

More congressmen support media call to trash Right of Reply Bill

by MIRIAM DESACADA & DELON PORCALLA
Philstar.com

More congressmen are supporting media's call to trash the Right of Reply Bill (RORB).

Rep. Reynaldo Uy of the first congressional district in Samar joined Makati Rep. Teddyboy Locsin and other lawmakers who back the media in seeking to junk the RORB at the House of Representatives.

"I hope the proponents of this bill would not impair press freedom or dictate to media what to say. Media should be given a voice," Uy said in a chance interview with reporters here.

Eastern Samar Governor Ben Evardone, for his part, said he would urge congressmen to junk the bill.

Uy has assured the local media in the region that he would not support the bill but instead back up the media and continue to respect press freedom.

He warned that approval of the RORB would affect press freedom. The solon said he has never encountered an irresponsible journalist or received unfair treatment from the press in his close to 20 years in public service.

"I am happy the media in the region has always been fair and balanced in treating issues and I salute them," Uy said.

The RORB seeks to punish media firms through fines, closures if they fail to immediately give the complainant equal airtime or equal print space. The media criticized the bill because they believe it curtails press freedom.

House Speaker Nograles, in an informal survey conducted by his office, noted that the majority of members of the House of Representatives favor the approval of a right of reply law despite resistance from the media community.

Meanwhile, the leadership of the House decided yesterday to defer approval of a measure

related to the RORB that seeks to decriminalize or remove penalties of imprisonment in the libel law.

Nograles ordered the deferment of the third reading approval of House Bill 5760, which would then provide lawmakers the opportunity to take a second and closer look at the bill, which apparently still contains penal provisions despite its original intent.

"The spirit and intent of the bills in relation to the decriminalization of libel is incompatible with the provisions of the substitute measure. I think that the provisions which are supposed to remove the imprisonment clauses in the measure did not see print," Nograles said.

He said this prompted some of the congressmen to withdraw authorship.

HB 5760 is the substitute

measure for five separate bills on libel.

Nograles noted that while HB 5760 missed its main objective of decriminalizing libel, he said its purpose should be to encourage media to be more responsible by way of higher fines for publishing or airing libelous materials while enhancing press freedom by removing penal provisions on libel.

With the decision to defer the third reading approval of HB 5760, Nograles said he supports the decriminalization of libel to strengthen freedom of the press while encouraging a more professional media.

After holding a dialogue with executives of media outfits, Nograles and several House leaders agreed to take a second look at the proposed RORB which media considers a form of censorship. ■

Comelec: Biometrics registration limited

by ANNA VALMERO
Inquirer.net

PASAY CITY—The Commission on Elections (Comelec) can only accommodate about two percent of the 48 million voters for its biometrics registration by end of 2009, poll executives said last Mar. 4.

Answering questions during a joint congressional hearing on automation, Comelec executive director Jose Tolentino admitted that the poll body could not cover all registered voters in time for the 2010 polls.

Comelec chairman Jose Melo added that the registration of voters using biometrics technology was only possible in 2013.

Melo said the poll body has limited resources and time to implement this plan, which sought to purge the voters' list of flying voters, double registrants, among others.

Melo said voters that did not register through biometrics could still vote in 2010.

Comelec said there were about 48 million registered voters in 2007.

Tolentino said that at least 23 million registered voters have no biometrics record with the Comelec.

Biometrics technology is now used by agencies like the Social Security System to capture information unique to individuals, including fingerprints, signatures and photos. ■



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