

Duterte can't save Lopez from being axed by CA — solons

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Despite pronouncements from President Rodrigo Duterte that he wants Gina Lopez to stay at the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), she will be officially bypassed by the Commission on Appointments (CA) not because Congress will adjourn this week for a Holy Week break, but for being unfit for the position, a lawmaker from Mindanao yesterday said. According Surigao del Norte Rep. Robert Ace Barbers, Lopez has failed to address the strong opposition for her appointment from various groups, including the business sector, the mining industry, indigenous peoples and from some CA members.

“She (Lopez) still has a lot of learning to do. She needs to understand the dynamics of government and the difference between the private sector. She cannot just do things in government as fast as doing it in the private sector,” Barbers explained.

“She (Lopez) had a hard time answering the issues of the oppositors. She will be bypassed. The issue is not her personal pro-environment advocacy but the issues surrounding her management style, arbitrary policies and corrupt advisers behind her,” he noted.

“If she will not be able to answer and satisfy the issues raised, I think she will be bypassed,” Barbers added.

Last week, Isabela Rep. Rodolfo “Rodito” Albano III and A-Teachers party-list Rep. Juliet Cortuna, both CA members, said Lopez needs a reappointment from the President because she is deemed bypassed for the third time by the CA.

The two explained that Lopez failed to hurdle her appointment because the CA will not hold plenary session anymore this week.

They stressed the hearing by the CA committee on environment chaired by Sen. Manny Pacquiao on Lopez’s confirmation was adjourned Thursday. The adjournment of Congress’ session this week will be Lopez’s third bypass and under the CA’s new “three-strike” rule which was approved last week, the body must decide on an appointee’s fitness for the post if he or she has been bypassed thrice during the two-day hearings of Pacquiao’s panel last week, Lopez was accused of abusing her powers.

Occidental Mindoro Rep. Josephine Ramirez Sato, in a statement, said presidential appointees should bear in mind the law that created the office to which they are appointed and mandated to lead to ensure smooth-sailing confirmation by the CA.

A member of the CA and the vice chairman of the House of Representatives’ economic affairs committee, Sato said as alter-ego of the President, Cabinet members should ensure they know the laws which they swore to uphold and enforce by heart.

Sato issued the statement after the CA committee on natural resources announced the termination of the public hearing on the ad interim appointment of Lopez after two successive days of extensive consultations.

At the end of the committee hearing on Thursday, Pacquiao, the chair of the CA committee hearing Lopez’s appointment, said that he and the committee members will meet on Tuesday to determine the appropriate action on Lopez’s ad interim appointment.

According to Sato, while she admired Lopez’s passion to protect the environment against destructive mining, Lopez should be guided by law every step of the way.

“I admire her passion, but the law is the law is the law. It may be harsh, it may be flawed, but that is the law. I am very much willing to hear from her what needs to be done and I will file a bill in the House of Representatives to make that happen. But it has to be done within the purview of the law. Any gaps in the law must be dealt with by amending the law or enactment of another law,” she said.

During the CA hearing of Lopez’s interim appointment, Sato expressed concern over the sweeping demoralization in the DENR because of Lopez’s decision to bring in undersecretaries and assistant secretaries that took over Provincial Environment and Natural Resources Office positions.

“As far as hiring of consultants is concerned, it is her prerogative to bring in her own team, but there is a law that protects civil servants against unjust removal from government positions. To lead the DENR effectively, she should be able to rally the people in the DENR behind her cause. This is not happening because some officials were unjustly removed when she brought in her team to take over certain positions,” Sato explained.

Underscoring the need to follow the civil service law, Sato said: “The law is there for a reason and if she thinks the law should be amended, then by all means – but let Congress do it first.”

‘Real thing’

Meanwhile, Lopez yesterday thanked Mr. Duterte for his support and “deeply caring about the country.”

“...(I) am deeply and profoundly touched by the support of the (P)resident,” she said in a post on her Facebook account.

“This is what (I) know of the man. He is the real thing. It’ s not plastic at all. He deeeeeply cares for our people... and he deeeeeply cares for the country,” she added.

“He is humble, unassuming and he CARES. I continue to be touched by his courage at supporting my controversial decisions.. my heart continues to resonate with his zero tolerance for corruption - and his stance at getting things done and done quickly.... he is the real thing,” she stressed.

According to Lopez, she will continue to be the President’s ally “for all that is good and true and noble for the country....”

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