

Here's a Filipino wisecrack that if you want to remain youthful up to the end, and suffer not an unwanted long decrepit old age, a porky diet is the answer. Ask any self-respecting lechon aficionado, and he'll readily say, it's just common sense. That's why cholesterol laden-up dishes of pork menu are the most popular source of protein for humankind. Of course, it is barred in places where God is health conscious. But to his dismay, it had free global propaganda mileage just a few weeks ago, thanks to Cable TV.

The world was faced by a real possibility that the defender of western civilization, the most powerful country in the world, could go the way of the pig and shrink like bacon, figuratively, for lack of money to run the government. If the Republicans had their way, the next generation of school children would be reading in the history books the time when pigs, literally and figuratively, could have brought down the start-up administration of the first black president of the United States. And all because of disagreement over pork!

The Democrats and the Republicans have been accusing and pounding on each other on the merits and demerits of letting them take the bacon home to their constituency.

Sen. John McCain chided President Obama for signing-off a spending bill providing a budget of \$410-billion for the fiscal year 2008-2009. He wanted it vetoed because it contains more than \$12.8-billion, or 3%, earmarked pork projects for the senators and congressmen. But Mr. Obama didn't take him seriously. He probably thought it is one of those famous McCain jokes.

The President didn't want to pick a fight with Congress, this time around, for two reasons. One, as his Press Secretary Robert Gibbs said, a lot of the earmarks were actually requested by, or leftovers of, the George W. Bush administration. And two, stripping some 9,000 earmarks would mean a long, dragged out fight in Congress that the country can't afford right now. Sure, some items in the bill are pork, but every dollar spent will stimulate the economy just the same. Anyway, there's still enough money, to the tune of 97% of the total budget that will fund desperately-needed programs nationwide.

Mr. Obama returned fire at the Republicans who accused him of backing down on his campaign promise to get rid of the pork. He called them hypocrites for decrying against the very same pork they themselves sought and took for themselves, and, then, sent it to him for his signature. He said he found it ironic "that some of those who railed the loudest against this bill because of

earmarks, actually inserted earmarks of their own, and will tout them in their own states and districts.”

Sen. Claire McCaskill (D-Mo) has also this to say of her colleagues: “No fewer than 17 different Republican senators stood up, and with absolutely righteous indignation, talked about the pet projects in the stimulus bill. And guess what? Every single one of them has earmarks in this [spending] bill.”

The pork issue is awkward for President Obama but most welcome to Senator McCain. They both campaigned against the practice in the last election. But Mr. Obama has found that it’s easier to rail against it as a candidate than convince the senators and the congressmen to kiss the practice good-bye once he became President.

Senator McCain, on the other hand, welcomes the opportunity to accentuate his healthy reason against pork. But if he were the President, he would have found himself in the same difficulty as Mr. Obama. Because while all the Republican senators and congressmen go on TV lambasting the pork barrels, they themselves joined the great chase to grab the squeaking swine pack around the halls of Congress. And once they got their pig, they helped themselves in carving choice slices of the same pork they say they despise!

The case against pork for physical reasons is clear and well-founded. But whether it’s really just as bad to the fiscal health of the country is still an arguable point. Actually, many of the pet programs being funded in the districts or states of the legislators are well-deserving. What’s objectionable is the way they are procured and how the sponsors are able to get them. And, more importantly, they don’t form part of the over-all economic plan of the area that’s crafted for a particular purpose.

It could be just a wild card, or, maybe, just off-the-cuff, that is decided at the whim of the community, or promoted to serve the agenda of a political sponsor. Hence, it’s not conducive to a wise use of government resources.

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They don't answer the two-way test, say, the one advanced by Mr. Steve Ellis, vice president for Taxpayers for Common Sense, to wit: Are they the best and most deserving programs, or just the ones that happened to be in the right congressional district? And, does the federal government have a proper role in such programs?

"Earmarks are the result of a bad system," Ellis said. "It's not a project-merit system. It's a political-muscle system. The more muscle you have, the more money you can get spend in your district.

What's known in U.S. history as pork barrel, AKA earmarks, is presently called in the Philippines as Priority Development Assistance Fund (PDAF). Members of the Philippines Congress publicly and noisily take credit of the projects funded from their pork-barrel allocations. Oftentimes, these projects never get done, but government records would show the public funds released but no public works to show for it.

If you read the e-mail circulated recently of the reasons why Filipinos love to become senators, it's because a senator has about 100-million pesos in disposable-and-discretionary pork barrel that he controls from start to finish. When it comes to pork, all members of Congress, from both sides of the Pacific Ocean, know that in a representative, democratic system, American style, it is very much a part of the democratic process. Elections are decided mainly by their ability to bring home the bacon, not by what they do during the legislative deliberations. The difference, though, is that in the US, at least, for the most part, the bacon turns up into public works. In the Philippines, the bacon could get melted in its own fat.

Filipino Americans thought that when it comes to pork barrel, the Philippines is ahead of the US. They're wrong. The porkiest of them all, by any measure, is the request of Sen. Tom Harkin (D-Io) for \$1.7 million "to study how to take the stink out of pig manure."

The good senator defended his pet project for Iowa, thus: "For some reason, the very word 'manure' seems to be cause for laughter and levity and jokes. In farm country, manure and odor management are profoundly serious challenges that can be mitigated through scientific research." He's right.

It's as if like Senator Harkin was talking to a crowd of Filipino Americans. They are fond of

sniffing stinking jokes. But if his Iowa project succeeded, and the technology learned there adopted in the Philippines, that would put an end to smelly stories.

The poor Chinaman, always the butt of jokes, will now be heard going up and down the whole body of Philippine territory, saying "amoy melon" and no longer have to stop somewhere saying "melon amoy." # # #

* Editor's Note: Atty. Lope Lindio practices law in Houston, Texas. He is also licensed to practice law in Illinois. To contact the author, please e-mail him at lopelindio@aol.com or call him up at (713) 988-9888.

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