

80 votes for impeach case vs GMA a 'work in progress'

By DELON PORCALLA

The head of the 30-member opposition bloc in the House of Representatives has conceded that the 80 votes they need to get the new impeachment complaint against President Arroyo going is a "work in progress."

It is difficult to talk about numbers. We have not yet had the chance to talk to each other. Some are in their districts while some are abroad. Whether we get the numbers, well that's a work in progress," House Minority Leader Ronaldo Zamora said.

Whether they really have the numbers, or one-third of the 240-member chamber (roughly 80 votes), Zamora admitted that they don't have the votes needed, but the opposition will ask other congressmen to support them.

"We are hoping for miracles," he told newsmen, when asked about the chances of the latest impeachment complaint filed by businessman Jose de Venecia III, son of former speaker Pangasinan Rep. Jose de Venecia Jr., against Mrs. Arroyo.

Zamora, who served as executive secretary during the administration of deposed President Joseph Estrada, said they

would consult other political parties in the House to seek their support, which will most likely be done "out of desperation."

"Right now up to this point, *magpapalitan la layo, wala pa akong nabibilang* (I'll be honest with you, I'm not seeing any) reaction from the other congressmen aside from those in the minority, *Ikatahihi lang ang mga laramin* (We might not be that many)," he told radio station *dRRH* early this week.

Three sources in the opposition who spoke to *The STAR* on condition of anonymity revealed that they are not supporting the impeachment complaint because the complainants' intentions are patently obvious: To use the political exercise as a vehicle to launch their senatorial bids.

Sources disclosed that they were not even consulted about the filing of the complaint, and an informal survey among their colleagues indicated that many of them would not support it.

An Waray Rep. Florencio "Ben" Noel and Parañaque Rep. Rotlo Golez, who both belong to the minority bloc, said they have yet to discuss the issue and decide whether they will endorse it.

"The minority as a group has no position yet on the impeachment complaint. We will discuss it first chance we have during recess. We have not seen the complainant and minority had no hand in the preparation of the complaint," said Golez.

Muntinlupa City Rep. Rufy Blazon, a member of the opposition Liberal Party, expressed doubts about the motives behind the fresh attempt to oust Mrs. Arroyo.

"At this point, I'm a bit wary of any impeachment complaint especially with elections coming. The timing and the motives may be political. I don't want to be used in any political maneuvering," he said.

"The action is meant to achieve personal political gain rather than a sincere desire to get social justice or to right a wrong. For me, an impeachment complaint should only be filed if it has a fighting chance of winning because I think a failed complaint only serves the interest of the accused and the one filing, especially if the real objective is just to gain publicity," Blazon added.

Meanwhile, a group of mayors and provincial board members pledged their support to the President and asked the House of Representatives to junk the new impeachment complaint filed against her.

Mayor Manuel Escalante III of Manapla, Negros Occidental, secretary general of the League of Municipalities (LMP) and Iarac provincial board member Pearl Angeli Erguiza Pacada, national president of the Provincial Board Members League of the Philippines (PBMLP), said Congress should dismiss the new impeachment complaint against Arroyo and allow her to finish her term to lessen the impact of the global financial crisis.

The LMP members, composed of mayors nationwide, have agreed during their national directors meeting to give their unconditional support to Mrs. Arroyo, Escalante told the guests at the Newsstand forum at Ambassador Hotel in Manila. — With Jose Rodel Clapano