

Senate Minority Leader Aquilino Q. Pimentel, Jr. (PDP-Laban) today said media practitioners should respect the right to reply of candidates and the people during the 2010 elections which is embodied under the Fair Elections Law.

Whether Congress approves or not the pending right to reply bill, Senator Pimentel said the protagonists in the electoral process can already avail of that right under the said existing law.

“There is already a law for that. When a candidate is hit by his opponent or anyone in the mass media during the election campaign, that offended party has the right to make that reply under the Fair Election Law,” Senator Pimentel told the Newsstand Forum at the Ambassador Hotel in Malate, Manila.

Under the Fair Election Law, he said the offended party can lodge a complaint with the Commission on Elections if the media organization concerned would refuse to print or air his side of the controversy. The Comelec is empowered to impose sanctions or penalties for violators of this law.

He said the right to reply bill, of which he is the principal author, does not

intend to amend or supplant the provisions on equal media time and space guaranteed under the Fair Election Law. But should Congress finally enact the right to reply bill, he said this legislation can be availed of by persons who feel aggrieved by the publication of derogatory or inaccurate items in the newspapers and broadcast media which have nothing to do with the fight between and among candidates for public office during the election period.

Senator Pimentel said the right to equal time and space under the Fair Election Law is an explicit recognition of the people's right to reply as part of the freedom of the press and of expression enshrined under the Constitution.

Contrary to imagined fears of some journalists, he stressed that the right to reply bill does not in anyway intend to diminish or curtail press freedom or the prerogative of the newspapers, television and radio stations to decide on what stories or comments to print and broadcast.

"However, if a publication or broadcast network attacks an individual or entity, it has the obligation to carry the response or defense of the aggrieved party in the interest of fair play and justice," the senator from Mindanao said.

Senator Pimentel said he welcomes the statement of Speaker Prospero Nograles that the House of Representatives will have to tackle the House version of the right-to-reply bill on the floor and decide on the measure despite the lobbying by some media organizations to shelve the proposal. #

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