

No campaign kitty for 2010 in proposed budget – GMA allies

Allies of President Arroyo in the House of Representatives, led by Speaker Prospero Nograles, assured the opposition that there is no allocation for the administration's campaign kitty in the 2009 national budget.

Administration stalwarts issued the statement in the wake of threats made by the House opposition bloc of Minority Leader Ronaldo Zamora that they intend to cut some P200 billion in excess fat from the P1.415-trillion General Appropriations Act.

"There should absolutely be no malice on what the government intends to do with the national outlay without necessarily letting our guards down in ensuring that government funds are not put to waste," Nograles said.

The Speaker reminded the opposition about the US financial crisis that forced US Congress to endorse a \$700-billion bailout package for toxic mortgages.

"We have a global financial crisis so this is not really the best time to put politics in the national budget."

By **DELON PORCALLA**

"Under our watch, we are committed to put up all necessary safety nets in the budget to ensure the full implementation of specific projects in a transparent and public manner to protect taxpayers' money," Nograles said.

He reiterated that the budget is full of allocations for infrastructure development, and that there is a "need for the government to invest in infrastructure to pump-prime the economy to shield the country from the aftershocks of the US financial tremor."

"There is a total of P147.47-billion infrastructure outlay for 2009 which, if implemented to the letter, could well help the country to sustain modest economic development even with the current global economic slowdown," Nograles said.

Another House official, lone Quirino Rep. Junie Cua,

chairman of the committee on appropriations, said there is no need to slash the 2009 budget ceiling considering that the government needs such amount to pump-prime the economy.

He is optimistic that there will be an end to the current US crisis and that everything will slowly but surely get back to normal after President Bush signed into law the historic \$700-billion government bailout of the battered financial industry.

"We should stick with the budget. I would like to be optimistic. The idea of cutting the budget is based on assumption that the US crisis will not normalize," Cua said.

"Now that the bailout has been approved, I think there will be normalcy, the global economy will rebound, and there is a big possibility that the goal of the (Arroyo) administration (for next year) will be achieved," he said.

Stalwart Rep. Edcel Lagman of Albay, vice-chair of the House appropriations

panel, was also against the reduction of the budget ceiling, saying the government will be needing the whole P1.415-trillion.

"It is not a question of the size of the budget pie. It is the question of how to allocate various pieces of that pie," he pointed out.

He said what should be done is to trim down the budget of some agencies that are slow-moving or not performing, and whatever amount is collated can be used to augment basic services and infrastructure development.

Under the 2009 budget proposal, the government has allocated P434 billion for social services, in which P204 billion will go to "education, culture and manpower" while the remaining P230 billion is for infrastructure.

Of the P230-billion infrastructure funds, P147.5 billion will be spent by the national government, P32.1 billion by government-owned and controlled corporations, and P50 billion by local government units.