

Amid calamity, congressmen still push for Charter change

by JESS DIAZ
Philstar.com

AMID hunger, devastation and calamity, congressmen found time last Oct. 12 to push for their Charter change (Cha-cha) initiative.

Upon recommendation of the House constitutional amendments committee, the appropriations committee approved a bill authorizing the expenditure of taxpayers' money for the convening of a constitutional convention (con-con) next year.

The appropriations panel, however, rejected the other committee's proposal for a P2-billion appropriation for the election and maintenance of the envisioned convention that would revise the Constitution.

Quirino Rep. Junie Cua, appropriations committee chairman, told reporters that the money needed for the election of convention delegates would be taken from the savings of the Commission on Elections.

It would be conducted simultaneously with the election of barangay officials in October next year to save on costs, he said.

"The convening of the convention, on the other hand,

could take place in January 2011 so we won't have to appropriate public funds for that purpose for next year," he said.

Cua said his panel rejected the recommendation for a P2-billion appropriation "because we are cognizant of the funding requirements of typhoon victims and areas devastated by floods."

"They are our priority, not the planned constitutional convention," he stressed.

The committee on constitutional amendments, chaired by Rep. Victor Ortega of La Union, one of the provinces affected by typhoon "Pepeng," endorsed the con-con mode of amending the Constitution after the constituent assembly (con-ass) option failed.

Under the Ortega panel's proposal, convention delegates would be elected on Oct. 25, 2010, five months after the combined presidential, congressional and local elections in May.

Each congressional district would have one delegate. Delegates would have no salary but would be entitled to a

P2,000 per diem for every day of attendance in the convention or any of its committees, and travel expenses.

Elected delegates would convene at the session hall of the House of Representatives on the third Monday of November 2010 with the Supreme Court chief justice presiding temporarily until a presiding officer is elected.

It is not clear where the delegates would hold their sessions after they are convened.

Given the onslaught of typhoons, the Senate is not expected to agree to the expenditure of public funds for Cha-cha at this time.

It has consistently refused to cooperate with the House in its con-ass initiative.

Before they adjourned their second regular session in June, congressmen adopted Resolution 1109, which calls on "members of Congress" to meet as a constituent assembly to consider Cha-cha proposals.

They have not done so until now as it is obvious that they have already run out of time for Cha-cha through con-ass. ■

Comelec stops printing of voter's ID

THE Commission on Elections (Comelec) has suspended the printing of voters' identification cards upon the advice of acting director Jeannie Flororita to give way to the computerized system of registration.

In a resolution, the poll body said the printing would resume after the records of 50 million registered voters have gone through the Automated Fingerprint Identification System (AFIS).

"In effect, only credible voters can enjoy hassle-free identification to vote," read the resolution.

In recommending the stoppage of printing, Flororita said

there has been no supply of paper for printing since October 2008.

Under the AFIS project, the Comelec uses data capturing machines (DCMs) to get the photographs, fingerprints and signatures of voters.

The biometrics will then be cross-matched to eliminate double and multiple registrants.

In an earlier interview, lawyer Teopisto Elnas, Comelec elections and barangay affairs director, said it was not practical to issue voter's ID since double and multiple registrants have not yet been eliminated from the list.

It would be better to wait for the cleared list of voters before

resuming the printing of IDs, he added.

The Comelec had begun using DCMs to get the biometrics of registrants in 2004 but it had no machines to cross match them.

In the 2007 elections, only around half of the 45 million voters had their biometrics taken.

Last month, the Comelec had awarded the P1.5-billion contract to supply the AFIS machines to the joint venture of Unison Computer System Inc., Lamco Paper Products Co. Inc. and NEC Philippines Inc.

The benefits of AFIS will be reaped in the midterm polls in 2013. (Philstar.com)



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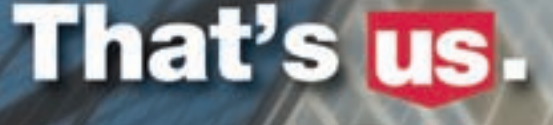

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