Honor and Integrity

By: Senator Juan Miguel F. Zubiri

Speech Delivered on the Senate Plenary,3 August 2011

Mr. President, My Distinguished Colleagues in this August Chamber, Mga Minamahal kong Kababayan:

On several occasions, I rose in this August Chamber, in defense of the environment and other issues affecting our country and our countrymen.

Today, I rise on a personal privilege in defense of my and my family’s honor, integrity and dignity.

And I address this speech to reach our people to whom I owe my present position.

Nais kong marating ang lahat ng ating mga kababayan sa sandaling ito sapagkat sa kanila nagmula o nanggaling ang katungkulan ko bilang isang Senador ng ating bansa.

My election as Senator:

In the May 2007 elections, I was elected and duly proclaimed as Senator of the Republic with more than 11 million votes. My proclamation was affirmed by the Supreme Court without prejudice to filing any case with the Senate Electoral Tribunal.

This chamber and our people may take judicial notice that my proclamation was assailed through the filing of an election protest before the Senate Electoral Tribunal (SET) alleging fraud and irregularities in some areas covered by the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao.

It was his right to do so just as the law and the rules on election gave me all the rights to file a counter protest in areas where I also believe I was also a victim of similar circumstances which also affected the actual number of votes I obtained in the said election.

Since the said election was conducted manually, and as experience will tell us, the manual count and re-appreciation of the millions of manually prepared ballots from the various protested and counter protested precincts would take a long process and time to be resolved. And that is the reason why, since 2007 up to the present, the revision and the recounting of the manually prepared ballots are still proceeding at the Senate Electoral Tribunal.

While the esteemed protestant claimed that he had recovered substantial number of votes from the areas he protested, the records of the Senate Electoral Tribunal will also reveal that an equally substantial number of votes were recovered in my favor in the areas which I counter protested.

And as a result, the Senate Electoral Tribunal, in its July and August 2010 Resolutions, directed the completion of the 100% revision of all the ballots from the precincts I contested.

Present Controversies Affecting My Position:

While my counter-protest is still pending before the Senate Electoral Tribunal and the revision and recounting of the ballots are going on smoothly to find out the truth on the parties’ allegations, a number of highly suspect “personalities” suddenly cropped up recently, claiming that they were allegedly “witnesses” to the alleged frauds and irregularities during the 2007 elections.

Armed merely with their vocal chords and without any supporting documents to prove their allegations, these alleged witnesses are now shouting out loud and, as if with full orchestration, that my election was marred with irregularities.

My rival took advantage of this political situation. He and his supporters are now asking for my resignation as a duly elected Senator, despite the pendency of his election protest at the Senate Electoral Tribunal.

My political detractors began calling me ugly names and dragging the name of my family in entirety.

In other words, Mr. President, the trial by publicity has begun. The trial at the Senate Electoral Tribunal where this issue could have been properly ventilated and resolved has been practically set aside.

Sa harap ng Diyos at sa harap ng tao ay nais kong pagtibayin na hindi ako nandaya At wala akong kinausap upang mandaya para sa akin sa halalan. Ang lahat ng akusasyon laban sa akin ay pawang walang katotohanan.

I DID NOT CHEAT NOR ASK ANYONE TO CHEAT FOR ME AND MY FAMILY. WE WOULD NEVER TOLERATE ANY FORM OF ELECTORAL FRAUD.

In my family’s almost thirty (30) years of public service in Bukidnon, not once has our name been dragged in any election controversy, not once has an election protest ever been filed against us. This you can ask the people of Bukidnon.

I am not the only one who feels the hurt because of the personal attacks against me and my family. I could feel how my wife has had sleepless nights, my father, my mother, who has undergone two (2) major brain operations and is now constantly suffering physically and emotionally, together with my siblings who have been hurt and affected by such unfounded and baseless accusations.

Kung ako lamang ang naka-darama ng masasakit na batikos at akusasyon, ay maaring makayanan ko pang dalhin.

Ngunit sa sandaling nakikita ko ang aking asawa, ang aking nagmamahal na magulang, at ang aking mga kapatid, kaibigan at mga kapanalig…damang dama ko rin ang kanilang pagdaramdam. Ang hapdi at pait na kanilang dinaranas dahilan sa mga walang basehang paratang laban sa aking pagkatao at bilang isang halal na Senador.

Mahal ko ang aking tungkulin bilang isang Senador at isang lingkod bayan o public servant. Ito ang dahilan kung bakit sa loob ng mahigit sa apat na taon kong paglilingkod dito sa Senado, ay aking maipagma-malaki ang mga nagawa ko upang tumbasan ang tiwala at pagkakataong ibinigay ng taong bayan sa akin upang ako ay makapag-lingkod sa ating bansa.

Isang paglilingkod na aking maipagma-malaki na walang bahid dungis. Hindi ako umabuso o nagpayaman sa aking katungkulan. Hindi ako nagkaroon ng maraming bodyguard o “back up” o gumamit ng anumang ‘wang wang’ kahit noong ako ay Kongresista pa lamang. Sa madaling salita, hindi pa man sinabi ng Pangulong Aquino ang sikat na salitang “Walang Wang-Wang”- iyan ay bahagi na ng aking panuntunan bilang isang lingkod bayan sa ating bansa.

List of Accomplishments

Mr. President, modesty aside and without being too repetitive, let me cite our legislative accomplishment in the last four years. In the 14th Congress, the Senate had passed 651 laws, of which around 90 are of national significance and 561 laws of local application. It was a record breaking performance for the Senate, surpassing the record of the chamber in the last three or four Congresses combined, especially in passing local bills which our colleagues in the House of Representatives had long been clamoring for.

The Senate did that in the 14th Congress under the able leadership of the incumbent Senate President who was also the Senate President then and more importantly with the support and active participation of our colleagues in the 14th Congress.

Of those laws of national significance, this representation has sponsored, principally authored, co-sponsored and/or authored around 32 laws. Some of which are the:

1. RA 9520 – Philippine Cooperative Code of 2008 (Sponsor and Author)

2. RA 9513 – Renewable Energy Act of 2008 (Co-Sponsor and Author)

3. RA 10068 – Organic Agriculture Act of 2010 (Sponsor and Author)

4. RA 9679 – Home Development Mutual Fund Act of 2009 (Principal Author and Co-sponsor)

5. RA 9653 – Rent Control Act of 2009 (Principal Author and Co-sponsor)

6. RA 9507 – Socialized and Low-Cost Housing Loan Condonation Act

(Sponsor and Author)

7. RA 9997 – the National Commission on Muslim Filipinos Act of 2009

(Sponsor and Author)

8. RA 9996 – the Mindanao Development Authority Act of 2010 (Principal Author and Co-sponsor)

9. RA 9904 – the Magna Carta for Homeowners and Homeowners’ Associations (Sponsor and Author)

10. RA 9903 – Condonation of Penalties on Delinquent Social Security Contributions (Principal Author and Co-sponsor)

11. RA 9507 – the Socialized and Low-Cost Housing Loan Condonation Program (Sponsor and Author)

12. RA 9850 – Declaring Arnis as the National Martial Art and Sport (Sponsor and Author)

13. RA 10121 – Philippine Disaster Risk Management Act (Co-sponsor and Author)

14. RA 10143 – Establishing the Philippine Tax Academy (Sponsor)

15. RA 10026 – Granting Income tax Exemption to Local Water Districts (Co-Sponsor and Co-Author)

16. RA 10072 – New Charter of the Philippine Red Cross (Co-sponsor and Author)

17. RA 10073 – New Charter of the Girl Scouts of the Philippines (Author)

18. RA 9645 – Declaring July 27 of Every Year as Araw ng Iglesia Ni Cristo and as Special Working Holiday (Co-sponsor and Author)

19. RA 9849 – Declaring Eidul Adha as a National Holiday (Co-sponsor and Author)

20. RA 10023 – Free Patents Act (Author)

21. RA 9851 – International Humanitarian Law (Author)

22. RA 9500 – UP Charter Amendments (Author)

23. RA 10122 – Strengthening the Literacy Coordinating Council (Co-sponsor)

24. RA 9505 – Personal Equity and Retirement Account (PERA) Act of 2008 (Author)

25. RA 9504 – Individual Income Tax Rate Exemption Law (Author)

26. RA 9502 – Cheaper Medicines Act (Author)

As Majority Leader then, to expedite the passage of pending local bills, I willingly took the cudgels for some of our colleagues, who were chairpersons of the concerned committees, whenever they requested me to sponsor or defend in the plenary their committee reports as some of them were on official business or had other pressing commitments.

That had resulted in the passage into laws of around 560 local bills.

To improve the quality of tertiary education, we passed 20 laws creating new state universities namely:

1. RA 10085 – North Luzon Philippines State College in Candon, Ilocos Sur

2. RA 9998 – Surigao Del Sur State University in Surigao del Sur

3. RA 9966 – Sultan Kudarat State University in Tacurong City, Sultan Kudarat

4. RA 9860 – Bicol University – Gubat Campus in Gubat, Sorsogon

5. RA 9854 – Caraga State University in Butuan City

6. RA 9852 – Jose Rizal Memorial State University in Dapitan City, Zamboanga Del Norte

7. RA 9832 – Don Honorio Ventura Technological State University in Bacolor, Pampanga

8. RA 9798 – Pangasinan Technological Institute in Pangasinan

9. RA 9744 – Cebu Technological University in Cebu City

10. RA 9747 – Occidental Mindoro State College in San Jose, Occidental Mindoro

11. RA 9746 – University of Antique in Sibalom, Antique

12. RA 9722 – Central Visayas State University in Tagbilaran City, Bohol

13. RA 9721 – Romblon State University in Odiongan, Romblon

14. RA 9720 – Ifugao State University in Lamut, Ifugao

15. RA 9719 – Tiburcio Tancinco State University in Calbayog City, Western Samar

16. RA 9718 – Naval State University in Naval, Biliran

17. RA 9717 – Central Bicol State University in Pili, Camarines Sur

18. RA 9647 – Philippine Normal University as the National Center for Teacher Education

19. RA 9519 – Mindanao University of Science and Technology in Cagayan De Oro City, Misamis Oriental

20. RA 9500 – University of the Philippines as the National University

We also created or converted 407 national high schools all over the country with the end in view of improving the quality of education in the secondary level and providing enough teachers and classroom equipment.

In order to improve the delivery of health services to the poor in several provinces, we passed 6 laws which established new hospitals or increased the bed capacity of existing hospitals.

To de-clog the local courts and further improve the administration and dispensation of justice, we created 30 additional branches of Regional Trial Courts and Metropolitan Trial Courts.

We also declared 2 new Protected Areas which would help in the protection and conservation of the environment and biodiversity. To enhance the delivery of services and infrastructure in the countryside, we passed 75 laws converting local roads into national roads and the creation of new engineering districts. We also converted 3 new cities but there was no question as to their qualifications as we observed the requirements provided in the Local Government Code.

Of these local laws, around 400 had been sponsored and/or co-sponsored and some were even authored by this representation.

In this 15th Congress, we continued to advocate for the environment and the cooperative sector. As Chairman of the Environment and Natural Resources Committee, we have finalized the Committee Report on the National Land Use Act after long and tedious committee hearings and technical working group meetings, as well as the Committee Report on the Forest Protection and Sustainable Management Act. We are now ready to route these reports for signature of the members of the Committee. We had also conducted several investigations on alleged violations of our environmental laws and degradation of the environment such as the FPIC leak in Makati which has resulted in the filing of SB No. 2788 or the Oil and Gas Pipeline Regulation Bill, and the hearing on illegal poaching of coral and marine resources, which resulted to the issuance of warrant of arrests to the perpetrators.

In relation to this representation’s advocacy in improving the delivery and quality of health services for all Filipinos, I had also filed SB No. 58 which amends the PhilHealth law for a mandatory universal healthcare coverage for all Filipinos. I understand that a consolidated bill is now under floor deliberations.

In relation to the delivery of social services and essential infrastructure projects to our constituencies, ang aking Priority Development Assistance Fund at iba pang inisyatiba sa nakaraang apat na taon ay inilaan po natin sa aking programang “Isang Bayan, Isang Proyekto” o “Every Town One Project” program.

At present we had allocated projects to seventy three (73) out of the (80) provinces in the country resulting to a ninety one percent 91% coverage and this is distributed to 83 out of the 135 cities and 871 of the 1,497 municipalities as beneficiaries or recipients of the “ Isang Bayan Isang Proyekto” ni Migz Zubiri.

In some regions, in the Visayas and Mindanao we have allocated projects to all their cities and municipalities, at nagsimula na rin kami ngayon sa mga bayan at lalawigan ng Luzon.

Sa pangkalahatan ang mga proyekto pong ito ay nagnanais na mapagkalooban ng mga basic infrastructure, serbisyong pangkalusugan, mga sasakyan at equipment para sa pagsasaayos ng peace and order at livelihood assistance sa mga nabanggit na lugar upang magresulta sa pag-angat ng kalidad ng pamumuhay.

Specifically, these projects are:

1. Construction of multi-purpose buildings, barangay halls, day care centers, public markets, covered courts and core shelters, a total of 846 projects;

2. Construction or school buildings, classrooms, local libraries and repair of school buildings, a total of 250 projects;

3. Construction of health centers and provision of mobile hospitals, total of 39 projects;

4. Provision of multi cabs as barangay patrols or service vehicles, ambulances, dump trucks, patrol cars, and fire trucks – total of 101 projects;

5. Construction of farm-to-market roads, bridges and water systems – total of 92 projects; and

6. Livelihood assistance to cooperatives – 6 projects.

Lahat ng ito, sa paniniwala ng inyong likod na ma-empower ang mga LGU’s, ay direktang binigay at inimpliment ng mga local government units.

On top of these Mr. President, we also infused funds for the following projects:

1. construction of the Rural Economic Development and Renewable Energy Center (REDREC) at UP Los Baños (P28.5M) to further advance the research and studies for the development of renewable energy;

2. construction of a Pediatric Ward Building at the Vicente Sotto Memorial Medical Center in Cebu (P30M);

3. construction of Dormitory at UP Tacloban Campus (P10M);

4. construction of a Cancer Center at the Cotabato City Hospital (P15M);

5. construction of a New Hospital building and Pediatric Ward at the Bukidnon Provincial Hospital (P25M); and

6. construction and repair of classrooms and school buildings at the Mindanao State University.

Sa Metro Manila naman po, nagsagawa tayo ng mga social services programs and projects lalung-lalu na sa mga depressed communities at mga biktima ng mga kalamidad.

We had conducted a total of 32 medical and dental missions, outreach programs to fire victims, relief operations to flood and calamity victims, nutrition and feeding programs, and distribution of sports equipment, particularly in Metro Manila, which benefitted around 9,600 families and another 22,100 individuals.

We had also provided scholarships and educational assistance to hundreds of college students.

Add to these projects our medical and financial assistance to indigent individuals and families which benefitted a total of 9,769 patients and individuals nationwide.

Mr. President, I beg the indulgence of our colleagues for romanticizing the past. I just wanted to emphasize that in the last four years, this representation had participated and contributed in the best way I could, and labored diligently and persistently in the legislative mill resulting to my PERFECT ATTENDANCE in Congress since 1998 as a legislator.

I fulfilled my job responsibly with honesty, integrity and dignity, and I could proudly look in the eyes of every Filipino who put me in this position, that the trust and confidence they had given me were not put to naught.

Baseless Accusations Compel Me to Leave:

Ngunit ang lahat ng ito, ang lahat ng aking ginawa at nais pa sanang gawin para sa ating taong bayan ay hindi ko na makakayanan pang gampanan.

Lubha na akong nasaktan, kasama ang sakit at hapding nadarama ng aking pamilya. At dahil dito, ang aking tungkulin bilang isang Senador ay lubha nang nadaramay at para bang nawawalang saysay.

I would be doing an injustice to my fellowmen and to this great and honored Institution if I continue working half-heartedly and without full concentration and devotion.

For this reason, I have directed my lawyers to make proper and immediate representation before the Senate Electoral Tribunal and convey my actuations today, with the end in view of expediting the proceedings and with the prayer that the Tribunal come up with a decision at the soonest possible time.

And in this August Chamber, without admitting any fault and with my vehement denial of the alleged electoral fraud hurled against me, I am submitting my RESIGNATION as a duly elected Senator of the Republic of the Philippines in the election for which I am FALSELY accused without mercy and compassion.

I am resigning, not because I am exhausted from the demands of my calling as a legislator. Hindi po ako napagod sa paglilingkod sa inyo.

I am resigning, not because I wish to evade the decision of the Senate Electoral Tribunal. Handa ko pong tanggapin ang anumang hatol mula sa nasabing hukuman.

Rather, I am resigning because of these unfounded accusations against me and these issues has systematically divided our nation and has casted doubts in our electoral system which has affected not only myself, this Institution but the public as well.

And as a legislator, who is being referred to in the Senate as “Your Honor”, I believe that my honor is something that should never be subject to taint.

NO AMOUNT OF POWER, POSITION OR WEALTH IS WORTH SACRIFICING ONE’S HONOR AND INTEGRITY.

Sa bandang huli, ang legasiya ng isang tao ay hindi nasusukat kung gaano kataas ang posisyon ang kanyang narating o ang dami ng kanyang yaman na naipon, kungdi ito ay nasusukat sa kanyang pagpanatiling malinis at walang bahid dungis ang kanyang sariling dignidad at integridad.

The life of a public servant is, to say the least, hardly rosy and sweet. For we, as public officers, are always subject to public scrutiny.

I have always taken it upon myself, not to give-in to intrigues against my person and honor – to always keep on maintaining my focus on performing my duties well.

All these, I rehearsed. I was prepared. I was conditioned. During the past few days, however, God reminded me that no matter how much I insist on exclusively carrying the burden of my oath and duties, the truth is that I have a family that suffers with me together with the Senate as an Institution, whether I like it or not.

I have seen and felt the suffering of my family, and from the burrows of my conscience, I could not allow this to happen, let alone be tolerated.

They do not deserve to suffer the consequences of my position.

After all, I am a husband first before a Senator; and I am a father first before a legislator.

I believe that membership in the Senate and serving our people is the highest form of service that a citizen could give back to his country.

Having said this, I, thus, express my honest gratitude to the people and to the Senate and the secretariat and my staff for allowing me to experience the magnanimity of public service through my duties as a Senator.

My highest respect always remains in this Institution and to the men and women who serve it.

My career in this August Chamber had been a fabled journey that is certainly not wanting of memories. However, as much as I wish to remain in the service of my country, I will not do so, at the expense of my honor and integrity.

My Alma Mater’s, the University of the Philippines, dictum of “HONOR AND EXCELLENCE” is a principle that I have upheld and imbibed in all of my daily undertakings.

I now go to live in happiness and peace with my family. I will leave the Senate with my head held up high, knowing that despite all endeavors that came my way, I was able to survive and perform, and I did so with the support of those who believed in me and my advocacies.

But let me just emphasize to my detractors, as I paraphrase a quote from General Douglas Macarthur that: I am not actually retreating; I am merely advancing in another direction.

And as I now pronounce my joining the civil society, it is my humble prayer that this Institution allow me to RESIGN WITH HONOR AND DIGNITY.

Marami pong Salamat…Pagpalain tayo ng Poong Maykapal…lalong lalo na ang ating Bansa at ang ating mga Kababayan.