

# DENR chief's fate known next week

1

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*Gina Lopez*

The environment committee of the Commission on Appointments (CA) terminated the public hearing on the appointment of Gina Lopez as Secretary of the Department of Environment Natural Resources (DENR) on Thursday.

The panel, chaired by Senator Manny Pacquiao gave the oppositors a chance to raise their respective objections to Lopez's designation.

The committee will decide on the case next week.

The CA panel received 23 sworn oppositions and almost all of them protested the order of Lopez to close down 23 of the 41 mines in the country.

The committee allowed 21 of the 23 oppositors to read their respective position papers questioning Lopez's qualifications and capacity to head the agency.

Among the issues tackled during the eight-hour hearing was the criteria being used by Lopez in deciding whether to close a particular mining firm or allow it to operate.

Pacquiao cited the case of San Roque Metals Inc. (SRMI) which was not padlocked despite the fact that its operation is in a watershed.

But Lopez maintained that the SRMI passed the audit because of positive results from laboratory tests.

“I really don’t want this to be a fight between me and the mining [companies]. We’ve passed 13 mines, my non-negotiable stand is for the common good,” she told the senator.

The committee, after hearing the oppositors, terminated the proceedings and scheduled a caucus on Tuesday, March 13.

If the committee will not be able to confirm Lopez’s appointment, she will be considered bypassed because Congress will go on a break next week.

If bypassed, Lopez needs to be reappointed by President Rodrigo Duterte in order for her to be considered by the CA once it resumes session in May.