

BRICK BY BRICK

DELIVERING GOOD GOVERNANCE

GOOD AFTERNOON, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN.

THANK YOU TO THE FRIEDRICH NAUMANN FOUNDATION FOR BRINGING US ALL HERE TOGETHER TO SHARE WITH AND LEARN FROM EACH OTHER.

PHYSICALLY HANDICAPPED PEOPLE LIKE ME USUALLY LIMIT OUR DREAMS TO WHAT WE THINK WE CAN AT LEAST ACHIEVE AND THERE ARE NOT MANY OF THEM, SPECIALLY NOT BEING GOVERNOR OF ONE OF THE LARGEST PROVINCES IN THE COUNTRY. I WAS ONLY THREE YEARS OLD WHEN I WAS AFFLICTED WITH POLIO. WHETHER I LIKED IT OR NOT, THIS CLEARLY LIMITED MY WORLD AND THE THINGS THAT I COULD DO.

IN THE YEAR 2001, THE PEOPLE OF MY PROVINCE ISABELA WERE SHOCKED WHEN I DARED RUN FOR THE ELECTIONS. WELL, I DID RUN FOR THE ELECTIONS EVEN IF I CAN HARDLY WALK. AND WORSE, I WAS RUNNING TO FIGHT THE ONE FAMILY THAT RULED OUR PROVINCE FOR MORE THAN 40 YEARS.

I COME FROM AN ORDINARY FILIPINO FAMILY. MY PARENTS WERE BOTH PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS WHO TAUGHT US, THEIR SIX CHILDREN, TO LIVE SIMPLY SO THAT WE COULD MAKE BOTH ENDS MEET. WHEN I WAS SEVENTEEN YEARS OLD, MY FATHER SUDDENLY DIED, LEAVING OUR MOTHER ALONE TO PUT US ALL TO SCHOOL.

I FINISHED SCHOOL AND BECAME A CERTIFIED PUBLIC ACCOUNTANT BUT MY FIRST MAJOR JOB WAS AS A BROADCASTER IN THE LOCAL RADIO STATION IN OUR PROVINCE, BOMBO RADIO CAUAYAN SO I BECAME A CERTIFIED PUBLIC ANNOUNCER INSTEAD.

FOR FOURTEEN YEARS AS A BROADCAST JOURNALIST, ANCHORING A RADIO PROGRAM THAT WENT ON THE AIR FOR THREE HOURS

EVERY SINGLE DAY, NEWS AND ISSUES CAME THROUGH ME - GIVING ME OFTEN A CLOSE UP VIEW OF THE ABUSIVE WAY BY WHICH THE RESOURCES OF OUR GOVERNMENT WERE BEING SQUANDERED WHILE OUR POOR PEOPLE KEPT GETTING POORER BY THE DAY.

THE POLITICAL DY-NASTY IN ISABELA BEGAN ITS RULE IN OUR PROVINCE AS EARLY AS THE YEAR 1963, FROM THE FATHER, TO THE SONS AND THEN THE GENERATIONS OF NUMEROUS GRANDSONS WERE AUTOMATICALLY WAITING NEXT IN LINE.

I TOLD MYSELF, I CANNOT JUST SIT HERE LOOKING AT THESE THINGS HAPPENING. I SAID THIS IS NOT WHAT I HAVE BEEN TAUGHT DEMOCRACY SHOULD BE. HENCE, IN THE ELECTIONS IN THE YEAR 2001, I FILED MY CANDIDACY AGAINST FAUSTINO "BOJIE" DY III FOR WHOSE SAKE EVERY EFFORT WAS MADE SO THAT HE WOULD RUN UNOPPOSED.

MY CHANCES OF WINNING WERE ALMOST NIL BUT I SAID, AT LEAST, EVEN IF I LOSE, I WOULD HAVE PEACE OF MIND. I WILL NOT BE ONE OF THOSE COMPLAINING WHY EVIL THINGS WERE BEING DONE TO

US AS A PEOPLE, FEELING MAD AND FRUSTRATED, BUT NOT LIFTING A FINGER ANYWAY TO STOP THEM.

AS A CANDIDATE, I WAS TAUNTED. THEY SAID I WAS CRAZY. THE POWERFUL MEN OF THE DYNASTY LAUGHED ME OFF. THEY DID NOT TAKE ME SERIOUSLY, WELL, UNTIL IT WAS TIME TO COUNT THE VOTES.

THIS WOMAN WHO COULD NOT WALK, RAN! FOR THE ELECTIONS AND TROUNCED THE MACHOS IN ISABELA.

THE FIRST THREE YEARS OF MY BEING GOVERNOR WERE VERY DIFFICULT. IF THEY CANNOT KILL YOUR BODY, EVERYDAY THEY WILL TRY TO KILL YOUR SPIRIT. .. I HAD TO LIVE WITH ALL THE BLOWS FROM EVERYWHERE THAT CAME MY WAY, ALL THE DYNASTY'S PEOPLE IN THE CAPITOL THAT I WAS SURROUNDED WITH, NOT TO MENTION MY STRUGGLES OF ADJUSTING FROM A POLIO-STRICKEN GIRL SINCE THREE WHO WAS MORE USED TO BEING

TAKEN CARE OF BUT NOW HAS TO TAKE CARE OF ONE AND A HALF MILLION, ISABELINOS.

BUT YES, ONE BY ONE, BRICK BY BRICK, WE USED THIS ONE INCREDIBLE CHANCE GIVEN TO US TO FINALLY CHANGE THE COURSE OF OUR PROVINCE'S HISTORY.

AGRICULTURE DEVELOPMENT

IN OUR COMMITMENT TO HELP FREE OUR FARMERS FROM POVERTY AND EXPLOITATION, WE ESTABLISHED OUR PRICE SUPPORT FUND WHERE WE PARTNERED WITH THE NATIONAL FOOD AUTHORITY AND USE OUR PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT FUNDS TO ADD UP TO P5 MORE FOR EVERY KILOGRAM OF RICE AND CORN PRODUCED BY OUR FARMERS. WE MAY NOT HAVE BEEN ABLE TO BUY ALL THEIR HARVESTS BECAUSE THEY ARE JUST TOO MUCH, ISABELA BEING THE NUMBER ONE CORN PRODUCER IN THE COUNTRY AND THE NUMBER TWO RICE PRODUCER IN THE COUNTRY , NEXT ONLY TO NUEVA ECIJA. BUT WE WERE ABLE TO INFLUENCE UPWARDS THE TREND OF PRICES IN THE MARKET SIMPLY BECAUSE WE GAVE OUR

FARMERS AN OPTION THAT THEY DID NOT HAVE ALL THE PAST YEARS OF THE DYNASTY IN ISABELA. UNLIKE MY OPPONENTS, WHEN I CAMPAIGNED I DID NOT DEMAND FROM THE RICE TRADERS AND OTHER BUSINESSMEN IN ISABELA MONEY FOR THE ELECTIONS, THAT'S WHY WHEN I WON, I HAD NOT THE BURDEN OF BEING INDEBTED TO THEM SO I COULD FREELY DO EVERYTHING THAT WAS NEEDED TO BE DONE FOR THE SAKE OF OUR POOR FARMERS. MANY PEOPLE TELL ME, ONE OF THE BIGGEST FACTORS WHY I WON AGAIN AS GOVERNOR IN LAST YEAR'S ELECTIONS IS BECAUSE OF THIS INNOVATIVE PROGRAM THAT BENEFITED OUR FARMERS IN ISABELA WHO, TOGETHER WITH THEIR FAMILIES, MAKE UP 60% OF OUR POPULATION. IT ALSO MADE US ONE OF THE 2007 TOP TEN WINNERS OF THE GALING POOK AWARDS.

WE EVEN EARN SOME MONEY THROUGH THIS PROGRAM. IT IS BECAUSE WHEN THE SUPPLY OF PALAY IN THE MARKET DECREASES AFTER THE FARMERS' SELLING SEASON, WE SELL WHAT WE AND THE NFA PURCHASED FROM THEM, AT EVEN HIGHER PRICES THAN WHAT WE BOUGHT THEM WITH. WHATEVER MARGIN WE GET, WE

PUT BACK OR ADD TO OUR PRICE SUPPORT FUND SO WE CAN HELP EVEN MORE FARMERS IN THE NEXT SEASON.

HEALTH

ONE OF THE MANY ISSUES THAT THE FORMER LEADERS OF ISABELA USED TO MAKE OUR PEOPLE FEEL SORRY THAT THEY VOTED FOR ME IS WHAT THEY SAY AS MY BEING HEARTLESS IN DEPRIVING THEM OF THE FREE MEDICINES THAT WERE GIVEN TO THEM BEFORE AS PART OF A HEALTH INSURANCE PROGRAM THAT PROVIDED 100% REIMBURSEMENT. THIS WAS OBVIOUSLY A CAMPAIGN STRATEGY BECAUSE IT WAS DONE JUST A FEW MONTHS BEFORE THE ELECTIONS. HOWEVER, BY THE TIME I TOOK OVER, THE PREMIUMS WHICH THEY COLLECTED FOR THIS FUND THAT THEY REGISTERED IN THEIR PERSONAL NOT OFFICIAL CAPACITIES WERE ALL BUT GONE. I REFUSED TO CONTINUE THIS PRIVATE VENTURE OF WHICH THEY PRESENTED AS A CENTERPIECE HEALTH PROGRAM OF THEIR LEADERSHIP. I HAD TO BEAR ALL CRITICISMS WHICH THEY FANNED THROUGH THEIR MEDIA TIRADES AGAINST ME IN THEIR PRIVATE RADIO STATION DAY BY DAY BY DAY.

I MAINTAINED IF EVERYTHING BOILED DOWN TO JUST FLOODING HOSPITALS WITH MEDICINES FOR FREE, A PRACTICE THAT CANNOT BE SUSTAINED AND WHICH CONTINUOUSLY DRAINED OUR PROVINCIAL FUNDS, THEN WE WERE NO DIFFERENT FROM MY PREDECESSORS AS PATRONS OF THE POLITICS OF PATRONAGE. AS PER THEIR OWN EXPERIENCE, WHEN MEDICINES WERE GIVEN FREE, EVEN THOSE WHO DID NOT NEED THEM SUDDENLY GOT “SICK” AND THE MEDICINES THAT THEY GOT THEY EITHER SOLD OR KEPT IN THEIR HOMES UNTIL THESE EXPIRED.

WHAT WE INSTEAD DID WAS TO PARTNER WITH THE PHILHEALTH INSURANCE CORPORATION. RIGHT ON MY SECOND YEAR AS GOVERNOR, WE ENROLLED MORE THAN 100,000 OF OUR APO ISABELINOS TO THE PHILHEALTH, (OURS IS ONE OF THE BIGGEST, IF NOT, THE BIGGEST ENROLMENT IN THE COUNTRY), EFFECTIVELY GUARANTEEING THE HEALTH INSURANCE OF ABOUT 700,000 OF ISABELINOS BECAUSE EACH OF THE CARDS IS GOOD FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY. FOR FOUR YEARS NOW, WE HAVE INVESTED A TOTAL OF P 98,352,320 AS PAYMENTS FOR PREMIUM BUT IN RETURN

WE RECEIVED AS CAPITATION A TOTAL OF P 73, 417,033.38. THE CAPITATION RECEIVED IS ROLLED BACK TO PURCHASE MEDICINES AND MEDICAL SUPPLIES AND MEDICAL EQUIPMENTS NOT TO MENTION REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE OF ALL HOSPITALS.

MORE IMPORTANT THAN THIS IS THE PRIORITY THAT WE HAVE BEEN GIVING TO OUR FIELD HEALTH SERVICES IN ORDER TO PROMOTE PREVENTIVE AND PROMOTIVE HEALTH CARE LIKE MATERNAL AND CHILD CARE, SANITATION, INFORMATION AND EDUCATION ON TROPICAL AND INFECTIOUS DISEASES LIKE TB, MALARIA, ANIMAL BITES, AND THE LIKE ETC. WE HAVE INCREASED BY 100% THE ALLOWANCES OF OUR BARANGAY HEALTH WORKERS AND WE GAVE THEM FREE PHILHEALTH CARDS AS INCENTIVES IN TAKING CARE OF THE HEALTH OF THEIR BARANGAY MATES.

IF WE TALK ABOUT RUNNING GOVERNMENTS MORE EFFICIENTLY AND EFFECTIVELY AT THE LEAST COST POSSIBLE, I THINK THE OLD SAYING “AN OUNCE OF PREVENTION IS WORTH A POUND A CURE” SHOULD BE APPLIED IN THE MANAGEMENT OF OUR PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICES.

GRAFT AND CORRUPTION

I INHERITED ALMOST ONE BILLION PESOS IN DEBT WHEN I TOOK OVER AS GOVERNOR, MOSTLY FOR PROJECTS CONTRACTED JUST BEFORE THE ELECTIONS OF 2004. SLOWLY, WE WERE ABLE TO PAY THEM AND DURING THE FIRST DAYS, WE POSTED BIG NOTICES IN THE OFFICES OF THE BUDGET, ACCOUNTING AND TREASURY – WITH WORDS TO THE EFFECT.... TO ALL CONTRACTORS/CREDITORS: YOUR CHECKS ARE READY FOR RELEASE. YOU DO NOT NEED TO GIVE ANYTHING TO ANYONE IN ORDER TO BE PRIORITIZED. IF ANYONE ASKS YOU FOR ANYTHING, REPORT THEM TO ME AT ONCE.

THE CONTRACTORS IN ISABELA ALSO HAD THE NOVEL EXPERIENCE OF DEALING WITH A GOVERNOR WHO HAS NEVER ASKED FOR A SINGLE CENT IN ANY TRANSACTION AND WHO HAS NOT IMPOSED ANYTHING TO DERAIL THE PROPER CONDUCT OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE BIDS AND AWARDS COMMITTEE. THESE HAVE BECOME VERY TRANSPARENT, WITH MEMBERS OF RELIGIOUS AND NON-GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATIONS COMING TO REGULARLY OBSERVE.

LAST WEEK, WE LAUNCHED A PARTNERSHIP WITH THE TRANSPARENCY FUND INTERNATIONAL AND THE INCITE GOV WHICH IS AN NGO LED BY FORMER DSWD SEC DINKY SOLIMAN, FORMER PEACE COMMISSIONER GING DELES AND FORMER CONGRESSWOMAN DINA ABAD OF BATANES AND THE ATENEO. THEY WERE LOOKING FOR A GOVERNOR WHO IS WILLING TO HAVE HER MULTI-MILLION PESO INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS AND PURCHASES BE MONITORED BY A LOCAL AND INTERNATIONAL NGO. I SAID, OH YES, LET IT BE ME. I HAVE A LOT OF PROJECTS IN ALL THE 1,018 BARANGAYS OF ISABELA, AS A RESULT OF MY WEEKLY PEOPLE'S DAY OR UGNAYANG BAYAN. WE PURCHASE MILLIONS OF MEDICINES FOR OUR FIVE PROVINCIAL HOSPITALS AND I WOULD LIKE TO CHECK THE EMERGENCY PURCHASES THAT ARE BEING MADE BY OUR DOCTORS. I WANT TO SEE EVERYTHING DONE WELL BUT I CANNOT DO IT ALONE. I AM LIKE A SHEEP AMONG WOLVES. I NEED A LOT OF HELP. SO PLEASE COME AND HELP ME MONITOR MY PROJECTS. THEY DID AND THEY WILL HAVE AS LOCAL PARTNERS PRIESTS AND LAYMEN FROM THE DIOCESE OF ILAGAN OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AS WELL AS FROM THE EPISCOPALIAN CHURCH,

THE IGLESIA FILPINA INDEPENDIENTE, THE UNITED METHODISTS CHURCH – IN SHORT AN ECUMENICAL GROUP WHICH WAS FORMED SPECIALLY FOR THIS PURPOSE. THEY CALL THEMSELVES THE PAJPDGG OR PEOPLES ALLIANCE FOR JUSTICE, PEACE AND GOOD GOVERNANCE.

MY LEADERSHIP HAS ALWAYS MADE IT A POINT TO SET THE EXAMPLE NOT ONLY IN LIFESTYLE BUT IN WORK HABITS AS WELL. I HAVE STANDING INSTRUCTIONS TO ECONOMIZE ON THE USE OF ELECTRICITY, COMPUTER INKS, BOND PAPERS, ETC. WE ARE A SUKI OF THE DBM PROCUREMENT SERVICE. WE EVEN GOT AN AWARD FOR IT LAST YEAR. WE NEVER MAKE MONEY FROM OVERPRICING OUR REGULAR, RECURRENT PURCHASES. WE BUY IT CHEAP FROM THE DBM. THIS TRANSLATES TO SAVINGS THAT ROLLS BACK TO BENEFIT THE ISABELINOS.

KAYA NGAYON, MAGAAN ANG PERA SA ISABELA. HINDI KAMI GIPIT. WHEN THERE ARE CALAMITIES, WE CAN READILY RESPOND. WE CAN EVEN AFFORD TO ADD TWO TO THREE PESOS MORE FOR THE BUYING PRICE OF PALAY AND CORN IN ISABELA. WE HAVE THE BIGGEST

ENROLLMENT IN PHEALTH IN THE PHILIPPINES – 103,000 – 100% LIBRE TO ALL THOSE PHEALTH CARD HOLDERS AND THAT’S FOR THREE CONSECUTIVE YEARS NOW.

FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IS ALWAYS EMPHASIZED BY OUR OWN ACTS AS LEADERS AMONG THE EMPLOYEES, IN ORDER TO CURB THE TEMPTATION FOR SOP’S. WHEN THEY REALIZE THAT THEY EARN FROM HONEST AND HARD WORK THEY LEARN TO RESPECT THEMSELVES AND THE JOBS THEY HOLD. WHEN THERE IS RESPECT FOR ONE’S JOB THERE IS GREATER RESPECT FOR PEOPLE WHO COME TO YOU HELP ESPECIALLY THE POOR AND THOSE WHO HAVE MISSED THE OPPORTUNITIES IN LIFE.

NOW THAT I HAVE BEEN THRUST INTO A POSITION OF POWER, MANY TIMES I’VE REALIZED THAT POWER CAN BE A GOOD THING. IT CAN MAKE YOU DO SO MANY THINGS TO UPLIFT THE CONDITIONS OF SO MANY POOR PEOPLE. IT CAN MAKE YOU GIVE STRENGTH TO THE WEAK. IT CAN MAKE YOU EMPOWER THE COMMON MAN.

THE MORE THAT IT HAS BECOME CLEAR TO ME THAT THIS POWER SHOULD NOT GO TO THE HANDS OF PEOPLE WHO HAVE MOTIVES OTHER THAN PUBLIC SERVICE . BECAUSE IF YOU ARE NOT GROUNDED, IF YOU HAVE NOT THE RIGHT VALUES, YOU CAN GET EASILY GET TEMPTED. BUT IF YOU USE THIS POWER, NOT FOR YOUR SELFISH ENDS BUT IN FULFILLMENT OF YOUR DUTY TO OTHERS, POWER CAN BE A GOOD THING.

UGNAYANG BAYAN

WITH THE POWER AND RESOURCES THAT I HAVE IN MY HANDS, WE WERE ABLE TO RE-FOCUS THE PRIORITY OF THE PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT TO THE TRULY MOST NEEDY OF BARANGAYS, REGARDLESS OF THE NUMBER OF POTENTIAL VOTERS LIVING THERE OR WHETHER OR NOT THE MAYOR IS AN ALLY OF THE GOVERNOR. WE HAVE INSTITUTED AN UGNAYANG BAYAN OR OUR PEOPLE'S DAY EVERY WEDNESDAY WHEN PEOPLE FROM THE BARANGAYS CAN DIRECTLY TALK WITH ME, AFTER ONLY ONE YEAR OF IMPLEMENTATION, ABOUT 90% OF THE PROVINCE'S 1018

BARANGAYS RECEIVED FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE FOR PROJECTS DIRECTLY FROM MY OFFICE , WITHOUT THE BARANGAY CAPTAINS NEEDING TO \ GO THROUGH THE MAYORS. I ALWAYS REMIND BARANGAY OFFICIALS THAT IF THEY DO NOT DO WELL IN THEIR JOINT PROJECTS WITH ME, I WILL TURN TO NGO'S OR PEOPLE'S ORGANIZATIONS IN THEIR BARANGAYS WHO WILL BE MY PARTNERS IN GIVING SERVICES TO THEIR CONSTITUENTS.

WHEN THEY SAW THAT I WAS COOPERATING WITH MORE AND MORE BARANGAY OFFICIALS, THE MAYORS COMING AND COOPERATING, TOO! EVEN SOME OF THE MOST RABID SUPPORTERS OF THE OLD ADMINISTRATION STARTED TESTING THE WATERS. THEY CAME TO REALIZE THAT IT IS NOT DIFFICULT TO DEAL WITH ME AS THE TOP LEADER OF THE PROVINCE. AS LONG AS THE REQUESTS, PROJECTS AND PROGRAMS PRESENTED TO ME ARE WHAT THE PEOPLE NEED AND ALONG MY PRIORITIES, THESE ARE EVALUATED AND ACCEPTED REGARDLESS OF POLITICAL COLOR. “

PEACE AND ORDER, JUDICIARY

FOR THE PAST FOUR YEARS OF MY BEING GOVERNOR, IT HAS BEEN CLEARLY PROVEN THAT IT IS NOT TRUE THAT I AM AN NPA – A RIDICULOUS CHARGE HURLED AGAINST ME BY MY PREDECESSOR IN HIS DESPERATE ATTEMPT TO FIND A REASON WHY THIS PERSON WHO HE DISMISSED AS A NUISANCE DEFEATED HIM.

EVEN IF SOME PEOPLE BECAME QUITE CURIOUS IF THE CHARGE WAS TRUE, I DID NOT ALLOW IT TO LIMIT MY ACTIONS. I CONTINUED REACHING OUT TO EVERYONE, SPECIALLY THOSE IN THE REMOTEST BARANGAYS, THE SO-CALLED NPA AREAS. AREN'T THEY THE ONES WHO FEEL MOST NEGLECTED BY GOVERNMENT HENCE THEY GO UP THE MOUNTAINS AND TAKE UP ARMS? NOW WHEN THEY COME TO THE CAPITOL, I GIVE THEM FIRST PRIORITY. WE ATTEND TO THEM PROMPTLY SO THAT THEY DON'T FIND THE NEED TO TAKE TO THE STREETS OR THE MOUNTAINS ANYMORE. HINDI KO PO ALAM KUNG PAANO KO IE-ENGLISH ITO PERO ANG LAGI KONG HANGARIN, SANA MAKABAWAS MAN LANG AKO SA MGA DAHILAN NG KANILANG PAGHIHIMAGSIK.

ANOTHER STEP THAT I INITIATED IS TO MEET WITH THE POOR MEN'S LAWYERS, THE PAO'S - TO LEARN FROM THEM THEIR PREDICAMENTS AND THOSE OF THEIR CLIENTS. EVEN BEFORE THE ENACTMENT OF RA 9406 LAST MARCH 2007 WHICH AUTHORIZES LOCAL GOVERNMENT UNITS TO GIVE FINANCIAL AND OTHER SUPPORT TO OUR PAO'S, I ALREADY WORKED FOR THE INCLUSION OF ALLOWANCES FOR THE PUBLIC ATTORNEYS IN ISABELA. IN 2006, DURING THE PREPARATION OF THE 2007 BUDGET HENCE, FOR THE FIRST TIME, THROUGH MY ADMINISTRATION, OUR PUBLIC ATTORNEYS ARE NOW RECEIVING ALLOWANCES FROM THE PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT. WE GIVE OUR PAO LAWYERS IN THE PROVINCE A P2000-ALLOWANCE A MONTH.

WHEN THE NATIONAL CHIEF OF THE PUBLIC ATTORNEYS OFFICE, ATTY PERSIDIA ACOSTA CAME TO ISABELA, SHE MADE IT A POINT TO COME TO OUR OFFICE TO PERSONALLY THANK THE PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT FOR BEING ONE OF THE VERY FEW WHO HAVE VOLUNTARILY DECIDED TO GIVE A MONTHLY ALLOWANCE TO OUR PUBLIC ATTORNEYS WHO ARE THE MOST OVERWORKED, OVERSADDLED AND UNDERSUPPORTED AND UNRECOGNIZED AS

THEY GO ABOUT THEIR DUTIES DEFENDING THE POOREST OF THE POOR.

I THINK THE DELIVERY OF BASIC SERVICES TO OUR PEOPLE, ESPECIALLY THE MOST NEEDY, IS FAR MORE ECONOMICAL THAN HAVING THEM TAKE UP ARMS AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT WHICH WILL THEN NEED TO SPEND MONEY FOR GUNS AND BULLETS TO STOP THEM.

SPEAKING OF THE AFP, I AM AT MY MOST COMFORTABLE PHASE WITH THEM. COMMUNICATION WITH THE CURRENT COMMANDER OF THE 5TH INFANTRY DIVISION, GEN. MELCHOR DILODILO AND HIS OFFICERS ARE EASY AND OPEN.

AND AS FAR AS THE PHILIPPINE NATIONAL POLICE IN ISABELA IS CONCERNED, THEY HAVE COME TO KNOW THAT I AM READY TO SUPPORT THEM IN ALL THEIR EFFORTS TO ENSURE BETTER LAW ENFORCEMENT IN OUR PROVINCE.

FOREST PROTECTION

SPEAKING OF THE MILITARY, THEY HAVE BECOME ONE OF MY MOST VALUABLE PARTNERS IN THE VERY DIFFICULT MISSION THAT I DECIDED TO TAKE HEAD ON – THE FIGHT AGAINST THE BIG SYNDICATES IN ISABELA WHO HAVE BEEN RAMPANTLY DESTROYING THE SIERRA MADRE MOUNTAINS WHICH IS LOCATED IN 9 OF OUR MUNICIPALITIES IN ISABELA. IT IS IN ISABELA WHERE 30 TO 40% OF THE COUNTRY’S LAST REMAINING FOREST COVER REMAINS. THE AREA HAS BEEN DECLARED A PROTECTED AREA SINCE THE EARLY 90’S BUT THIS FACT HAS MADE NO DIFFERENCE AT ALL AS THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE, INCLUDING POLITICIANS AND DENR PERSONNEL, HAVE BEEN SHAMELESSLY EARNING BIG MONEY FROM DESTROYING IT ALMOST WITH IMPUNITY.

ON MY SECOND YEAR AS GOVERNOR, I INITIATED OUR OWN PROVINCIAL FOREST PROTECTION TASK FORCE BUT THE PROBLEM PROVED TOO OVERWHELMING FOR THIS FIRST TIME GOVERNOR DEALING WITH SO MANY OTHER THINGS OTHER THAN THIS RESPONSIBILITY WHICH IS PRIMARILY THE MANDATE OF THE DENR.

BUT WE CANT JUST STAND BY LETTING ALL THE TRUCKS FULL OF ILLEGALLY CUT LOGS PASS THROUGH OUR HIGHWAYS UNDETERRED BY THE DENR WHILE WE LOSE BILLIONS OF PESOS IN CROP AND INFRASTRUCTURE DAMAGES WHEN TYPHOONS AND FLOODS HIT US, AND THEY HIT US ALMOST TEN TIMES A YEAR. IF ITS NOT THE WATERS, IT IS LACK OF THEM THAT CAUSE UNTOLD SUFFERING TO OUR FARMERS AND POOR FAMILIES LIKE WHEN THE DROUGHT OF 2007 DAMAGED THE EQUIVALENT OF OUR WHOLE PROVINCIAL BUDGET FOR THE YEAR.

I HAD TO GIVE WHAT THE SANGGUNIANG PANLALAWIGAN ASKED ME SO THAT THEY WILL APPROVE MY REQUEST OF APPROPRIATING P8M OF OUR OWN MONEY IN ORDER TO HELP PUT A STOP TO THE UNABATED CUTTING OF TREES IN OUR PART OF THE SIERRA MADRES. WE HAVE STARTED ONLY LAST JULY 15 THE OTHER SUNDAY, AND SINCE THEN, WE'VE HAD ALMOST DAILY CONFISCATIONS, SOMETHING WHICH THE LOCAL DENR CANNOT CLAIM TO HAVE DONE IN THE EVERYDAY THAT THEY ARE TASKED TO DO SO. IN JUST TWO WEEKS, WE CONFISCATED ABOUT 45,000 BOARD FEET OF COMMON HARD WOOD AND EVEN NARRA AND

OTHER ENDANGERED SPECIES. AND THEN WE FOUND THE NEED TO ESTABLISH A PERMANENT CHECK POINT RIGHT IN THE RIVER WHERE THESE WOOD WERE BEING DELIVERED, AND IN JUST ONE DAY, WE CONFISCATED MORE THAN 35,000 BOARD FEET. BUT THAT IS ABSOLUTELY NOTHING COMPARED TO THE ESTIMATED ONE MILLION BOARD FEET THAT ARE WAITING TO BROUGHT DOWN FROM THE SIERRA MADRES - THOSE THAT HAVE ALREADY BEEN CUT BY THE POOR PEOPLE WHO WERE FINANCED BY CAPITALISTS AND MIDDLEMEN TO GO UP THE MOUNTAINS AND USE THEIR CHAINSAWS AS IF THERE WERE NO TOMORROW.

TWO WEEKS AGO, I JOINED A HELICOPTER RIDE OVER THE SIERRA MADRES AND PROVED MY WORST FEARS, THE ONE MILLION BOARD FEET OF ILLEGALLY CUT LOGS THAT WE HAVE BLOCKED IN THE TOWN OF ILAGAN IS NOTHING COMPARED TO THE ESTIMATED TEN MILLION BOARD FEET THAT WE SAW IN THE TOWN OF SAN MARIANO, STILL A PART OF THE SIERRA MADRE NATURAL PARK.

TEN MILLION, ELEVEN MILLION BOARD FEET,
ONLY FOR THIS YEAR 2008?

HOW ABOUT ALL THESE PAST YEARS? LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, HOW CAN I NOT TAKE AN ACTIVE ROLE IN THIS FIGHT TO PROTECT OUR FORESTS?

THEY ARE GANGING UP ON ME NOW – MAYORS AND BARANGAY CAPTAINS, CAPITALISTS AND MIDDLEMEN – AND THEY ARE USING THE POOR PEOPLE THEY HAVE BEEN EMPLOYING FOR THE DIFFICULT MANUAL LABOR OF CUTTING TREES, TO PRESSURE ME AND MAKE ME FEEL THAT I AM DEPRIVING THEM OF THEIR LIVELIHOOD, OF THEIR SOURCE OF DAILY SUSTENTANCE. I AM AGAIN PAINTED HERE AS A HEARTLESS GOVERNOR, THAT I, THEIR GOVERNOR, TAKE AWAY AND CONFISCATE THE TREES AND LOGS THEY HAVE CUT AND CARRIED, RISKING THEIR LIVES IN DOING A JOB THEY WERE PAID TO DO SO.

BUT MY GRATITUDE TO DENR WHO HAVE BEEN VERY SUPPORTIVE AND APPRECIATIVE OF WHAT WE ARE DOING, DEPUTIZING ME AS AN ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES OFFICER WITH POWER TO CONFISCATE ILLEGALLY CUT LOGS. DENR SECRETARY LITO

ATIENZA GRANTED MY REQUEST TO REPLACE THEIR MAN IN DENR ISABELA, WHO IS IN FACT USELESS BUT NOT EXACTLY POOR, WHILE ALL OF THESE VIOLATIONS HAVE BEEN GOING ON FOR YEARS AND YEARS AND YEARS UNDER HIS WATCH.

I NEED HELP – IMMEDIATE HELP – TO RESPOND TO THE NEED OF THE POOR PEOPLE WHO SUDDENLY LOST THE SOURCE OF THEIR DAILY BREAD BECAUSE OF MY CAMPAIGN. WE HAVE TO RESPOND TO THE NEED FOR ALTERNATIVE LIVELIHOOD FOR THEM IN THE SHORT TERM, MEDIUM AND LONG, SO THAT THEY CAN HAVE A BETTER, AND MORE SUSTAINABLE AND LEGITIMATE SOURCE OF LIVING.

JUETENG THEY SAY IS A VICTIMLESS CRIME BECAUSE BETTORS WILLINGLY GAMBLE THEIR MONEY ON THIS ILLEGAL GAME. BUT TIMBER CUTTING AND POACHING VICTIMIZES US ALL, NOT ONLY US IN ISABELA BUT ALSO OUR WHOLE LAND, OUR MOTHER EARTH WHERE WE ALL LIVE AND WHERE EVERYTHING IS CONNECTED.

ONE OF THE MOST DIFFICULT THINGS IS WHEN POLITICIANS AND CAPITALISTS EXPLOIT THE POVERTY OF PEOPLE TO PREVENT WHAT IS RIGHT AND JUST. BUT, WITH MY TWO SMALL FEET, I WILL STAND MY GROUND. I WILL CONTINUE TO EDUCATE OUR PEOPLE AND FREE THEM FROM THE SELFISH INTERESTS OF THOSE WHO HAVE LONG BEEN EXPLOITING THEM.

I HAVE ALWAYS TOLD OUR PEOPLE THAT AFTER FREEING OURSELVES FROM THE 40-YEAR DYNASTY THAT LORDED IT OVER US THAT THE BATTLE IS NOT YET OVER. WE MAY HAVE DEFEATED THE DYNASTY BUT THERE ARE OTHER THINGS THAT WE HAVE TO CONTINUE TO FIGHT. WE ALSO HAVE TO FREE OURSELVES FROM OUR OWN WRONG ATTITUDES, FROM OUR MISPLACED VALUES, OUR BAD HABITS. THAT WE SHOULD NOT JUST RELY ON OTHERS TO DO THE THINKING FOR US. I REPEAT TO THEM OVER AND OVER AGAIN, MAS MASARAP TULUNGAN MGA TAONG MARUNONG TUMULONG SA KANILANG MGA SARILI. THAT THEY SHOULD NOT ONLY EXPECT TO RECEIVE HELP, 100%, THEY SHOULD ALSO GIVE THEIR

COUNTERPART. I TELL THEM, USE ME AS YOUR VISUAL AID. IT IS EASY TO SEE THAT WITH MY PHYSICAL CONDITION, I ALSO NEED A LOT OF HELP BUT I HAVE NOT USED THIS AS AN EXCUSE TO BE JUST A BURDEN TO OTHERS.

ELECTORAL REFORMS

CLEARLY, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, THE STRUGGLE DID NOT END WITH MY VICTORY IN THE ELECTION OF 2004. IT WAS A CASE OF ONE DOWN, ONE THOUSAND TO GO. THANKFULLY, WE HAVE BEEN BLESSED WITH SOME HUMBLE ACHIEVEMENTS AND OUR PEOPLE HAVE FELT THE DIFFERENCE IN GOVERNMENT.

THIS IS ALL BECAUSE THEY CHOSE TO USE THEIR RIGHT TO SUFFRAGE DIFFERENTLY BY VOTING SOMEONE NEW.

LET US SPREAD ISLANDS OF HOPE IN ALL PARTS OF THE PHILIPPINES. LET US NOT PUT ALL OUR HOPES AND EXPECTATIONS ON ONE PERSON ALONE. OUR COUNTRY'S ISSUES CANNOT BE SOLVED BY ASKING JUST ONE PERSON TO RESIGN OR REFORM. WE WILL ONLY

BE FRUSTRATED. LET US ALSO WORK FOR THE ELECTION INTO OFFICE OF GOOD GOVERNORS, GOOD MAYORS AND EVEN GOOD BARANGAY CAPTAINS AND KAGAWADS SO THAT IF WE ARE NOT SATISFIED WITH THE PEOPLE AT THE TOP, THERE ARE STILL THE LOCAL GOVERNMENTS TO RELY ON.

I AM QUITE OBSESSIVE ON THIS MATTER THESE DAYS.

BECAUSE EVER SINCE MY RE-ELECTION AS GOVERNOR LAST YEAR AND SEEING ONCE AGAIN HOW THE ELECTORAL PROCESS HAS GOTTEN EVEN DIRTIER, HOW VOTE BUYING HAS BECOME EVEN WORSE, I WOULD TELL ANYONE WHO'D CARE TO LISTEN THAT WE SHOULD NOT WAIT UNTIL JUST THREE MONTHS BEFORE THE ELECTIONS TO CRAM AND DO OUR VOTER'S EDUCATION, TO ENCOURAGE VOLUNTEERS, TO GATHER OUR YOUNG COLLEGE STUDENTS TO PARTICIPATE AND NOT JUST LEAVE THE POLLWATCHING TO A HANDFUL OF SACRIFICING CWL OR LEGION OF MARY MEMBERS OR LET ELECTIONS BE DOMINATED BY THE WELL PAID MACHINERY OF TRADITIONAL POLITICIANS. I HAVE BEEN PUSHING FOR THE COMING TOGETHER OF ALL COLLEGES AND

UNIVERSITIES OF THE PHILIPPINES SO WE CAN START INVOLVING THE YOUTH IN TAKING AN ACTIVE ROLE NOT ONLY IN VOTING BUT ALSO IN POLLWATCHING. WE'VE HAD OUR INITIAL MEETINGS WITH THE LEADERS OF DIFFERENT COLLEGES AS WELL AS CATHOLIC INSTITUTIONS AND WE WERE JOINED BY AMBASSADOR TITA DE VILLA AND MR GUS LAGMAN OF THE PPCRV NAMFREL. I AM ALSO HAPPY TO SHARE WITH YOU THAT TOGETHER WITH GOVERNOR PANLILIO AND 2001 RAMON MAGSAYSAY AWARDEE MAYOR JESSE ROBREDO OF NAGA CITY WE HAVE SUCCESSFULLY LAUNCHED WITH THE ATENEO SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT THE KAYA NATIN: A MOVEMENT FOR GOOD GOVERNANCE AND ETHICAL LEADERSHIP WE HAVE BEEN TO SOME UNIVERSITIES TALKING BEFORE THOUSANDS OF COLLEGE STUDENTS IN DIFFERENT CAMPUSES IN METRO MANILA. THERE WILL BE MORE DIALOGUES WITH DIFFERENT ORGANIZATIONS, THE MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION OF THE PHILIPPINES, THE AYALA YOUNG LEADERS CLUB ALUMNI AND OTHERS WHO WANT MEANINGFUL CHANGE IN THE COUNTRY AND READY TO WORK FOR IT. THIS HAS INSPIRED TO PUSH ON DESPITE THE SACRIFICES THAT THESE ENTAIL SPECIALLY ON OUR OWN RESPONSIBILITIES IN OUR LOCALITIES.

I AM SURE IT WILL ALL BE WORTH IT. PERSONALLY, I AM COMMITTED TO THIS. YOU SEE, SOME PEOPLE THINK THAT BECAUSE I AM PHYSICALLY DISABLED, MY MAIN ADVOCACY IS FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES. OTHERS THINK THAT BECAUSE I AM A WOMAN, I ALWAYS HAVE WOMEN'S CONCERNS IN MIND OR BECAUSE AGRICULTURE IS MY FLAGSHIP PROGRAM IN ISABELA, IT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING TO ME. BUT NO, THERE IS SOMETHING MORE IMPORTANT BEYOND OUR OWN PERSONAL BELIEFS AND THAT IS THAT WE ELECT ONLY THE RIGHT PEOPLE TO LEAD US.

IF I HAVE TO SAY SO MYSELF PLEASE LOOK AT ME, THIS HANDICAPPED PERSON WHO IS NOW THE GOVERNOR OF MY PEOPLE. LOOK AT ME AS THE EMBODIMENT OF THE POWER OF THE PEOPLE THROUGH THE BALLOT. WHAT ELSE CAN EXPLAIN MY BEING GOVERNOR THAN THE DECISION OF THE ISABELINOS TO USE THEIR RIGHT TO VOTE DIFFERENTLY. MINE WAS ONLY ONE VOTE. WHAT MADE ME WIN WAS THE VOTE OF HUNDREDS OF THOUSAND OF OTHERS. THEY WHO MADE THE CHOICE AND BECAUSE OF THIS, THEY HAVE A DIFFERENT ISABELA NOW.

I FEEL SO INADEQUATE HAVING TO SPEAK BEFORE YOU ON THIS “LECTURE SERIES” WHEN IT IS I WHO NEED SO MUCH MORE TO LEARN. MY LIFE AS GOVERNOR FOR THE PAST FOUR YEARS HAS BEEN MOSTLY PLAYING IT BY EAR, ESPECIALLY IN THE BEGINNING, AND HAVING HAD TO LEARN VERY FAST SO THAT I CAN COPE WITH ALL THAT WAS EXPECTED OF ME. I RELIED MUCH ON LISTENING TO THE PEOPLE, UNDERSTANDING THEIR NEEDS AND BEING SENSITIVE TO THEIR PLIGHT, ESPECIALLY THE MOST DEPRIVED. I THINK IT WAS THE BEST THING TO DO BECAUSE WHY AM I HERE ANYWAY BUT TO KNOW THEIR NEEDS AND SERVE THEM? I ALSO THANK GOD, THAT HE MADE ME A CERTIFIED PUBLIC ACCOUNTANT FIRST BEFORE HE MADE ME A CERTIFIED PUBLIC ANNOUNCER AND THEN A CERTIFIED PUBLIC ADMINISTRATOR BECAUSE MY KNOWLEDGE OF ACCOUNTING AND OTHER FINANCIAL PROCESSES GAVE ME THE CONFIDENCE I NEED AS I GO THROUGH VARIOUS FINANCIAL TRANSACTIONS, SIGN VOUCHERS AND CHECKS WORTH MILLIONS OF PESOS. I KNOW THAT THERE ARE STILL SOME SECTORS IN MY OWN GOVERNMENT WHO ARE JUST WAITING FOR THE CHANCE TO SEE ME FALTER.

PLEASE REALIZE THAT THE VERY FEW AMONG US WHO ARE SAID TO GIVE OUR PEOPLE HOPE, ALSO NEED TO BE ENCOURAGED, ALSO NEED TO BE UPLIFTED. IN MY CASE, I DID NOT DREAM OR PLAN ALL MY LIFE TO ENTER POLITICS AND BECOME GOVERNOR ONE DAY, BUT SINCE I SUDDENLY BECAME ONE AND WITH SO MANY EYES FOCUSED ON WHAT I AM DOING, IT CAN REALLY GET OVERWHELMING AND SOMETIMES FRIGHTENING.

BUT THE GOOD NEWS IS I KNOW WELL ENOUGH THAT SO MANY OF OUR FELLOW FILIPINOS SUPPORT THOSE WHO FIGHT FOR WHAT IS RIGHT. I KNOW IT FROM ALL THE ENCOURAGEMENT AND CHEERS THAT I GET WHEN I MEET ORDINARY FILIPINOS - SALESLADIES IN DEPARTMENT STORES, SECURITY GUARDS, WAITERS AND WAITRESSES, AS WELL AS PROFESSIONALS, BUSINESS EXECUTIVES AND EVEN AMONG OUR SOLDIERS AND POLICEMEN. AS LONG AS OUR KABABAYANS STILL FEEL OFFENDED AND DISGUSTED WITH THE WRONG THINGS HAPPENING IN OUR COUNTRY AND AT THE SAME TIME CLAMOR FOR CHANGE AND READILY AND

ENTHUSIASTICALLY RESPOND TO GROUPS LIKE KAYA NATIN AND SIMILAR ORGANIZATIONS, WE WILL HAVE A BETTER PHILIPPINES.

I THANK THE FRIEDRICH NAUMAN FOUNDATION THIS CHANCE GIVEN ME TO TELL MORE PEOPLE ABOUT WHAT EACH ONE OF US CAN DO, TO WARN THAT THERE ARE LOTS OF OBSTACLES AND DIFFICULTIES ALONG THE WAY BUT ALSO TO PROVE THAT IT IS WORTH IT. IT IS ALL WORTH IT.

MARAMING SALAMAT PO.