck the accusing finger that he undermined approval of the measure.

Rep. Joel Villanueva corroborated that at the time of the roll call there were 135 present in the plenary session, which actually means there were two more members to constitute the majority of half of the 267 House members. There and then FOI could have been approved, but Nograles opted to declare no-quorum thereby rendering the plenary session impotent.

Consequently, it wouldn't be amiss to say he did so out of fear that their collective nightmares might come to life ending the masquerade that the 14th Congress, championed honesty in the government. Its real form however, took shape in the chaos that ensued after plugging the smelly government deals, which transparency could have leaked out. This was his last gasping gesture as head honcho of Gloria's captive Congress.

Making matters worse for the frauds in sheep's clothes, on the day the session was abruptly adjourned there were 128 congressmen; short by seven votes to constitute a majority, Representative Abante, boomed. That number could have ensured passage of the embattled information bill, he stressed.

Seven votes added to the 128 solons would make more than one half of the 268 members composing the House. If that does not knockdown the lame excuse (lack of quorum), nothing will. The bill was deliberately frozen to die a natural death in the archives for doomed measures. Or so the

minions of Speaker Nograles, believed.

I don't have to be Van Gogh to paint the grim picture that would vividly portray Nograles' motive for adjourning the last plenary session of the 14th Congress. That would be a redundancy. Even Quasimodo, Victor Hugo's simple minded hunchback of Notre Dame, could have easily figured out why the information bill was put in a hiatus, by the mere expedient of banging the Speaker's gavel.

How the foot-balled bill will fare in the next Congress is anybody's guess. For one thing, transparency would be fatal for the lawmakers of the outgoing House: it would be like exposing a leper under the scorching sun. Nobody among them is fool enough to initiate such a disastrous move. Most, if not all solons, are directly or indirectly, smeared with corruption.

The tainted Congress and the equally venal outgoing administration were expected to fight to death the tabled FOI to prevent the skeletons in their closets from jumping out in the open had the bill been passed. The panic seizing them was horrifying, which explains the frenzy of Nograles et al to kill it on the day it was scheduled for approval.

Speaker Nograles and his minions in the House contrived the lack of quorum charade to assuage the people who were already murmuring against inaction on the bill. But transparency was a fearsome proposition, a nemesis to them and so something drastic was in order for self-preservation.

To be brutally frank about it, both sides of the aisles are guilty of keeping the bill in a hiatus and the reason transcends the veneer (lack of quorum). Recoiling from making the milestone decision of approving the information measure deprived them of a footnote in history as having initiated transparency in the government.

Like they say, Pres. Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo is the last person interested in liberating the public from the darkness surrounding government deals and transactions. The lawmakers, particularly those who deliberately absented themselves were party to the conspiracy, no question about it.

Passing the bill is highly unlikely with the prevailing mentality of congressional leaders. That can only happen when they are out of office. Other than that, it will be a status quo. Shakespeare aptly said it in his Merchant of Venice: "in the course of justice none of us would see salvation." This explains why they tenaciously cling to their official trappings for fear of being railroaded to jail for engaging in questionable transactions using the power and clout of their offices,

including their Malacanang connection.

Therefore, passing the Freedom of information is digging the political graves of congressional leaders involved in corruption. And most, if not all of them, have skeletons in their closets. It would be rank stupidity on their part to voluntarily open the can of worms exposing their anomalies. Only the influx of fresh blood in Congress could make the people's right to scrutinize official actions, come true.

The newly elected legislators can breathe life on the bill. So long as they perform with integrity, President-elect Benigno "Noynoy" Aquino III, will be a strong ally to them. Cory Aquino's legacy of being God fearing, integrity and love of country are strong values engraved in the heart of the young Noynoy.

Thus, the Aquino administration and Congress can jointly unmask the scoundrels exploiting their public trust by enacting this law, which gives the people the right to scrutiny all the deals and transactions entered into by public officials. By law Juan de la Cruz can now take the necessary legal action to prosecute perpetrators of graft and corruption in the three departments of the government. Then we can truly claim to have a government of the people, by the people and for the people.

This humongous responsibility of reforming the government, if possible keeping his administration impeccable, rests on the shoulders of the young President Aquino. He will prevail. He has to. The challenge for him to live up to the people's expectation by following the foot steps of his great and well-loved mother, Cory Aquino, are so pressing on his conscience that he has no other way but to comply and perform accordingly.

In the language of Ben Franklin: "Well done is better than well said."