

OPINION & FEATURES

A moment to exhale

WHILE pundits are busy pummeling President Obama with criticisms and shaking their heads in dismay over his actions on Guantanamo, General Motors, the health care industry and Iran's civil unrest, the President makes himself even more vulnerable to flagellation by admitting a nasty habit—smoking.

Pres. Obama ruefully admitted his fight with the big C (cigarettes, that is) but redeemed himself by signing one of the toughest laws ever formulated in American history—the anti-smoking law that seeks to keep teenagers off the habit.

After all, the President did promise his wife, Michelle that he would quit “huffing and puffing” if she allowed him to run the presidential race. A smoking candidate would just simply run out of breath in a neck-and-neck battle for the finish line.

She proudly tells 60 Minutes how she has

outed him from the habit cause there was simply no room in the White House for a president with a constant cloud of smoke.

However, the President has vaguely acknowledged moments when he “fell off the wagon.”

“Almost 90 percent of people who smoke began at 18 or younger,” he said. And in his youth, he was just one of many who fell prey to the vultures of the tobacco industry. “I know I was one of these teenagers. And so I know how difficult it can be break this habit when it’s been with you for a long time.”

But whether Pres. Obama sneaks a smoke now and then is not the issue at this point. It is a weakness that he sheepishly admits for a good cause. And perhaps, his bold confession of an achilles heel would be his key motivation towards his own personal change. (AJPpress)

EDITORIAL



Hidden treasures of the Philippines

WE have written on our man-made tourism resources in the past. Resources, such as our churches, along with our overwhelming natural resources, remain our best option for encouraging tourists to visit the Philippines. The reasons are relatively simple. Our natural resources — even in Asia — remain wholly unique and beautiful. Almost every tourist we have met remarks on the incredible natural beauty the Philippines possess. With relatively little cost, we can preserve our ecological resources and develop them into eco-friendly tourist attractions. But, at times it seems that we are more concerned with chopping down and wasting them for short-term use, than developing them for long-term profit. In the end, the loss of our natural resources is a loss from which we can never recover.

In Asia, and very likely around the world, our church structures and Spanish-era structures are unique. They remain an under-utilized attraction. Macao has been able to leverage one church facade into an international tourist spot. Some of our towns alone have more attractive facades. In Europe, Spain has been able to become one of the top tourist destinations in the world, essentially on the strength of their churches, food and fiestas (elements of which we have in abundance). Among our regional neighbors the

Philippines boasts a culture, a cuisine, an architecture that is completely exceptional. We should be capitalizing on this. Instead, we see that we are trying to remake ourselves into a gambling destination; a venture that will fail. We cannot compete with the Macaos and Singapores of Asia. Instead, we will end up attracting the dregs of the gambling establishment. And with a gambling culture, we will see a resurgence in vice trades. If we are worried about the sex and drug trades now, wait until we become the seedy gambling destination of Asia.

We were very pleased then to see that some organizations have begun to take notice of our churches. Chief among them is the Ortigas Foundation. It was with sadness that we read last week of the passing of Attorney Rafael Ortigas Jr. He was the president of Ortigas Company, as well as president of the Ortigas Foundation. One of his major projects was the Ortigas Library; one of the few organizations in the Philippines dedicated to research and preserving Philippine history. This is an admirable endeavor; one that has already brought invaluable research resources to the Philippines. We were informed that prior to his passing Mr. Ortigas donated his personal collection of Filipiniana to the Ortigas Library. His donations and the development of the library are notable achievements that should also be hailed with his passing. He was a great patron and protector of Philippine history and culture.

One of the last great projects Mr. Ortigas embarked upon was a pictorial and informative database of all Spanish-era churches in

the Philippines. A monumental task, but one for which he had great passion. He appointed his executive assistant (and photographer) Betty Lalana and photographer Boy Arboleda to seek out and photograph the churches. To do so they used the Catholic directory of churches, old maps and other sources to map the churches out. In the process they discovered and photographed ‘hidden treasures’: Churches of surpassing beauty in far-flung locations. Recently, they exhibited photographs of some thirty-five churches, a kumbento and even a hormo (oven) that they decided were amongst the most unique and beautiful of the Philippines’ hidden treasures. Some of the churches they highlight are the cemetery chapel in Tayabas, the brick churches of the Cagayan Valley and the fortress church of Cuyo in Palawan, among many others. Overall, they have photographed over 300 churches throughout the country. The verve and tireless energy the photographers demonstrated in cataloging these treasures is worthy of our highest commendation.

Mr. Ortigas and the Ortigas Library have created an invaluable tool for conservation, heritage preservation and tourism. More than anything, by bringing these hidden treasures to light they have aptly demonstrated that the Philippines’ greatest tourism attractions are right in front of us. We look forward to seeing the exhibit again and for the publication of the full catalogue of all the churches in the Philippines. With this project, Attorney Rafael Ortigas has left an incalculably valuable legacy to the Filipino people. (Philstar.com)



ROSES & THORNS
Alejandro R. Roces

David to challenge GMA in Pampanga if...

FORMER Senate President Jovito Salonga celebrated his 89th birthday last Monday, June 22 at the Valle Verde 3 multi-purpose hall and, as expected, it was star-studded with opposition figures and cause-oriented leaders. This being an election year, all eyes were on Sen. Mar Roxas and his mother, LP high priestess Judy Roxas who took the opportunity to remind Ka Jovy in her guest book remarks that he has to help her son in his presidential fight, and Rep. Cynthia Villar, Sen. Manny Villar’s indefatigable campaigner-wife who arrived earlier. Salonga remains healthy and his memory is sharp as ever (contributing factors include a healthy diet, continuing work, regular exercise and retiring early, so that at exactly 9 p.m., he left his guests and went home). One indication of his sharpness was his 16-page reminiscences, titled *Mga Sariwang Ala-ala*, of his own life and career, dating from before the war.

The lovely evening was marked by cordial fellowship and lots of Filipino music, the hallmark of any Salonga gathering. The songs interpreted by soprano Rachel Gerodias and tenor Jemuel Victorino, Justice Raul Victorino’s grandson. But equally tantalizing were the political tidbits, and by far the most interesting was that sociologist and Inquirer columnist Randy David would run against President Macapagal-Arroyo in Pampanga’s 2nd district, if she were to declare her candidacy this November. Like the Macapagals, the David clan is true-blue Pampangueno, and Randy could inject the kind of non-trapo political heat that Fr. Ed Panlilio gener-

ated in 2007, and unite the opposition and most of the cause-oriented groups. On the other hand, GMA would rely on her vaunted political machinery in the province and the solid infrastructure program she put in place over the past eight years. A grand combat.

But before this can happen, some questions must be satisfied. Will GMA run for Congress? It has been bruited about that she would run to capture the prime minister’s post in the event of a shift to a parliamentary system, but her election lawyer, Romulo Macalintal, disputes this. He asserts that whoever among the presidential aspirants gets elected in 2010, he or she wouldn’t just hand the PM’s post to GMA on a silver platter. “What’s certain if ever GMA runs for Congress in 2010 is that there will be presidential elections and that she will step down at noon of June 30, as provided for in the Constitution,” Macalintal says.

But the more basic issue is whether or not GMA could run for Congress. Macalintal asserts that RA 9006, the Fair Election Act, passed the year GMA assumed power in 2001, repealed Sec. 67 of the 1975 Omnibus Election Code. This provision deemed any elected official ipso facto resigned if he or she ran for an office other than the one he

or she was holding. Macalintal notes that what had seemed to be a “rider” to the law lifting the ban on political advertising was challenged before the Supreme Court, which said it wouldn’t question the wisdom of the lawmakers.

UE College of Law dean Amado Valdez asserts, however, that the very idea of GMA’s running for Congress in the remaining months of her incumbency is not allowed by the Constitution, inasmuch as she had sworn to discharge the duties of her six-year term which began in 2004 and ends on June 30, 2010. If GMA wants to run for Congress, he said, “her legal option is to go on terminal leave,” but he warned that this act will make her shed her immunity and leave her susceptible to charges or indictment for violation of election laws during the campaign. Valdez asserts that to argue that she can run in Pampanga because there is no law prohibiting it “is to beg for a redundancy and the height of irresponsibility.”

Anyone who feels the political situation in our country is hopeless should look at a small crop of Filipino local leaders, among them Mayor Jesse Robredo of Naga City, the most awarded LGU in the country, which recently celebrated its 61st charter day, and Mayor Sonia Ramoso-Lorenzo of San Isidro, Nueva Ecija, who enchanted a recent seminar at the Kennedy School of Government in Harvard University with her “bottom-up” theory of governance, as narrated in Inquirer yesterday. Robredo and Lorenzo, who are active in the Kaya Natin! movement founded by Harvey Keh of the

Ateneo School of Government, are models of genuine participative governance. The national and international recognition they have been reaping confirms the truism about public service being its own reward. They represent a radical departure from the typical local officials whose only motivation in public office is to rake in more money and ensure the continuation of their political dynasties.

I am proud that Cecile Alvarez and I “discovered” Sonia Lorenzo years ago. Some weeks back Ateneo University president Bienvenido Nebres, a guest in our radio show, used as an example of the school’s grassroots involvement its partnership with Lorenzo in packaging programs to raise standards in public schools and form a health delivery system. More recently, the Zuellig Family Foundation began working with the mayor on a health information management system, in cooperation with Intel and Salus, a local IT company. Father Nebres asserts that if a local executive tackles health and education like Lorenzo does, “you don’t need a miting de avance.” Or I would add, the official need not buy votes, which demeans both candidate and voters.

At the 92nd birthday of Dr. Stephen Zuellig, I was amused when I introduced Lorenzo to South African Ambassador Pieter Vermuullen and he quipped, “You don’t look like a mayor.” “But how should a mayor look?” she shot back. The envoy stammered, “Not as prettily put-together.”

Thank God looks deceive, for Sonia Lorenzo is both good-looking and efficient and dedicated—a local executive with a vision. (Inquirer.net)

COMMENTARY

Belinda Olivares-Cunanan

Scenarios

WITH the joint opening of Congress and President Arroyo’s final State of the Nation Address (SONA) approaching, a new sinister scenario is being floated.

At this point the scenario looks more like wishful thinking on the part of desperadoes than anything else.

On the other hand, this ad-

ministration has a track record for resorting to desperate, evil measures to serve its interests. At the risk of being deemed paranoid, certain seemingly wild scenarios must not be dismissed outright.

Those claiming to have first-hand knowledge of sinister plots want the nation to be on its toes, reminding Filipinos that grievous events have happened in this country in the past four decades that the people thought would never happen.

With the scenarios being floated in connection with the joint opening of Congress late next month, postponing the SONA may be a good idea.

The scenarios aren’t just health-re-

lated, though these are the wackiest, with anti-government forces supposedly planning to unleash germ warfare on the President and her congressional lackeys.

A more plausible scenario is that the House of Representatives will con senators into becoming part of a constituent assembly (con-ass) through their sheer presence at the joint opening of the third and final session of the 14th Congress.

Senators are expected to walk out, and the consequent tumult, according to certain quarters, will be used as an excuse to declare emergency rule, during which anything can happen.

It’s not beyond this President to impose emergency rule, shut down Congress, declare a revolutionary government and rewrite the Constitution so she can stay in power for life.

This is the scenario; you’ve been

warned.

There are at least two wild cards in this scenario.

One is that the tumult against con-ass, with contrived Senate participation, may not be enough to justify the declaration of emergency rule. As recent events have shown, Filipinos are content to just wait for the May 2010 elections to roll around—whether automated or manual doesn’t matter all that much—to see a change in leadership after nine long years.

Also, unless senators are asleep, handcuffed to their seats or downed by a virulent form of Influenza A(H1N1) at the joint opening session, it would be impossible to prevent their walkout at the first hint that a con-ass is being convened.

But there is the possibility that for several million reasons, a senator or two (or

even four) can be persuaded to stay on, giving the House the token Senate participation that it needs for con-ass.

The second wild card is military participation. Unless another diplomatic post is found for him, Victor Ibrado will still be the Armed Forces chief when the third session opens late next month. And like his predecessor and classmate in the Philippine Military Academy, Alexander Yano, Ibrado isn’t the type who will allow the AFP to be used for emergency rule.

While the President’s loyal aide Delfin Bangit is now in place to take over from Ibrado, and has filled key Army and intelligence positions with his PMA classmates, Ibrado is just starting to warm his seat. Sending Ibrado overseas like his two “mistahs” will look too suspicious—although when did that stop this administration? (Philstar.com)



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