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# Lawmakers to have final say on charter amendments

By **DELON PORCALLA**

Both senators and congressmen will have the final say on which specific provisions of the 1987 Constitution should be amended, based on what a 19-member consultative body will recommend, a House official said yesterday.

"We're not saying that we are brushing them aside. It's not a question of are we going to wait for their output. We will always give much weight to all proposed amendments," House Deputy Speaker Gwendolyn Garcia said, referring to the committee led by former chief justice Reynato Puno.

"As the name suggests, the consultative committee is consultative," the Cebu lawmaker explained, noting that the finishing touches will definitely rest on them, being members of the bicameral Congress – the Senate and the House.

Puno, along with 18 others, has been designated by President Duterte to study the possibility of amending the Charter and shift to a federal government, whether the bicameral legislature will remain or become a unicameral parliament.

"In the end, whether or not to adopt their amendments or their proposals would be to guide the hands of Congress," Garcia explained to reporters in a news briefing. She said the House committee may consolidate proposed constitutional changes with Puno's group.

Another deputy speaker, Rolando Andaya Jr. of Camarines Sur, also pushed for the federal form of government, highlighting the fact that Bicol remains the most disaster-prone region in the country.

The proposal, according to him, is a "good climate change adaptation measure because disaster risk reduction funds, instead of being parked in Manila, will be handled by the federal states."

"Empowering federal states with the discretion on how each will implement their climate change plans will create more resilient communities. It would also result in faster delivery of aid during calamities and in the reconstruction of damaged areas," Andaya said in a statement.

"The present system has created a Manila-dependent mentality, and even mendicancy, when it comes to disaster management," he added, noting that even the repair of a damaged classroom in a remote barrio will have to go through the national government.

Andaya said that an "ideal federal state" will have the resources to handle its own disaster risk management program, from building up resilience to rebuilding destroyed infrastructure.

"We should devolve a great part of climate change adaptation work to the regions, including the resources, because the nearer these are to the ground, the faster they can be deployed in times of emergency," he said.

It will also cut red tape substantially, citing the complicated ways in which nationally held calamity funds can be accessed.

He explained that in 2016, fund requests were submitted to the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC), then reviewed by the Office for Civil Defense, which sends it back to the NDRRMC, then to the Office of the President, which endorses it to the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) before the funds are released.

Andaya said a fresh approach in disaster risk management is needed "for a country that is the second most disaster-prone in the world." And Bicol, "on account of geographical features and location," is the most vulnerable to calamities, he said.

"Bicol is right smack in the typhoon alley. We provide the welcome mat to most of the typhoons that make landfall. We were hit by 64 typhoons from 2003 to

2013. One typhoon, Reming, left P5.4 billion in damages in 2006," he recalled.

The region also hosts seven volcanoes, two of which are active, including Mayon which has been intermittently erupting for a week now.

## 'Imperfect'

Amid renewed attempts to implement Charter change, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) yesterday said that the 1987 Constitution may not be perfect, but it is consistent with the teachings of the Gospel.

The CBCP, at the end of its 116th Plenary Assembly in Cebu, yesterday issued its "Pastoral Guidelines for Discerning the Moral Dimension of the Present-day Moves for Charter Change."

While it was CBCP president Davao Archbishop Romulo Valles, a good friend of President Duterte, who presided over the plenary assembly, the prelates, based on moral grounds, did

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not clearly support present efforts to amend the fundamental law of the land.

The bishops instead came out with a moral critique and encouraged the people to discern and to participate in discussions and debates on the matter.

The bishops said that since the crafting of the 1987 Constitution in 1986 or 32 years ago, they have maintained their position and declared a moral stand five times already. They support the present Constitution because it is attuned to the teachings of the Lord.

"We began with a moral judgment in 1986 declaring that, though imperfect, the provisions of the draft 1987 Constitution were consistent with the Gospel," the CBCP said.

It added that amendments to the Constitution should be carefully crafted to prevent another dictatorship and that there should be a unity of vision, transparency and relative serenity that would allow rational discussion

and debate.

There should also be widespread participation and consultation with the people.

## 'Shift could be dangerous'

Meanwhile, former senator Joey Lina yesterday warned in a press briefing in Manila that the proposal for the present form of government's shift to federalism could become "dangerous" if some provisions also change the laws tackling rights of persons, families and property.

The creation of states under the proposed federal form of government by some lawmakers could also grant such states "inherent power to decide on all aspects of their existence," according to Lina.

"Especially that the federal government is only in charge of foreign policy, currency, national defense, maybe penal laws and even weights and measures," Lina said.

- With Evelyn Macairan, Ghio Ong

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