

Written by

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JGL Eye By JOSEPH G. LARIOS (© 2013 *Fil Am Extra Exchange*) C HICAGO (*FAXX/jG Li*) –

Janet Napoles' masterful ability to pull the rug from under the feet of unsuspecting Philippine senators and congressmen could be a game changer that could also remake a nation that will go into a soul searching on how a culture of gift giving has allowed Filipinos to accept starvation wages.

If senators and congressmen are earning a minuscule salary 40,000 pesos (US\$952) a month, nobody could blame them if they dip their hands into the pork barrel cookie jar and other perks just to keep up with their lifestyles and recover their election expenses.

If they give themselves a raise (under the Philippine Constitution, any raise Congress passes will only take effect after their term of office) but lose discretion to pinpoint projects for Priority Development Assistance Fund and other privileges, their constituents will no longer bother them to open their wallets for health and education expenses among others and gifts for baptism, birthdays, weddings, burials and other rites of passage.

This will also prompt politicians from using their own money to bankroll their campaign because they had lost the ability to break the pork-barrel piggy banks.

The "porkless" Congress will not only lose its glamor, it will also compel it to pass an election reform that will allow political parties to raise and accept campaign contributions from donors to fuel their campaign. Names of campaign contributors should be posted online.

Any unspent balance of the campaign contributions should revert back to the political parties and not to the personal pockets of politicians. The political parties will be required to report to the Commission on Elections the amount they have raised and the amount of money they have spent, including election expenses receipts.

Think of it this way: if you give alms to a disabled person on the street, other beggars would also be expecting alms from you. Why don't the government's Departments of Social Work and Development, Health, Education, Interior and Local Government, National Housing Authority, Pagcor, PCSO, etc. come together and round up the beggars and informal settlers (squatters) and provide them high-rise homes, a place to rehabilitate them and provide them medical, occupational and physical therapists, education, training, etc. so they could become productive members of society? **ERAP'S NOVEL FUND-RAISING** The City of Manila led by my friend, former President and Mayor Joseph Estrada, is trying to adopt a novel way of increasing the meager salaries of traffic enforcers by giving them 20 percent commission from penalties paid for by traffic violators.

The traffic enforcers, who earn P4,000 (US\$95) a month, will no longer be forced to extort from traffic violators. They would now be compelled to turnover their parking fees collections.

But City Hall should adopt some mechanisms, like CCTV cameras, on the street that could also monitor if traffic enforcers are abusing their duties.

If employees of both the government and private sectors are given big salary increases, like the senators and congressmen, they will not be tempted to look for side jobs. They could just go straight home to their families from work, be well rested to prepare for work the next day.

Big salaries will discourage Filipinos from leaving the country to seek greener pastures.

Big salaries will make them fall in love with their jobs. Big salaries will deter them from accepting grease money while transacting business with the public for fear of losing their jobs.

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If for some reasons, some employees would still look for side jobs, their employers should report their earnings to the Bureau of Internal Revenue. These employers can withhold their taxes so that their extra incomes will not form part of the underground economy, like grease money, which has remained untaxed.

If all transactions are taxed, including sales, and professional services such as doctors', attorneys', CPA's, architects', engineers', waiters', taxi drivers' tips, casino, race track winnings, etc., and are properly reported to the BIR, these "new moneys" would not only boost the collection of the BIR but will flow back as salaries and benefits of government employees so they are expected to render efficient public service. **PUBLIC MAY PAY BY CREDIT CARD, CHECKS OR MONEY ORDER**

With the computerizations, the public can transact personally less with the government employees by letting them pay with credit cards online. There is no more need to require employees to report for work without pockets, like casino dealers, as one of the public proposals floated around by the Bureau of Customs to deter extortion activities of its employees. If the public transacts business with the government, the public should be encouraged to pay only in check or money order.

If the public would pay in cash, the government employee should all the more be required to issue a receipt at all times.

It's about time the Big Business moderate their profits by supporting the legislated wage increase pending in Congress.

The Big Business, which composes the current or probable future income earner at the 30-percent of the income distribution, especially those earning one million pesos (US\$23,809) a month, and the Catholic Church and other religious institutions, should join hands in helping the government and the private sector raise the salaries of both the government and private sectors.

The revelation by the Commission on Audit about the irregularities and misuse of about P113-billion (US\$2.6-billion) pork barrel by legislators for 2007 and 2009 must stop. It easily makes the P10-billion (US\$238-million) pork barrel stolen by Napoles a tip of the iceberg. Senators and congressmen may not have actually pocketed about P56-billion (US\$1.3-billion) of this pork but it is only about .005 percent of the six years' national budget of about P10.6-trillion (US\$252-billion) or more.

The business sector should stop defying, threatening and harassing the government and Congress over the proposed P125 legislated wage hike for the more than 35-million workers in the private sector because of its overflowing profits of their businesses.

These businessmen control and own the oil, power/electricity, water, telecoms, big shopping malls and many more. Worse, they can increase anytime the rates of basic utilities and services despite the cry of hapless ordinary citizens and Congress and government be damned!

The powerful ECOP (Employers Confederation of the Philippines) members should stop threatening congressmen, who dare pass this very important wage measure that will benefit the working force, who actually build the nation.

As a Catholic, I will be more impressed if the Catholic Church leaders would use their power to push for the approval of the legislated wage hike. They control majority of private schools, whose tuition fees are out of reach by majority of the Filipinos.

The Philippine population is about the breach the 100-million mark. It's about time the Catholic Church supports the Reproductive Health Bill, which will arrest the runaway population. I know

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the Catholic Church wants an increase of population so more poor Filipinos will be making donations during baptism, weddings, burials, masses, etc. But why doesn't the Church advocate for responsible parenthood that includes the process of deciding how to choose partners, when to form families, when to have the first child, child spacing, how many children to have and how to ensure the best possible lives of the parents and their children? (lariosa_jos@sbcglobal.net)

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