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## No offer for Escudero to join Lakas...

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Escudero didn't rate well in surveys for "presidentiables" but fared better in polls for vice president.

### Meeting with Danding

NPC sources said Escudero met with Cojuangco before he announced his decision but it was actually San Miguel Corp. president and chief operating officer Ramon Ang who had been blocking the release of funds for Escudero's presidential campaign. Cojuangco is chairman of SMC while Ang is also Petron Corp.'s chairman and chief executive officer.

The sources said Escudero was offered only between P100 million and P200 million or way below the P4 billion that experts believe is needed to launch a massive campaign.

But the sources could not say whether Escudero caught the ire of Ang for his refusal to vote in favor of the Japan-Philippines Economic Partnership Agreement, which was ratified by the Senate, last year.

SMC and a Japanese firm, Kirin Holdings Co. Limited, are partners.

Escudero earlier said on *Profiles*, an ABS-CBN late night show featuring presidential candidates that Ang had requested him to vote for the JPEPA but that he declined.

### Not for money

Escudero denied money was a factor in his decision to bolt NPC.

"The subject of financing was never discussed, or was it ever an

issue within the party. My resignation was a matter of principles and conviction," he said in an interview on *Umagang Kay Ganda* television program.

"I never prioritized money in my career. I live in a simple house with my simple family. I didn't dream of having money when I went into public service," he said.

Escudero's camp said the senator had been in "conflict" with the interests of many of the NPC members.

In his speech last Wednesday, Escudero was in a fighting mood as he hit massive corruption. He said reforms would be difficult to carry out if the leadership is beholden to a party or groups with vested interests.

Escudero is also known for his opposition to the allocation of pork barrel funds for lawmakers saying the practice is one of the principal causes of corruption.

### NPC still in the race

Legarda said NPC is ready to move on and field a presidential candidate in 2010 after losing Escudero.

She said NPC leaders and members were considering various options at the moment but that she would definitely stay on as the party's vice presidential bet.

"Why will my life depend on someone who changed his mind?" she asked.

She disclosed that some party members had considered fielding her as their presidential candidate but that she had to decline because she had already declared

her bid for the vice presidency and would like to stand by it.

She said she had agreed to be vice president of Escudero even if she is older and more experienced in politics.

Right now, she said, the NPC is considering aligning with other parties or just allowing leaders and members to separately pick a presidential candidate to support but with her as vice presidential bet.

"The NPC is solidly behind my candidacy. We had an emergency meeting (on Wednesday) and we boosted the morale (of one another)," Legarda said.

She admitted that she and many others didn't have prior knowledge of Escudero's decision because he had talked about it only with former Isabela governor and NPC chairman Faustino Dy.

"I don't know exactly what happened. I am asking too. I haven't seen the shadow of any presidential candidate, I haven't been talking to them personally," Legarda said.

Legarda said Escudero has not even made clear if he's running again and for what position thus making it difficult to tell if he would still get support from some NPC members.

### Partyless, hopeless

For Sen. Miriam Defensor-Santiago, it is "virtually impossible" for an independent candidate to win in a presidential election, especially if fraud and cheating exist.

"Even if all the necessary factors are present, there will be no official party machinery to prevent cheating," Santiago told The STAR in a telephone interview.

Santiago, who ran for president in 1992 but lost to administration candidate Fidel Ramos in what she described as fraud-tainted elections, explained that a party-less candidate can win a Senate seat.

"I proved that during my first term when I ran for senator as an independent," Santiago said.

For the presidency, Santiago said an independent to be successful "requires first, overwhelming popularity."

"This means the candidate should place No. 1 or No. 2 in the reputable national surveys. If the independent candidate ranks below No. 2, then he will be defeated by the sheer necessity of going around the country personally trying to reach 45 million voters," she said. ■

## Villar says competence...

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June next year.

"I will let justice take its course," he said.

"It is very important to say that under our system, the judiciary is not under the president. The president is the head of the executive branch. If people will file cases against President Arroyo, then they will have to defend themselves.

Villar also had his two-cents' worth on corruption.

"When you talk about eradicating corruption, it is very important to establish that you are capable of doing it.

"Have you done anything in the past that will show that you are capable of doing something as difficult as eradicating corruption?"

"Because otherwise, it will just become an empty platform, an empty claim."

Villar said a president aspirant must have a game plan, not just say that he or she will not be corrupt, or he or she had not been accused of anything.

"You must be explicit about how exactly you're going to do that. I can," he said.

"Year one, month one, you must show that your term will not be characterized by corruption."

Villar said as president, he would promote transparency in bidding and would allow the public to scrutinize all public documents.

"Invite all investors," he said. ■

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