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By: BOARD MEMBER CARLO M. BATALLA

SANGGUNIANG PANLALAWIGAN

In its report on the 2007 financial operations of the province of Camarines Sur, the Commission on Audit found a discrepancy of over P 812 million in the provincial government's property, plant and equipment inventory which could not be ascertained due to the provincial government's inability to complete the physical count and reconcile the records of the accounting and general services offices. Moreover, the report said, the provincial government did not submit some accounts for 2007 amounting to about P 20.8 million, "thus the validity, legality and reliability of the transactions could not be determined".

The Commission on Audit report revealed some 21 more findings involving taxpayer's money not properly accounted for. It estimated that the unaccounted amount could reach P1 billion pesos. During the past weeks, this representation has filed several cases of violation of the Anti-Graft and Corrupt Practices Act against Governor Villafuerte and some other provincial officials – subject of my complaint is the Commission on Audit report on the financial operations of the provincial government during the year 2006.

Step by arduous step, the melange of corruption have now been expose in the open. From my first complaint filed at the Office of the Ombudsman involving P7.9 million of anomalous purchase of 25,000 G.I. Sheet s to my second complaint involving P18 million of disallowed fund assistance to the Kaogma Foundation – the work of stealing public funds have now progressed to gargantuan proportions. P1 billion pesos of unaccounted funds, the equivalent of the province one year Internal Revenue allotment share gone missing.

The officials responsible for these cancerous transactions should be held responsible as fast as possible before they suck the finances of the province of Camarines Sur dry. These crooks masquerading as government officials are disrupting the continuity of whatever progress this province has attained in the past. The poor people of Camarines Sur coming from the toil of years of hard work and, pausing a moment from the meagre earning of their daily bread, turn toward this august body once again to ask for help and succor, in the name of transparency and good governance the privilege of an investigation.

Investigating this anomalous transaction of the provincial government and coming out with a report on the findings- I believe is within the bounds of normalcy. Ignoring this – constitute a disservice to the people; ignoring this – constitute a disservice to those who voted us into office, a breach to the oath we have sworn to uphold; ignoring this – would in itself constitute a crime against the people of Camarines Sur especially to those who cast their votes on us.

Against this wrongdoing, this representation eternally protests! Against this wrongdoing, the poor people of the province eternally protests! We will not be satisfied watching this rape and plunder of the provinces' coffer in silence. Hence, this representation begs with all humanity for this august body to hear our plea, please investigate this matter and file the appropriate charges against these officials, and all the others involved should be identified and pursued with prosecutorial zeal. And until this action is done – we will never cease championing this cause; we will never cease begging on your sensibilities; we will never cease assailing your ears. And we are very committed to this crusade, and we are very courageous in waging this battle. For this representation, there is a cerebral aspect to this work in spite of being a lone voice and in spite of all the harsh criticism coming from the media and cases hurled against me by Governor Villafuerte – I will not give up. I will not be tracked. I will not be cowed.

This battle we wage against graft and corruption is not for ourselves alone but for all the people of Camarines Sur. It is a fight for transparency, good governance and public accountability. It is a fight for the future of the province and its generations yet to come. Lest this – our common province, false to its claim, become in truth, the province of the thief, and the home of the corrupt – a byword and a hissing among neighbouring provinces and all throughout the country for its sounding pretensions and pitiful accomplishments. Never before in the history of our beloved province that its coffers have been alleged to have been pillage and plundered by our fellow officials – born and bred on its soil, voted and mandated to be our true leaders and guardians – tasked to lead our province and steer us to progress and prosperity.

Millions in unaccounted taxpayers' money resulted all because of these crooks – masquerading as government officials. And these are the same officials who professed morality, the same officials who professed to follow the path of righteousness and the path trudged by Jesus Christ. The blasphemy if such a course is only matched by their insatiable greed. LET US STOP THIS BLEEDING! LET US STOP THIS ROBBERY! The humble request of this representation for this august body to investigate this matter and if warranted file the appropriate civil,



administrative and criminal cases to liable parties is plain, clear and unequivocal. Why this request and pleas fell eternally to deaf ears escapes me when this is the only right thing to do. Investigating this Commission on Audit report is the right thing that we should do. How shall we start this: by thinking first of the general welfare of the people, by persistent and unceasing devotion to public service, by hammering at the truth, by sacrifice and work. Transparency and accountability must prevail.

Then and only then, we live to tell these poor brothers and sisters of ours especially those mired in poverty – scattered in the four districts of the province, wavering and weak that no bribe of money or notoriety, no promise of wealth or fame, is worth the surrender and loss of a man's self respect. We are the Sangguniang Panlalawigan. We are the Sanggunian of the people. Let us work for their general welfare, let us work for the welfare of the province.

And we shall win! The past promised it. The present foretells it. Thank God for those who cared. Thank God for the Citizens Crime Watch. Thank God for the Volunteers against Crime and Corruption. Thank God for their vigorous campaign against all forms of criminalities. Thank God for all those today, few though their voices are – who have not forgotten their sworn duty and their pledge of honesty. And for those whose doubts were casts in stone – we appeal to you, we appeal to your sense of duty, we appeal to your sense of responsibility, we appeal to your sense of sensibilities: **STAND UP FOR THE RIGHT! STAND UP FOR THE PEOPLE!** Courage, dear peers! The battle against graft and corruption is not lost or losing, but we must not falter, we must not shrink. Thank you.

