

ARE WE A RACE OF SUCKERS?

Privilege Statement of Senator Aquilino Pimentel Jr., at the Senate on Dec. 17, 2007

Are we a race of suckers? Or are we just a plain happy-go-lucky kind of people?

I use the questions to bring to the fore what appears to be our wishy-washy attitude towards science and technology as a concrete means to propel the country into the developed world. Not only do we fail to provide the Department of Science and Technology with adequate funds to pursue research and development. Neither are we outraged by the neglect of our officials to support our inventors so that their creativeness may benefit the nation.

Concretely, I would like to advert to two things to which I was a witness where the government failed to extend the needed support to two inventors. Their inventions would have helped to rid the nation of overdependence on fossil fuel.

One event took place soon after Cory Aquino took over the presidency from Mr. Ferdinand E. Marcos in 1986. I was, then, the Minister of Local Government.

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The other happened 17 years later, to be exact, in 2003. I was, then, about to end a term as a senator.

{moseasymedia media=<http://www.youtube.com/watch/v/UVhXrvCCILw>}

Water-run car

In 1986, an Ilonggo by the name of Daniel Dingle came over to see me at my office as MILG Minister.

Mr. Dingle said he had an invention that made it possible for cars to run on water.

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I asked him why he came over to my office instead of seeing people who had the power and the authority to do something about his invention.

Shameless

He told me that for a long time now, that is, even before the Cory government came to power, he had been asking the support of government authorities but to no avail. Some officials, he said, first asked shamelessly what was in there for them before they'd consider helping him.

He said that the oil industry and its minions made it difficult for him to get government recognition and support for his invention.

I decided to accompany him and present his problem directly to President Aquino.

After explaining the matter to the President, she agreed to ride in the “water-run” car of the inventor for a test drive within the premises of the presidential palace.

Referral to MOST

After the short ride, she asked me to refer the invention to the Ministry of Science and Technology for evaluation and possible support.

Immediately after the test drive, I did exactly as she asked me to do. I referred the matter to the MOST.

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After waiting for three weeks, there was still no reply from the Ministry. So I called to find out what they had done to the referral I made upon instructions of the President.

No merit?

A bureaucrat replied that there was no merit to the claim of Dingle. The car, he said, ran on a mix of gasoline and water.

When I asked Dingle about it, he explained that the so-called mix of gasoline and water was only partially true because he had to use gasoline to start the engine. Once the engine gets started, water would replace the gasoline to run the car.

Lackadaisical attitude

The lackadaisical attitude displayed by the bureaucrat at the MOST towards the Dingle invention, I believe, has cost us the billions of pesos that we are spending and have spent through the years that kept our vehicles gurgling on gasoline instead of on water.

Losing to Honda

I say that because only days ago, Honda engineers formally announced that the company is now marketing water-powered cars. Water as any Chemistry 101 student would know has two parts hydrogen and one part oxygen. By coming up with an engine that manipulates the mixture, Honda water-run cars are now ready for the world market.

In that respect, we lost the race to come up with our own native discovery of water-run vehicles. From 1986 to 2007 is 21 years. For 21 years, we took no note at all of the invention that had the potential to save millions dollars worth of gasoline imports – money that could be used to build roads, schools, hospitals, and a thousand other things and make us less dependent on the Middle East for our fuel needs and on other super powers for our other needs.

Harnessing waves

The second invention that the government bureaucrats did not give adequate support to

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involved a discovery by Isidro Umali Ursua. I have no idea where Mr. Ursua hails from but I know that Marikina has adopted him as a son of the city because of the invention that everybody - but the government - believes can provide renewable energy to the country.

Like Dingle, Ursua saw me at my office probably in utter frustration over the fact that the authorities had not shown any serious interest in the viability of his invention despite the positive endorsement of the then Department of Trade and Industry Secretary, now Senator, Mar Roxas.

Scientific breakthrough

In his letter to me dated December 16, 2003, Ursua said that “A group of Filipino inventors through a scientific breakthrough in power generation have discovered a way to produce all (of) our electrical power requirements without the use of diesel or fossil fuel. The power will be extracted from the Tidal Flow (of) our ocean.”

His letter continued: “We have filed (a) patent application with the World Intellectual Property

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Office. This invention had already been presented to several government entities, i.e., NAPOCOR, in front of 18 of their best engineers, DOE with 6 of their best engineers present, and National Electrification Administration witnessed by 12 of their best engineers.”

Lament

He concluded the paragraph with the lament: “They are convinced but no one seems to care or help.”

When I talked with Mr. Ursua in my office, I was surprised that:

1. The Department (formerly Ministry) of Science and Technology was not among the

government entities to which he had presented his invention for evaluation; and,

2. He had applied for patent protection not with the Intellectual Property Office in Manila but with the World Intellectual Property Office in Geneva, Switzerland under application number WO 02/38954 A1 for the invention "Skyla Turbine". Incidentally, Ursua's application for patent protection with WIPO in Geneva rather than with the IPO in Manila sadly speaks volumes of the mistrust our own people have of the latter.

In any event, since I wanted to get the DOST involved in evaluating Ursua's invention, I requested the department in early February, 2003, to evaluate Ursua's invention. On February 24, the DOST through Undersecretary Rogelio A. Panlasigui sent me a three page letter. In essence the DOST communication listed a number of things explaining why the evaluation of the invention did not materialize. Certain "steps" had to be undertaken that apparently had not been taken. And that was how the DOST cavalierly disposed of Ursua's 'breakthrough' idea.

By themselves, the DOST excuses appear valid but I'd like to say that with a little creativity, the officials concerned could have been more proactive to help overcome whatever Ursua's problems were.

Bureaucratic failings

That they did not is, I guess, one of the major failings of the bureaucracy that are correctible and need to be corrected.

The idea of harnessing the ocean waves for electricity as Ursua had suggested to our officials at the turn of the current century now appears to be the subject of separate experimental runs by companies from the UK, the US, Canada and Australia.

Waiting for government help

What riles me up is the fact that the two inventions that I mention in this privilege statement were in our hands of Filipino inventors waiting for the government authorities to get them off the drawing board into the government testing field, then, hopefully into the national market and eventually into the world market.

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At the very least, had both inventions or even individually been supported by the government, we could already have looked forward to the:

- Reduction of our fossil fuel import costs which best estimates place at over \$4 billion a year; and
- Cleansing of the atmosphere (at least in our country) by lessening the releases of carbon dioxide and sulphur oxide into it.

Then, we could have proudly pointed to the two circumstances mentioned above as specific contributions of the Republic to attain the objectives of the recently concluded conference on global warming in Bali, Indonesia.

But the ideas behind the inventions seem to have slipped from our hands into the hands of foreign entities.

Let me, then, repeat what I asked at the start of this talk: What kind of a people are we, Mr. President?

Government acrobats

Are our people in general just plain suckers in the game of life? Or are we simply too happy-go-lucky as a people, we don't feel the need to plan for our future as a nation?

"Like acrobats, they keep their balance by saying the opposite of what they do."

In either case, the masses of our people are not primarily to blame for the malaise our country is in. We, as public officials, I submit, are perhaps more to blame for the mess we are in because we appear to be more concerned with form than with substance in our so-called commitment to public service.

Often we dupe our people into believing that we are their servants, not their masters. I hate to

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say it but the way it looks we tend to comport ourselves as the masters not the servants of the people. Many of us in politics act in the manner that Maurice Barre, a member of the Academie Francaise and member of Parliament in the 1800s, said of French politicians: "Like acrobats, they keep their balance by saying the opposite of what they do."

In making this statement, Mr. President, I have no wish to project myself as better than any of our colleagues. But I am disgusted, distressed and discombobulated by the sufferings that our people unnecessarily undergo which are preventable by government action.

Missing two boats

We have missed two boats, so to speak, Mr. President, in preparing our country for the oil crunch that everybody foretells will come sooner than later. We did not help Dingle with his water car invention. And we did not help Ursua with his machine to harness the waves for our energy needs.

In the meantime we only shake our heads when monies even if officially appropriated vanish from the people's sight and view. Witness the disappearance of some P11 billion intended for the modernization of the armed forces? Witness the misapplication of the fertilizer fund of some P723 million that went into the pockets of political personalities? Witness the misuse of some P1.1 billion for the construction of the six kilometre road in the reclamation area in Pasay City that is inappropriately named after Diosdado Macapagal, a former President of the country, who did not by most accounts make money illegitimately while in office.

Boost DOST funds

Anyway, just so that we do not end this talk on such a pessimistic note, I suggest that it is not yet too late in the day for the legislature to support the needs of the DOST. We are, after all, still doing the bicameral conference committee meetings on the national appropriations act.

We can, for instance, commit at least some P200 million additional funds for the research and development projects of the DOST and for the training of teachers in physics and scholarship grants for science education.

Having gotten that off my chest, I cannot but close this intervention with a sigh of regret that public corruption goes on its merry way and public service deteriorates by the day in this land so blessed by God but so cursed by acrobats masquerading as government officials. # # #