

Federalism is top mission for 2018 – Nograles

By ELLSON QUISMORIO

The top mission of Congress for the year 2018 is to pave the way for the adoption of a federal system of government, Appropriations Committee Chairman Representative Karlo Nograles, one of the top advocates of federalism in the House of Representatives, said.

"The primary mission for us lawmakers in the 17th Congress is to usher in a federalized Philippines in 2018," Nograles said.

"Over 16 million Filipinos gave their stamp of approval to this endeavor when they elected President Duterte who has championed federalism since Day One," stressed the House leader.

According to the Davao lawmaker, Congress' hardwork in 2017 has allowed it to finally focus its collective effort into making the big switch to a federal government from the current unitary system.

Among the "necessary legislation" that lawmakers had to tackle first were the ₱3.767-trillion General Appropriations Act (GAA) of 2018 and the Tax Reform for Acceleration and Inclusion Act or TRAIN. These two important measures were signed into law by Duterte last December 19.

On top of setting in motion all government functions this year, the 2018 GAA provides for the implementation of the free college tuition program under Republic Act (RA) 10931 or the Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act.

"But now that we're done with the GAA and TRAIN, our focus for the latter half of the 2nd regular session and beyond will be on switching from the current unitary system of government to a federal system," Nograles said, adding that Duterte named it as a priority measure during last LEDAC-Execom meeting in August 2017.

"I am hopeful that 2018 would be

the year that the Philippines begins its long-awaited journey toward progress via the federalism super-highway," he further said.

The 1987 Constitution must first be opened up for amendments in order to allow for the establishment of autonomous federal states.

These are Northern Luzon, Central Luzon, Southern Luzon, NCR/Metro Manila, Bicol, MIMAROPA, Eastern Visayas, Central Visayas, Western Visayas, Northern Mindanao, Southern Mindanao, and Bangsamoro.

During its final session day before the holiday recess last December 13, the House of Representatives began the plenary debates on the convening of the 17th Congress as a Constituent Assembly or Con-Ass under House Concurrent Resolution 9.

Nograles is a stalwart of Duterte's Partido Demokratiko Pilipino - Lakas ng Bayan (PDP-Laban), the ruling party in the country.

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