

Written by Senator Pimentel's Press Office

Saturday, 28 February 2009 16:45 - Last Updated Friday, 20 March 2009 20:17

---



Senate Minority Leader Aquilino Q. Pimentel, Jr. (PDP-Laban) today said it would be premature and irresponsible to say that the right-to-reply bill faces presidential veto while the bill is still being crafted and debated by Congress.

Senator Pimentel shrugged off reports that President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo will veto the measure supposedly because she is against any infringement on press freedom.

“As usual, she does not know what she is saying. Maybe she has not read the bill or she does not understand it,” he said.

Senator Pimentel maintained that the bill does not curtail the freedom of speech, of the press and of expression and neither does it mean prior censorship of stories in the mass media.

“All that the right of reply wants to do is to accord the persons criticized the right to reply not absolutely as they want to but within the constraints of reason and the law. And, therefore, we are trying to balance the right of the press to offend and the right of the people to defend themselves,” he said.

The senator from Mindanao noted Justice Secretary Raul Gonzalez has issued a statement that the proposal is not violative of press freedom but “is merely an exercise of fair play.”

“The right-of-reply bill does not mean to curtail the media’s right to print stories. It merely seeks to provide the (aggrieved) personality the venue for exercising his right to air his side,” Secretary Gonzalez was quoted as telling justice reporters.

The minority leader counseled the President’s media advisers and spokesmen to see to it that the accuracy of any information that they give to her is thoroughly verified to spare her from embarrassment.

Senator Pimentel said the right to reply should alarm only media outlets, which do not afford the persons they have criticized the right to respond and present their side of the story.

“Just like criminal laws on theft, only thieves are hit. Those who do not steal should not be alarmed,” he said. “Or the laws on traffic. Only those who do not observe traffic laws are

sanctioned.. Those who do follow traffic rules need not be alarmed.”

Senator Pimentel, meanwhile, hailed the passage by the House of Representatives of the bill decriminalizing libel. He said he expects the Senate to pass a similar measure soon to complement the right of reply proposal.

“As usual, President Arroyo does not know what she is saying. Maybe she has not read the bill or she does not understand it,” Senator Pimentel said.

“There is a need to decriminalize libel so that the freedom of speech that the Constitution guarantees is more fully enjoyed by our people,” he said.

He pointed out that decriminalizing libel does not mean that the libeled would no longer have any remedy in law.

“They would still have an avenue in law to vindicate their good name or reputation that might have been besmirched. And that is to file civil actions for damages against the defamer,” Senator Pimentel said.

“Should decriminalizing libel come about, the additional remedy that the offended party may take in addition to the action for damages would be his right to reply.”

Senator Pimentel likewise explained that the journalists and media outlet concerned can be penalized fine for not complying with the right-of-reply rule.. The amount of fine increases with the repeated non-observance of this requirement.

He said the reply should not take up more space than the criticism in print or broadcast medium. For instance, he said if the offending article is a banner-headline story, the reply need not be published with the same treatment. The editors, he said, may put an ear or teaser on the upper portion of the newspaper to draw attention to the publication of the reply, part of which may be on the front page while the rest is in the inside page. # # #

[Joomla SEO powered by JoomSEF](#)