

# More senators question 'book blockade'

by AUREA CALICA  
Philstar.com

SENATORS questioned the Bureau of Customs' (BOC) "book blockade," saying it could do more harm than good even if it intends to raise more revenues.

Senators Edgardo Angara, Manuel Roxas II and Richard Gordon joined Sen. Miriam Defensor-Santiago in questioning the BOC's move to impose taxes on imported books.

They said the government must promote reading and make it a part of every Filipino's lifestyle rather than make books more inaccessible.

Angara said reading and publishing must flourish in the country.

"Books play an integral part in a country's intellectual, technical and cultural development. They are the most effective and economical tools for achieving educational growth, imparting information and recording, preserving, and disseminating the nation's cultural heritage. Unfortunately, only few of the books in our libraries and bookstores are local publications," Angara said.

The Philippines has the lowest output of book titles compared to neighbors in Southeast Asia. Statistics released by the Philippine

National Library showed that the number of books published since 2000 averages 5,326.5 a year.

Roxas asked Finance Secretary Margarito Teves to explain the new BOC policy, which has sparked complaints from book importers and sellers.

One percent duty is being collected for educational, technical, scientific, historical and cultural books and five percent for books/materials which are non-educational and intended for sale, barter or hire.

Roxas said Teves should shed light on the implementation of Department of Finance Order No. 17-09 dated March 24, 2009 which also clarified guidelines on duty-free importation of books allowed under existing laws and international agreements.

"We have received reports that the new Department Order has imposed a more stringent policy on importing books in our country, therefore restricting and discouraging booksellers and importers."

Roxas also sent a letter to National Book Development Board chairman Dennis Gonzalez and requested the agency's position on the implementation of the DOF order. ■

# Politicos reminded to clean up after rallies

by ALCUIN PAPA  
Inquirer.net

AN environmental group challenged political parties and candidates on Wednesday, May 13, to adopt environmental responsibility in their platforms in the run-up to the 2010 elections.

The EcoWaste Coalition also said candidates can start showing care for the environment by promising to conduct their campaigns in an environment-friendly manner, including reducing litter from campaign materials.

"We would like to encourage political parties to integrate environmental responsibility and concern in their platforms in their campaign. They can start by reducing the trash their campaigns produce," said Manny Calonzo, president of the coalition.

Calonzo told the Inquirer their green advocacy was non-partisan.

"We will endorse policies and not candidates," he said.

He said that three members of the Commission on Elections, members of the religious and other concerned citizens have

voiced support for the group by urging political parties and candidates to think "green" as they woo voters.

Calonzo said Bishop Deogracious Iñiguez, Jr. and Comelec Commissioners

Rene V. Sarmiento, Armand Velasco and Leonard Leonida joined the EcoWaste Coalition and the Miss Earth Foundation in exhorting all election stakeholders to heed the plea for reduced campaign waste and pollution. The calls were made at May 13 launching of the group's Zero Waste 2010 Elections in a simple ceremony held outside the headquarters of the Comelec in Intramuros, Manila. Following the launch, Calonzo



Miss Philippine Earth 2009 winners, together with members of the Eco-Waste coalition and election officials, launch the 'Zero-Waste 2010 Elections' drive to urge politicians to reduce their campaign wastes ahead of the 2010 national polls. Inquirer.net Photo by Rem Zamora

said they would reach out to all concerned parties, groups and personalities to ensure broad support for advocacy.

"We will forge links with all major election stakeholders, including the presidential candidates, and obtain their unity with our non-partisan advocacy that is solely in service of Mother Earth," said Rei Panaligan, Coordinator, EcoWaste Coalition. "We also hope to raise and promote our green agenda at the proposed national summit of citizens' groups working for clean, honest and credible elections, which we support."

Calonzo said they will circulate a set of guidelines and ask the parties, candidates and their supporters to pledge adherence. The guidelines are:

1. Create a lead team in the campaign machinery that will be tasked to prevent or reduce waste and pollution to the minimum in all campaign activities. Ensure that environmental and climate protection is integrated into the campaign platform and strategy.
2. Enforce zero tolerance on litter and pollution in all campaign meetings, sorties and related activities. This means no confetti throwing, exploding of firecrackers or releasing of balloons, and no use of plastic and styrofoam for volunteers meals and drinks. They are also asked to provide for waste bins and clean up after rallies.
3. Cut back on leaflets, pamphlets, posters, stickers, decals, sample ballots and other campaign paraphernalia. Ensure that materials for mass distribution carry a friendly reminder that says: "Para sa ating kalusugan at kalikasan, huwag pong ikalat, itambak o sunugin" or its equivalent in local

languages.

4. Use post-consumer recycled paper for campaign materials to conserve trees and protect our forests, watersheds, and ecosystems. To make recycling easy, avoid using plastic-coated paper.

5. Stay away from campaign materials that are hardly reused or recycled such as confetti, bunting and balloons. These are often burned or discarded in storm drains, esteros, rivers, seas and dumps.

6. Avoid the use of tarpaulin banners and other plastic campaign materials. If tarpaulins cannot be avoided, make plans for their recycling into carry or utility bags after the campaign period. Explore the use of plastic-less and paperless modern and interactive social media to inform and win votes.

7. Refrain from undertaking campaign motorcades that eat up lots of fossil fuels, discharges air pollutants and snarls traffic. Go for emission-free campaign by cycling or campaigning on foot.

8. Reject graffiti or vandalism, or the willful or malicious defacing or destruction of property.

9. Harm not the trees: don't hang, stick or nail campaign materials on trees. Use designated common poster areas.

10. Win or lose, remove election campaign materials from all sites immediately after May 10, 2010.

"Through the unity of all election stakeholders, the groups look forward to 'greener' polls that will reduce wasteful consumption of resources and minimize the creation of garbage, greenhouse gases, persistent organic pollutants and other contaminants that are bad to health and the environment," Calonzo said. ■

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