

OFFICE OF SENATOR ANTONIO "SONNY" F. TRILLANES IV
PRIVILEGE SPEECH
19 SEPTEMBER 2012

“KUNG GUSTO KO ISASAGASA KO. KUNG AYAW KO, UUPUAN KO.”

“Gusto ko happy ka.” Iyan po ang campaign slogan ng ating senate president noong siya ay kandidato pa noong 2010 elections. Bumenta po iyan; maraming pong sumakay dyan. Pero ang nakakalungkot, sa pagpatakbo ng senado, malayo ito sa katotohanan. Kasi po, ang kalakaran talaga dito ay: “Kung gusto ko, isasagasa ko; kung ayaw ko, uupuan ko.”

There are many instances to illustrate this prevailing policy under Senator Enrile and some of my colleagues, (particularly, Senator Pia Cayetano and Senator Joker Arroyo), have been at the receiving end more often than others. As for myself, being a newcomer, and the youngest at that, while I was uncomfortable being shoved around every now and then, I gamely took everything as part of the learning process and figured that’s just how it is here in this august chamber. I am a very patient man. Well, not necessarily before the Oakwood Incident in 2003 but seven and a half years in prison can do that to you sometimes. But one incident a couple of months ago jolted me into the realization that this shabby treatment and even shabbier policy should not be tolerated anymore.

Last July 24, a day after the President’s SONA, a caucus was called at the Senate President’s office. We were not informed of the agenda so; I assumed right away that it was probably about something really important. Eventually, of course, I learned that the principal item on the agenda was not about national security, or even of national significance. It was about the local bill on the division of the province of Camarines Sur. Without elaborating on the details of what happened in that caucus, suffice to say that I was shoved aside for the nth time. Eto na naman po, “kung gusto ko, isasagasa ko.”

I got out of that caucus feeling trampled upon by a bully determined to get his way. My neophyte instincts were telling me then to just keep the peace and get out of his way. But then, the public servant in me just couldn’t let this thing pass.

As a matter of public policy, dividing provinces or carving out new ones is not beneficial to the state or the people of the affected province. Otherwise, let's just divide all the big provinces for as long as they meet the requirements as provided for in the law and we'll probably end up with around 200 provinces in total. A few exceptions could be, when there are two distinct and warring tribes occupying one province or; when a province is composed of two large islands that are administratively cumbersome. But in the case of Camarines Sur, neither of these conditions is present.

Of course, there is the cop-out "we should let the people decide" argument. I've heard this from the Senate President several times that I was almost convinced that he actually believed it. Almost, because if he really does, then I would immediately initiate the division of his Cagayan province and expect from him the same zeal and vigor that he has in rushing this bill. This argument, if allowed to be the basis for the approval of this bill, will, henceforth reduce the whole process of succeeding similar bills, from the committee hearings, interpellations and up to the third reading, as a mere ministerial duty of the Committee on Local Government and the Senate because at the end of the day, if anyone would oppose, somebody would just say, "we should let the people decide." In my limited understanding of my job description, that is not why we are here. If, as a Senator of the republic, a representative of the people, you see that something is patently detrimental to the interest of the State, in this case, the Province and the public, you should not let it pass or, at the very least, oppose it. That is the essence of a representative democracy. Then again, our Senate President is a very smart man and I know for sure that he knows this. But with his, "kung gusto ko, isasagasa ko" policy, he will use such arguments if he finds it convenient.

Now, this is the sad part. Everyone in this august chamber knows that this bill is gerrymandering in its worst kind, particularly, one that would provide for new elective positions to accommodate two 3-term congressmen. But if it were so, why would our Senate President be particularly interested to the point of straining relations with members of the very Senate that he leads? Is it just to please Congressman Villafuerte? And why would he rush it to the point of dictating on a chief of staff of a fellow senator on what his principal should do and when he should schedule his committee hearings? Worse, our Senate President didn't even cancel the session at the height of the habagat rains when all government agencies already did, just so this bill could be tackled.

The Senate President even said that this bill should be passed immediately to relieve him of the pressure. What, the great Senator Enrile could be pressured? I remember him saying otherwise, during the last impeachment proceedings. Is the pressure coming from Congressman Villafuerte, who we see often loitering about at the senator's lounge, the senate president's office, and even personally lobbying to senators while we are in session? As persistent as Congressman Villafuerte is, I doubt it if our Senate President would be pressured by him. Annoyed, probably, but not pressured. Of course, President Aquino cannot possibly be the source of the pressure since this bill isn't even in the president's legislative agenda.

I kept on looking for a possible explanation for our Senate President's irrational behavior and it finally came in the form of a news report by Ms. Christina Mendez of the Philippine Star dated 06 September 2012. In the report, Ms. Mendez's source revealed that it was Congresswoman Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo who personally called up the Senate President to speed up the measure. This information was also validated by one of our colleagues.

With this totally unexpected twist, everything seemed to fall into place. Now, there remain only two possibilities: that our Senate President is deeply indebted to GMA; or that he is a GMA lackey. Either way, I have lost trust, faith and confidence in Senator Enrile's capability to lead the senate along the path consistent with the reform agenda that I espouse.

I, therefore, manifest that I am leaving the majority and, consequently, joining the minority effective this day.

Thank you.