

Headline: It can be done in 2 weeks

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Last week I recommended splitting the DENR into two departments: one on Environment and the other on Natural Resources. You can't find one person who is, first, a strict environmentalist, and, second, a supporter of responsible extraction of the natural resources we must have in the modern world.

So I did some quick research. Australia and Canada, the countries with mining policies and operations we most respect—and the President has said we should emulate—have separate departments. Australia has a department on Environment Energy, and another on Resources. Canada has Environment and Climate Change in one department and Natural Resources in another.

Brazil and Chile, two other major mineral-producing countries, have different departments for Mining and the Environment. Indonesia, also another major mining country, has two separate departments on Environment and Forestry and on Energy and Mineral Resources. Vietnam and Thailand merge environmental issues and mining in one department—a Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment—but mining is much less in those countries. Russia merges environment and mining into one department, but that's Russia: we don't particularly use it as a model. So the ones we do split it.

What all this says is that splitting it seems to be the way to go. President Duterte promised a new regime with radical change. Here's one such change that could greatly ease the never-ending conflict in a controversial sector. Where two secretaries end up butting heads, the President would be the final arbiter between the two.

And in regard to change, generally the world is talking in a very loud voice that it wants a change in the way politicians run democratic countries. It's a voice Philippine politicians are not immune to. Their reelection in 2019 depends on listening to that voice clamoring for change. What happened in France is just the latest in sending another chilling message to traditional politicians: The people don't want them. Emmanuel Macron is not someone from the long-established political parties. And Marine Le Pen is a way-out rightist. The traditional politicians were trounced by these two.

In country after country, people are clamoring for a new style of leadership, for one where radical thinking becomes the norm, for one where endless debate and nitpicking over irrelevant details are not acceptable. Yet too many in Congress don't seem to have gotten the message. President Duterte was a harbinger of this growing trend—a call for real action, not interminable talk and unfulfilled promises. I appeal to Congress to give the people tax reform, and to do it in this session, before the President's State of the Nation Address, so he can praise a joint accomplishment, not wail over a lost opportunity.

Important bills are still pending while unimportant ones get attention. If the House of Representatives can pass a bill in two weeks for an ill-considered 2-tier tax system, is there any reason it can't pass the far more worthy, sensible and hugely beneficial to all tax reform package that the Department of Finance wants in the remaining two weeks of this session? The House should not sit interminably on it, arguing in ways that will only end up weakening it into far less effectivity if those changes are accepted.

For those decrying that it will hurt the poor if oil is taxed more, etc., read my two previous columns, study the Department of Finance's paper more carefully, or just read its latest press releases. The poor and the low-salaried will experience little, if any, increase in their daily costs of life. It's those with enough who may end up paying a bit more—a bit more that will be well worth it for the greater benefits it will bring. In fact, the salaried worker with a higher take-home pay will be better off. Nothing worthwhile comes for nothing. We desperately, desperately need infrastructure, transport services, health costs covered, our kids schooled, and on and on.

Funds are needed to do it. Congress is needed to act. The Speaker can use the power of his office, and the overwhelming majority who support the DOF recommendation to vote this through now.

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