September 18, 2014

THE JOINT CONGRESSIONAL OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

The Senate of the Philippines

Manila, Philippines

Thru: The Honorable AQUILINO PIMENTEL III

Senator and JCOC Chairman for the Senate

Your Honors:

TransparentElections.org.ph is a group of mostly Information Technology (IT) practitioners who have had many years of experience in running the automated parallel counts of Namfrel. In 2006, a few of us were also invited to participate in the Technical Working Group that assisted the Senate in crafting the automation law, R.A. 9369. At this stage of the hearings, there are three issues that we would like to bring up to the Joint Congressional Oversight Committee (JCOC).

1. During the JCOC hearing of August 14, 2014, I asked the following question of the COMELEC:

*Why does the COMELEC want to spend P18 billion on PCOS which only shortens the election process by half-a-day, yet removes the transparency in precinct-counting and seriously impairs the protest process. Certainly, the COMELEC knows that it is the automation of canvassing that shortens the process by some five weeks or so.*

The only response I have heard so far – and this was from Chairman Brillantes - was that manual precinct-counting is not allowed by the automation law. We beg to disagree. The law says that the COMELEC is ***authorized*** to use an automated election system for the process of voting, counting of votes, and canvassing/consolidation and transmission of results. Surely, the chairman knows the difference between “authorized” and “mandated”. (Further explanation is given in the attached article.) We would like to hear valid answers and arguments from the COMELEC. It is only fair that they explain to the taxpaying public why they want to spend that large amount just to save twelve hours in the process.

1. In the resolution that was read by Chairman Louis Casambre of the COMELEC Advisory Council during a previous JCOC hearing, I take it that the CAC basically concurs with the COMELEC’s choice of technology for 2016, even as it allows for the testing of other technologies in the same election. We would like to request from them for a copy of the working papers they used in analyzing the various technologies available and arriving at what they believe could be the most appropriate one for 2016. We can provide the JCOC and the CAC a copy of our working papers, should they so require. The CAC has several IT practitioners as members and we would like to find out how our two conclusions – theirs and ours - could be so far apart, in fact, value-wise, more than P13 billion apart. This is such a huge amount that we believe it is worth it for JCOC to spend some time in investigating the details of the CAC’s, and our analyses. We might be wrong; or, they could be wrong. The taxpaying public would surely want to find out which one is right.
2. We are not vendors of election systems. But we know of a very simple, yet most appropriate, and very transparent system for the automation of our elections. We are offering this solution to the COMELEC, free of charge. We would like to be given a chance to present to the JCOC such system that will only cost the country P4 billion, maybe P5 billion maximum. Certainly, far, very far, from the P18 billion budget that the COMELEC is asking for. We would be ready to present it in the next JCOC hearing, if the Chairman will allow us.

(Just a point of comparison: The potential savings of more than P13 billion can provide some 130,000 houses to Yolanda victims (@P100,000); or, enough fishing boats for fishermen and equipment for tradesmen who lost their only means of livelihood during the storm.)

Having shown how huge the numbers are, we are hoping that our requests would merit the approval of the Committee. Thank you.

Sincerely,

AUGUSTO C. LAGMAN

Lead Convenor

TransparentElections.org.ph