

OPINION & FEATURES



June Lagmay

With Pinoy Power comes great responsibility

EDITORIAL

DURING the reception for Asian Pacific Islander Leaders Group held last week at Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa's house, June Lagmay, a *kababayan* was introduced. She will assume the position of City Clerk this June in the city of Los Angeles.

The mayor handpicked Lagmay because he said that she is "a woman that has served in various capacities and done each one extraordinarily well." Villaraigosa recognizes Lagmay's strong abilities and capabilities, a fact that makes her *kababayans* in Los Angeles truly proud.

To all these, Lagmay's humble words were "I feel very strongly the responsibilities riding on my shoulders, and I acknowledge that I get it. I am very appreciative to all of you who have been a mentor, a friend, an advisor along the way."

Being a city clerk is no walk in the park -- it is a job that requires meticulousness and utter vigilance. According to californiacity-clerks.org, "The city clerk is the local official for elections, local legislation, the Public Records Act, the Political Reform Act, and the Brown Act (open meeting laws). Before and after the city council takes action, the city clerk ensures that actions are in compliance with all federal, state and local statutes and regulations and that all actions are properly executed, recorded, and archived."

"The office of the city clerk is a service department within the municipal government upon which the city council, all City departments, and the general public rely for information regarding the operations and legislative history of the City. The city clerk serves as the liaison between the public and city council and provides related municipal services."

"As an Elections Official, the City Clerk administers Federal, State and Local procedures through which local government representatives are selected. The Clerk assists candidates in meeting their legal responsibilities before, during and after an election. From Election pre-planning to certification of election results and filing of final campaign disclosure documents, the City Clerk manages the process which forms the foundation of our democratic system of government."

"As a Legislative Administrator, the City Clerk plays a critical role in the decision-making process of the local legislature. As the key staff for Council meetings, the Clerk prepares the legislative Agenda, verifies legal notices have been posted or published and completes the necessary arrangements to ensure an effective meeting. The Clerk is entrusted with the responsibility of recording the decisions which constitute the building blocks of our representative government."

"As a Records Manager, the City Clerk oversees yet another legislative process; the preservation and protection of the public record. By statute, the clerk is required to maintain and index the Minutes, Ordinances and Resolutions adopted by the legislative body. The City Clerk also ensures that other municipal records are readily accessible to the public. The public record under the conservatorship of the City Clerk provides fundamental integrity to the structure of our democracy," the website further elaborated.

Truly a gargantuan feat, but with Mayor Villaraigosa and her *kababayans'* confidence, June Lagmay will get the task done. A remarkable individual, June Lagmay is a deserving addition to LA's prosperity and good governance. (AJPress)

The challenge of automated polls

TIME flies fast and before we know it, we would be queuing to the polls to elect our chosen leaders. But whether election results shall be known instantly through automated polls remains a big question.

The Philippines is among a few countries that still rely on tedious manual vote counting. A turtle-slow election process is a breeding ground for violence, intimidation, vote buying, "dagdag-bawas" and other nefarious activities that compromise the integrity of our democratic foundations. It can be argued that an automated election cannot guarantee the total elimination of shenanigans during election time. I honestly believe, however, that the faster the ballots are counted, the greater our chances of putting in office duly-elected leaders of our land.

There are just too many doubting Thomases who believe that a computerized election is much easier to rig than having the votes counted literally by our bare fingers. This is stretching the truth a bit too far. But this could be the line of thinking precisely being propagated by politicians who cannot win an honest and fair election.

The Commission on Elections (Comelec) says that among the 26 criteria that precinct count optical scan (PCOS) machines should hurdle and pass is that they should be 99.995 percent accurate. This means that for 20,000 vote markers, the machines can only commit one error or none. Also the machines should be able to differentiate genuine ballots from fake ones.

Otherwise bidders whose machines fail this test



COMMONSENSE
Marichu A. Villanueva

will not get the contract. And even before bidders get to this stage, they should have undergone other stringent rules set by the Comelec's Special Bids and Awards Committee (SBAC).

As it is, the consortium of Smartmatic and Total Information Management Corp. remains the only bidder to have met the requirements set by SBAC for the P11.3-billion poll automation contract. SBAC, named the consortium as the bidder "with the single complying calculated bid." The consortium's PCOS machines have, in fact, passed the accuracy test and it is now on the threshold of bagging the contract for what could be historic fully automated polls in the Philippines.

Last week, the Comelec conducted the battery of tests on the polling machines of Smartmatic, including the 12-hour running straight without power but using only their battery. But the electric cable in one of the machines apparently over-heated and smoke came out. Despite this isolated case, the SBAC of Comelec accepted this as something that could be expected but could be remedied if such scenario of power shortage or 12-hour black-out happens.

Although the winner has not been named, I'm giving the Comelec the benefit of the doubt in choosing the bidder with the best machinery and more importantly, intentions. As closely monitored by media and election watchdog groups, the Comelec made sure every bidder went through the wringer, so to speak. So far, it appears that the Comelec must have been convinced by the tested capability of the Smartmatic-TIM consortium to

handle the challenge to be the implementor of the country's fully automated polls.

To the Comelec's credit, headed by their chairman, retired Supreme Court justice Jose Melo, they have been very transparent in the bidding process thus far. Comelec is still on track to meet its timetable for poll automation.

But many people are asking and rightly so, about Smartmatic. Is it the same Barbados-based Smartmatic? Is it a private corporation? Who owns it? What I know thus far is that it is a subsidiary of Smartmatic B.V. in the Netherlands. But then again who are the people that run the Netherlands firm? Is there truth to a report that it has done numerous elections in Venezuela whose president Hugo Chavez is supposedly a part owner of Smartmatic? Glossing over such name, then probably the firm has the ability and know-how in conducting automated elections.

Its local partner TIM, however, is a reputable company that has been in operation since 1985. It is one of the leading IT companies serving the information management needs of some of the largest financial, insurance, and telecommunications companies in the country.

A 100-percent Filipino-owned firm, it has made its mark by supporting the technological advancement of our country's banking industry. Its multi-platform approach in IT services and solutions provisioning has enabled the company to evolve into one of the most reliable Filipino IT companies in a field dominated by multinationals.

TIM is also one of the lead players in Union Bank's going live with Finacle core banking solution, making it the first bank to successfully replace its mainframe legacy with a new generation open

systems based solution. It also spearheaded the official launch of the National Computer Center's (NCC) Philippine Government e-Services Portal.

This portal is designed to serve as a one-stop, all-in-one internet gateway for accessing comprehensive information and online frontline services of multiple government agencies. It also has a contract with Government Service Insurance System (GSIS) for the agency's computerized documentation and archiving system.

But these questions beg for answers: Is it capable of running an election? What experience does it have? In fact, it was one of the losing bidders in the failed 2004 poll automation. Its largest deal ever was the P350-million SSS server consolidation project. Can it handle the P11.3-billion poll automation deal?

At stake here is our only chance to vote without the accompanying fear and anxiety that our right of suffrage will not be trampled upon. We should not let our guard down in making sure that the Comelec chooses the right entity to electronically count our ballots. There are valid apprehensions that some groups have brought up concerning Smartmatic-TIM consortium.

The way things are it is becoming clearer by the day that the consortium is a cinch to bag the contract. I just hope that these concerns about its capability to perform such delicate tasks should be addressed sooner than later. There should be no doubt left on why the consortium deserves our trust. I believe the Comelec owes the Republic just that.

Just the thought of having my and your votes reflecting the true will of the nation should drive each one of us to push for automated polls. (Philstar.com)

Being Filipino

WHEN I was young, I never truly considered myself Filipino. Sure, I lived in the Philippines and I carried a green passport, but I never identified with the nation of my birth. My parents' friends always complimented me for my mestizo looks when I was still a kid. I didn't have the trademark *kayumanggi* complexion my Filipino teachers used to talk about. I went to a Chinese school and even a Chinese church, and Chinese dominated my community.

How could I call myself a Filipino when I spoke Fukien at home? How could I tell my friends I liked a Filipino girl when everyone paired up with a Chinese girl in the school across the street? Because of social structures I didn't choose, I never really had the chance to call myself a Filipino, nor was I given a reason to do so.

Surprisingly, all that changed in school. I never thought school would address this issue. I thought school was for learning fancy words for communication. To me, knowledge never meant self-reflection. But I was mistaken. In the end, schools, both at home and abroad, solved the issue of my identity.

It started in the third year of my Chinese high school experience in the Philippines. I was lucky enough to meet my Jose Rizal in the classroom. He was a young graduate of Ateneo de Manila

University who planned to spend his whole life teaching. It was his second year as a teacher, but he was already brimming with wisdom and experience. He provided social commentaries on the recent sitcoms involving our elected officials. He showed why *Noli Me Tangere* needed to be taught in school. Everyone in society embodied the characters in the novel, including my favorite religious model, Hermana Rufa. He also believed education could change lives, and he proved that with me.

I took the lingering problems of our country, like corruption and poverty, with a grain of salt. These didn't have to exist in my world. So, I grew up ignoring them and other social illnesses. After all, politics simply isn't a concern for the Chinese in the Philippines. We only need to focus on business. You can be mean and call us gold diggers but then, as my economics teacher explained, Adam Smith's invisible hand will solve all our problems.

Sadly, Smith's hypothesis has failed time and time again in the Philippines. My favorite teacher disagreed with it, and so did the writers of contemporary Filipino literature and opinion-makers like Conrado de Quiros. For as one character in *High School Musical* puts it, "We're all in this together." Just practicing business, medicine, law and

other professions without succumbing to corrupt practices will never solve our problems.

But this mentality plagues the Chinese and Filipino communities alike. Our failure to do something about them causes problems to fester. By not standing up for equality or justice, we allow the problem to persist. By continuing with life as usual, we allow the problems to grow. By not telling everyone else about them, we ensure that the problems will endure. And now our problems have grown too big for any "reform" candidate in 2010 (if there is one) to control or solve.

Considering all this, my 16-year-old brain had a "Eureka!" moment like no other. So this is what it means to be Filipino, I told myself. Filipinos do not only love everything that is good or bad about this country. More importantly, Filipinos fight to change their country. Filipinos open their eyes to the problems they cause and look for ways to change them.

It was at that point in my life that I decided that I wanted to be a Filipino. And that was back in high school, when my idealism was at its peak.

Then I had to go to college. I got accepted to my top two choices of Philippine universities. In April 2008, however, I received an e-mail informing me of my acceptance into the Wharton School of Business at the University of

Pennsylvania.

I had always wanted to study abroad, but this time I couldn't reconcile it with my being Filipino. In the end, I decided to put being Filipino on hold so that I could have what I hoped to be the experience of a lifetime.

I arrived in Philadelphia without any preconceptions. I would explore other options once more since no one knew who I was. Maybe I was just pressured in high school into accepting this definition of a Filipino, I thought.

Like most other college students, I looked for a group of people to associate with. Since I grew up in a Chinese family, it was only natural that I would first try to get along with Chinese students from the mainland. It didn't work. They spoke fluent Mandarin with each other, and I felt like a stranger among them. I guess I'm not really just Chinese after all.

I tried befriending Chinese-American students. In the process, I met countless friends who shared my interest in music and the desire to perfect our Mandarin. However, they didn't know what Gawad Kalinga was nor did they find *kare-kare*, *sinigang* and *adobo* delicious.

To my relief, Penn has a strong Filipino-American group and I joined them. They definitely like the food of their parents, but they don't know where Pasig was nor do they concern themselves with the latest gimmick of our

President.

Each of these groups appeals to me but I have never felt like we share the same values. There is always something missing. Being Filipino is missing. They don't understand the extent of our problems. Even if the Fil-Ams share my food and culture, they only talk about Barack Obama and the US recession. They don't know anything about the eternal Philippine economic and social depression. When I tell them about vote-buying during elections, they just laugh or say it is "cool." They can't be roused to anger, but I am angry.

After being away for almost a year, I realize that I am a Filipino. Given the opportunity to start what could be a very profitable career in investment banking (in a post-recession United States, of course), I will turn it down. I can't imagine living a happy and contented life outside the Philippines. For me, nothing will compare with going back one day and working to help solve our problems.

With this, I have added another dimension to being Filipino: going back to our only home. Sadly, countless Filipinos continue to leave our country for good. I suppose we can't all be Filipino enough when money problems arise. (Inquirer.net)

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