

The News UpFront: (TOP STORY) as of Friday, March 22, 2013

The story that began a year ago with a simple demand for complete financial reports has now embroiled the Senate of Canada and the Philippine Consulate. It highlights the chasm in the community, the growing public demand for accountability and lately, the seeming attempt by responsible officials to shield the career fundraiser from the inquiring minds of the media. While these are going on, the community is lulled into believing its interests are fought for and protected, and so some members are consoled by rewarding them, minus the minute scrutiny, with the Queen's medals so indiscriminately given that they lost their meaning.

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PREROGATIVE:

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A Colossal Mistake or Abject Surrender?

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{xtypo_quote} When the public's right to know is threatened, and when the rights of free speech and free press are at risk, all of the other liberties we hold dear are endangered. - Christopher Dodd *{/xtypo_quote}*
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TORONTO - Implausible, meaning, beyond belief or understanding.

As I sit down and think about it over and over in search of answers, one thought keeps bothering me.

In the six months that Tobias Enverga Jr. has held his appointive office as member of the Senate of Canada, he seems to have succeeded in staging a coup of some sort, and bloodless at that, just by doing the rounds of friends and constituency in his paper giant called Philippine Canadian Charitable Foundation.

I don't mean that he has the courage or military muscle to mount it; a fundraiser would be more likely. Nor do I imply that

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he has the vast following of loyalists who would blindly support him.

Where daring, might and following failed, Enverga prevailed by networking and talking endlessly about how lucky Filipinos are for the "gift" of having him, and for the interminable pandering to Prime Minister Stephen Harper and the slew of provincial and federal Conservatives. (Video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5cdQMojaPys>)

It is quite an effective gambit that's already wearing off implanting on our collective psyche that we ought to thank him and his patrons for his position secured through a process citizens and taxpayers had been denied - the right to vote him in and out of office.

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In the excitement of some and disappointment of many, we almost miss the signs . . .

I thought he had annexed to the dominion the only Philippine territory in Toronto - the Philippine Consulate on Eglinton Ave. E - and converted it into an extension of his office in Ottawa

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Don't laugh now. To a fault that raises questions of protocol, the consulate has become his generous assistant. As events of recent days show, there's an unmistakable surrender to whatever charm (for lack of a better word, sorry) of the new member of the Senate.

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For instance, the launching on March 15 of the annual tour to the homeland being promoted by the Philippine diplomatic corps in their foreign postings. Embedded in the program is a Canadian event - the recognition ceremony for the recipients of Queen Elizabeth II diamond jubilee medals.

My impression was that it would be devoted exclusively to generate interests in the many tourist spots in the Philippines. Vice-Consul Bolivar Bao was impressive in his presentation and quite convincing too. However, his part of the program was far shorter than the one taking a piggyback ride, which was the other ceremony.

Enverga officiated at that event, but his name did not appear in the program sheet, perhaps to not attract attention. Arguably, it was also a Filipino event inasmuch as those involved are Canadians of Filipino descent.

But why would the Philippine government spend, as it did, for a ceremony of, by, and for Canadians on behalf of a generously-compensated member of the Senate of Canada who has a budget for such occasions?

The consulate shouldered the costs of the event, according to Zaldy Cuachon, owner of the popular Casa Manila restaurant on York Mills Rd. where it took place.

All it means is that Enverga hinged on - a freeloader nonetheless - on the consulate to pursue his politics, and the consulate willingly allowed it without much quibbling.
(Video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qQ44XpCup9o>)

Has the consulate of the sovereign Republic of the Philippines

totally given up everything to accommodate Enverga, in the process committed discrimination that effectively undermined the media's right to information?

Consul General Junever Mahilum-West has yielded to the wishes of some individuals to forbid my news coverage where Enverga was the unlisted guest. She would deny it, of course, but a careful reading of her statement showed where her leanings are.

"Right now, we could no longer accommodate additional guests as we have overshot Casa Manila's limit of 120 persons, which is set as per fire and safety regulations," she wrote back in an email inquiring if I could cover the event without an invitation.

Being read the fire code when all I wanted was to cover the

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news is evidently aimed at deterring me from coming. There's no precedent as vengeful and tactless as this from a diplomat. It indicated a definitive stand to favor Enverga who is also in the eye of the storm courtesy of his wife, Rosemer Albovias Enverga.

(Video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h0BAxCQYRoc>)

In fairness, the Consul General did say that I could come but there's no guarantee I would have a seat. There's an assumption there that I would partake of the dinner, which costs \$18 per person. In my news coverages, I distance myself from such a freebie as it would compromise my independence as a journalist.

But then, after unnecessarily invoking the fire code, her invitation ("if you wish to come") is clearly an after-thought.

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I'm used to verbal and written insults because of the nature of my stories but this one from the Consul General beats them all . . . for the reason that she is a diplomat.

Her main excuse was that the "limit of 120" has been reached as of Friday morning, ostensibly based on reservations. I was counting the members of Philippine Press Club Ontario where the invitation was sent and there were only 47. There must be a room for one more, I said to myself.

In reality, the estimated number of people who went hovered between 130 and 150, according to Mr. Cuachon, the restaurant owner, who was generous enough to answer questions during a phone talk on Thursday, March 21. People came and went, so the number waxed and waned, he said.

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The 120-limit under the fire code means that every guest has to be seated, he explained. But that is not a hard and fast rule as the number could be put to a maximum of 130.

An interesting detail that never got mentioned was the intel that a group would hold a picket there. The day before, a Toronto police operative visited and inquired if police assistance is needed. The restaurant owner said no.

Other issues might sidetrack from the real import of the Consul General's statement, which is the selective banning of members of the press.

I do not wish to divine her motives. For me it's good enough to see how one diplomat would turn her back on the very essence of all democratic societies just to oblige somebody who was not

even vetted by the people. # # #

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3. Filipino Web Entertainment Channel at: <http://www.youtube.com/user/FilWebEntertainment#g/>

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4. EatsNRestos Channel at: <http://www.youtube.com/user/EatsNRestos/videos>

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