

## **Executive Summary**

The question is whether or not bicameralism is indispensable to the strengthening of democratic institutions and to ensuring accountability and a more deliberative process. Having two chambers is necessary to enhance mechanisms for accountability in terms of a Second Chamber reigning in 'hasty' legislation emanating from a First Chamber. However, those in favor of unicameralism may argue that this would lead to delay or deadlock in decision-making, making more meaningful reform difficult to achieve.

Despite the points raised against bicameralism being more costly and deadlock-prone, the merits for checks and balances still obtain, especially given the inherent weaknesses of a soft State or a heavy-handed presidency. In the Philippines, the rivalry or conflict between the House and the Senate may still be simply described as 'intra-elite' factionalism or competition, but it is to the credit of a bicameral model in the country that abuses have been somewhat checked and a democratic space for institutional accountability has been, at minimum, assured.

When the scandal-plagued Arroyo administration (2005 to 2006) enforced a 'calibrated preemptive response', Executive Order 464 and Proclamation 1017, what emerged was a democracy under attack. In this state of affairs, it was bicameralism in the Philippine context, or the presence of a largely independent Senate, which helped save the day for the country's still fledgling democracy.

An overriding general assessment in the context of the protracted political crisis was that the Senate had more concern over policy implications, while the House was seen as operating largely on more parochial imperatives of adhering to the administration's line or ensuring that central government largesse accruing to local districts would not be disrupted.

The Filipino electorate responded to a Senate that, for the most part, stood its ground. Electing an opposition-dominated Senate even as the House remained solidly in the hands of the administration, was a clear message for bicameralism, for a Senate to chart a path that maintained its institutional independence and fiscalizing role, the better to provide the 'breathing space' for institutions to evolve and carry out their functions fairly.

For the unique national circumstances of the Philippines, a body like the Senate ought to exercise broad powers of inquiry and oversight to restrain the abuse of State or executive power and to keep the people's faith in the institutional recourses for continuing redress and renewal in the body politic.

## ARE TWO BETTER THAN ONE? REVISITING PHILIPPINE BICAMERALISM

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Nothing perhaps comes closest in the country's history to a self-serving rejection of bicameralism than the experience of 'Con-Ass' in the House of Representatives in early December 2006. The rather inelegant, if crude, abbreviation of 'Constituent Assembly' represented an equally crude, bizarre and unilateral attempt to transform the House into a body that could summarily introduce changes to the 1987 Constitution.

A Constituent Assembly, as provided for in Article 17 Section 1 of the Constitution, could be constituted by a vote of three-fourths of all Members of Congress (the provision is silent on whether either chamber would vote *jointly* or *separately*) to effect changes in the Charter. The novel, albeit convoluted, variation propounded by the proponents of Con-Ass led by Speaker Jose de Venecia, however, would insist that Congress in this case meant both the House and the Senate numerically combined.

The argument was made that three-fourths of the Congress meant an aggregate 192 members, three-fourths of a total of 236 Representatives and 24 Senators - not three-fourths of each separate chamber. The Senate, which was largely averse to any discussion on Charter Change especially towards a unicameral

legislature, could therefore be effectively ignored for as long as 192 members of the House would vote to constitute themselves as a Constituent Assembly. To achieve this, the sponsors of the move would subvert the very rules of the House and contort them to justify the ends of, or pay lip-service to, the requirement for bicameral cooperation.

The elaborate rhetoric of political and economic reform through Charter Change notwithstanding, the push for Con-Ass in the House was seen by a larger public as a quicker, truncated means to abolish the Senate, postpone the 2007 elections, extend the terms of the members of Congress, including Senators who would supposedly be absorbed into the unicameral Assembly - and, as underscored by several columnists and analysts, to provide Speaker de Venecia a route to become Prime Minister in a new parliament.

The perception of Charter Change driven by ambition was widespread, as various surveys evinced. The efforts to push for Change at all cost were met with derision and rage by citizens who saw naked ambition and sheer hubris on the part of Con-Ass proponents in the House. The plenary debates that ran for two all-night sessions were acrimonious, and for many who viewed the non-stop live proceedings on cable television, a rather desperate display of arrogance from those who would ride

roughshod over public sentiment to suit personal ends and partisan interests.

This was perceived to be brazen especially because, several weeks before, a Palace-led People's Initiative to change the Constitution by way of a petition of at least 12 percent of the electorate nationwide was shot down by the Supreme Court as unconstitutional. There was no enabling law, the Court averred, and the mode by which the signatures were obtained - through the machinery of the Local Government Units (LGUs), as ordered by the Department of Interior and Local Government - was seen as spurious, if not misleading or coercive.

The resolution to revise the Constitution through the legislative process, on the other hand, was deemed too protracted. The third and last recourse to change the Charter before the onset of the 2007 elections was through the convening of a Constituent Assembly, no matter if done or maneuvered with problematic, if spurious, machinations - as those discordant debates in December 2006 in the House showed.

### **Does It Matter?**

In those surreal days, bicameralism as such faced a crossroad. To the group of the House Speaker, the question of whether bicameralism matters had a categorical answer: yes, it does, but

largely in the pejorative sense. Bicameralism mattered only insofar as it could be dispensed with. The attendant arguments, laid out in full-page ads in national dailies, sang paeans to a unicameral parliamentary system and lambasted the Senate as an 'expensive, obstructionist body' of 'endless, unproductive investigations', and a hindrance to 'more efficient policy-making.' The ads would lament a situation where numerous bills passed in the House would be waylaid or ignored by the Senate.

The Mayor of the City of Manila, who was at the forefront of an earlier Palace-sponsored People's Initiative (to amend the Constitution), decried the Senate as 'useless' and 'elitist.' Efficacy and efficiency in legislation were forwarded as valid reasons for abolishing the Senate. Only a unicameral set-up, the corollary went, would hasten reform.

The petition for a People's Initiative to amend the Constitution to shift from a bicameral presidential to a unicameral parliamentary government was filed before the Commission on Elections on August 2006 as one of the three modes available for 'changing the charter.' (The third mode would be the calling for a Constitutional Convention.) Petitioners Raul Lambino and Governor Erico Aumentado of Bohol argued that, along with an enabling law (Republic Act 6735 or 'The Initiative and Referendum Act'), there was sufficient basis in the Constitution

to have at least 12 percent of all registered voters in the country, with each legislative district represented by at least 3 percent of its voters, initiate a process of amending of the Constitution.

In a parallel effort for Charter Change, more aligned with the Con-Ass initiative in late 2006, ruling party congressmen, led by the Chair of the Committee on Constitutional Amendments, filed a resolution proposing the revision (as opposed to the amending) of the 1987 Constitution. The formal 'whereas' components of the resolution underlined "the frustratingly ineffective presidential form of government in addressing the economic and political problems of the country"; "the recurring gridlock and paralysis in governance"; and "the excessive concentration of powers in the executive," making no secret about abolishing the Senate altogether.

This debate over which form better suited Philippine democracy was not entirely new. The history of the Philippine legislature since the *Asamblea Filipina* (Philippine Assembly) of 1907 during the American colonial period was one of shifting back and forth from a unicameral to a bicameral system.

The Philippine Bill of 1902 gave birth to the first Philippine Assembly, which was made up of 80 elected members. It was one of two law-making bodies, the other being the appointive seven-man

Philippine Commission which was vested with legislative and executive powers. This two-chamber configuration was continued, albeit modified, under the 1916 Jones Law passed by the US Congress, creating both a House of Representatives and a Senate.

The bicameral structure would be replaced by a unicameral National Assembly after the ratification of the 1935 Constitution in the Commonwealth period. When the Constitution was amended in 1941, the Philippine legislature reverted yet again to a bicameral set-up.

This was short-lived, as the Japanese Occupation beginning in 1942 paved the way for a re-writing of the Philippine Constitution to suit the imperatives of Japan's Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. A unicameral National Assembly of 108 members was established under the Occupation Government from 1942 to 1944.

When the Second World War ended and the Philippines became independent from the United States in 1946, a bicameral Congress was reconvened, a system that was in place until martial law was declared in 1972 by President Ferdinand Marcos. The authoritarian period and a new 1973 Constitution allowed for a shift to a modified parliamentary form of government, which gave rise to a so-called Interim National Assembly, a unicameral Batasang Pambansa, by 1978. In 1984 the Marcos regime called

for elections to a regular Batasang Pambansa of 200 representatives, which included members appointed by Marcos, to serve a six-year term.

The Batasang Pambansa lasted only less than two years. The 1986 People Power Uprising, which triggered Marcos' downfall and elevated Corazon Aquino to the presidency, ushered in a revolutionary government. The Batasang Pambansa was abolished and a Constitutional Commission to draft a new Charter was created.

The 1987 Constitutional Commission vote on the legislative structure was a cliffhanger, tied at 22: until Commissioner Laurel cast the tie-breaker. If the latter voted the other way - or if two other Commissioners who were widely believed to favor unicameralism stuck to their original preference - the post-Marcos Congress would be unicameral today.

All this pendulum-like movement from one set-up to the other over five Philippine republics in a span of seven or eight decades indicates that there was no patent, overriding *raison d'etre* for either form of legislature. Over time and many debates, there have been general, at times vague, references to the usual efficiency versus equity arguments, or those that revolved around 'hasty or careless' versus 'more thoughtful and



deliberative' legislative processes, or those implying 'more democratic' vis-à-vis 'more elitist' representation.

The records on the discussions over the advantages or disadvantages of either form among the 1935 Constitutional Convention delegates and the commissioners of the 1987 Constitutional Commission serve as instructive manuals on what largely informs the conceptual ambiguities of having one or two chambers of a legislative body.

### **Accountability**

In light of growing literature on the inherent merits and demerits of bicameralism, it is helpful to inquire substantively whether or not bicameralism is indispensable to the strengthening of democratic institutions and to ensuring accountability and a more deliberative process.

Arguments have been made regarding the necessity of two chambers to increase democratic 'value-added' and enhance mechanisms for accountability in terms of a Second Chamber reining in 'hasty or carelessly-crafted' legislation emanating from a First Chamber. Such thinking may be a throwback to age-old notions of a putatively more enlightened body that 'restrains' the 'arbitrariness' of popular will, as America's Founding Fathers justified the creation of a Senate shorn of a clear nobility

(like Britain's) vis-à-vis a commons-based House of Representatives.

But would this not also lead to delay or deadlock in decision-making, making more meaningful reform difficult to achieve? This is where the countervailing arguments for unicameralism play out: by unifying decision-making under a single deliberative body, legislative activity becomes clearer, more accountable and more understandable to the public.

A single legislative chamber, it is bruted, can exercise more effective control over the country's fiscal policies and annual budget appropriations. This would thus be more efficient and economical, reducing time-consuming deliberations and thus avoiding situations of policy impasse.

Proponents of unicameralism, under the larger rubric of a shift to a parliamentary form of government, will be quick to assign blame on the bicameral nature of the Philippine legislature, or more pointedly at the Senate's intransigence, since only 21 bills were passed in the Senate as opposed to 962 in the House in the 13<sup>th</sup> Congress. But this begs the question of whether cost efficiency in business applies to law-making. Should an imperative of safeguarding laws against haste and arbitrariness outweigh the demands for quicker, more efficient, and less costly legislation?

## **Bicameralism in a Weak State**

All told, the characterizations of the pitfalls or advantages of either set-up do not operate in a vacuum. The Philippine body politic, wherein patronage is endemic and rent-seeking by an entrenched oligarchy is widespread, lends itself to what political scientists would call a 'weak' or 'soft' state. The latter is roughly defined as a state wherein the principal source of wealth is not created value, but extracted value (rents, privileges, concessions) based on a tiny elite's extensive power over rules and enforcement.

In a weak State, a unicameral or bicameral set-up willy-nilly can be held hostage to particular, or in the case of the Philippines, familial, interests. Institutional parameters, instead of being more rigid and impersonal, are made more elastic, and subjected to discretion and transaction.

In what may be termed an 'oligarchic state' like the Philippines, an Upper or Second Chamber - of a decidedly more 'aristocratic' or 'elitist' composition because of the prohibitive costs of running for a Senate seat - could well be capricious and uncooperative, or as recent Charter Change adherents would say of the Philippine Senate, 'resistant to reform.' A second review by a 'chamber of second thought' does not necessarily preclude a hasty passage of legislation or the

approval of haphazardly-drawn, unsound or even self-seeking measures that serve to protect the interests of a political elite in a soft State.

In the same vein, a unicameral body, comprising the same elite, would lend itself to 'oligarchic capture' - wherein the economic interests of the members of the House primarily prevail over the considerations of the 'national good.' When the Con-Ass debates raged and the accompanying debacle played out in the House in late 2006, not a few political pundits and commentators wisecracked in the media about how the behavior exhibited by the House became the best argument against any shift to a unicameral parliamentary system.

Public sentiment would point to how a few powerful interests driven by self-serving ambition could well define and manipulate a unicameral body with the inordinate use of money and patronage. The scuttlebutt was that a quorum could be reached, or an administration-certified bill hastily approved by the numerical superiority of a ruling coalition, only if so-called incentives were doled out. A Prime Minister aspirant in a unicameral parliamentary setup could readily employ superior resources to buy individual members of the body to capture the post--a far cheaper scheme than campaigning nationwide for the Presidency.

Had the country's legislature gone unicameral in the 1987 Constitution Commission vote, would the country be witness to a situation where a national assembly would be held hostage by a few powerful vested interests and predominantly driven by the politics of pork and patronage?

If the practice of 'railroading of bills' without extensive deliberation, as has been increasingly become the norm, or the allegations that perks and sundry 'incentives' have to dispensed to members to even attain a quorum are any indication, one is led to think that having a 'chamber of second thought' has become a useful institutional check against this abuse in the larger chamber.

### **Expanding Democratic Space**

Despite the points raised against bicameralism being more costly and deadlock-prone, the merits for checks and balances still obtain, especially given the inherent weaknesses of a soft State or a heavy-handed presidency. In the Philippines, the rivalry or conflict between the House and the Senate may still be simply described as 'intra-elite' factionalism or competition, but it is to the credit of a bicameral model in the country that abuses have been somewhat checked and a democratic space for institutional accountability has been, at minimum, assured.

The scandal-plagued Arroyo administration, particularly over the period of the 'Hello Garci' tapes and the two subsequent impeachment attempts (2005 to 2006), makes this manifest. It was the opposition-inclined Senate that aggressively initiated more investigations into the searing issue of legitimacy caused by the Garci scandal and other corruption and electoral fraud-related exposes, while the House became the bastion of support for Pres. Gloria Macapagal Arroyo. A vote of one-third for an impeachment complaint against the sitting president would have transmitted it to the Senate for trial.

Faced with growing demonstrations and rising calls for the president's resignation, the current administration fought back with the use of institutional machinations, dangerously testing constitutional limits. To beat back a crescendo of public outcry, the police forces enforced a 'calibrated preemptive response' (CPR) against demonstrators, which limited the freedom to assemble. To bar Cabinet secretaries and other heads of executive offices from testifying in Senate-led investigations, the President signed EO 464.

In a move to squelch coup attempts and stave off 'threats to the State,' Arroyo signed Proclamation 1017 and issued General Order Number 5, directing the Armed Forces in the "face of national emergency to maintain public peace and order and suppress

lawless violence." Proclamation 1017 lasted more than a week, but the signal was made that the current regime would not hesitate to resort to more authoritarian measures and restrict democratic space to ensure the state's (or the President's) survival.

What emerged was a 'democracy under attack' where feeble institutions are further manipulated to advance or protect partisan interests, or where 'experiments' to constrict democratic space by way of executive fiat (EO 464, Proclamation 1017, CPR) were largely in response to a political crisis set in motion by a series of scandals.

In this state of affairs, it was bicameralism in the Philippine context, or decidedly the presence of a largely independent Senate, which helped save the day for the country's still fledgling democracy. This assessment found institutional validation when an activist Supreme Court shot down these edicts as unconstitutional, and in one fell swoop in late 2006 ruled that the People's Initiative to change the 1987 Constitution was inherently infirm, lacked legal basis and driven by self-seeking agendas.

### **Policy versus the Parochial?**

While the comparison may be labeled unfair or simplistic, an overriding general assessment in the context of the protracted political crisis was that the Senate had more concern over policy implications, while the House was seen as operating largely on more parochial imperatives of adhering to the administration's line, or resisting impeachment attempts, to ensure that central government largesse accruing to local districts would not be disrupted.

The drive for impeachment of the sitting president and thus holding her government accountable to the public for several anomalous transactions and deals was derided by many congressmen and local officials as being 'too Manila-centric,' 'intelligentsia-led,' 'destabilizing,' or 'too dangerous' to the economy.

A congressman from the South, in explaining his vote during the second impeachment attempt against the President in August 2006, declared unabashedly that he could not vote 'yes' to the impeachment complaint because this would mean infrastructure projects in the pipeline for his district would be compromised.

The discourses that emanated from the House and the Senate were dissonant. Save for the minority members of the House who endorsed the impeachment complaints or who supported moves to investigate scandals in the Arroyo government, the message



seemed to be that the House would relegate high-minded and pressing discussions on the tenets of Section 11 of the Constitution - Public Office as a Public Trust, i.e., 'legitimacy,' 'accountability,' 'transparency,' and 'reform' - to a backburner. It appeared that a higher premium would be placed on association with or loyalty to the regime, which would assure presidential patronage for local constituencies.

The Senate, with its broader national constituency, was more audacious in calling for the President to account for the shortfalls and anomalies surrounding the 2004 elections and allegations of corruption. The Senate President prominently led the call for the Chief Executive's resignation in July 2005.

The Chair of the Agriculture Committee in the Senate pushed for the prosecution of former Agriculture Undersecretary Jocelyn 'Joc-Joc' Bolante over the 700-million peso fertilizer scam which was seen as tied directly to the alleged chicanery of the 2004 elections. The Chair of the Committee on National Defense and Security also initiated investigations into the military's allegedly complicitous involvement in the 2004 elections. This move seemed to have sent shockwaves in the Palace, giving rise to the issuance of EO 464.

On other policy considerations, one notable contrast between the two legislative bodies' approaches would be the issue of

creating, via legislation, new local government units - whether these be new cities or provinces - as a function of provisions in the 1991 Local Government Code. Several members of the House see their leadership roles as tied to the dispensing of local patronage and the firm control of local political hierarchies.

The promise of higher Internal Revenue Allotment (IRA) and the prospects of new levers of power at the local level ('new fiefdoms for the landlords,' as one columnist would describe it) propel many members of the House to file bills seeking to convert municipalities into cities or to carve out new provinces.

In the 13<sup>th</sup> Congress, as many as 30 bills calling for new cities passed in the House and were pending in the Senate for bicameral conference committee approval. Town mayors and district congressmen would troop to the Senate regularly to lobby for the passage of these bills.

In general, the Senate was averse to the unbridled creation of new cities and provinces primarily because, as argued by Sen. Aquilino Pimentel Jr., the principal author of the Local Government Code, this would wreak havoc on the national budget. Moreover, this would reduce the aggregate allocation for cities or provinces, thereby shrinking the IRA shares in turn, if the overall fiscal pie did not necessarily expand every year.

A Senator would relay the story of how a number of incumbent and prospective city mayors aired their complaints to him about the possibility of their IRA shares contracting in the face of several additional cities being created. Accompanied by some of their congressmen, they had asked that their IRA shares remain the same or be increased in the national budget.

The Senator had asked the mayors and congressmen about the policy implications of having existing cities receiving effectively smaller IRAs because of the greater number of those who would draw resources from the same budgetary pool. To the shock and dismay of the Senator, not a few in this group of local leaders putatively responded: "we don't care about the other LGUs; just make sure we get what is due us - or more." Politics-cum-patronage readily trumps policy. The local picture eschews the bigger picture.

Which also brings to mind what former Department of Budget and Management Sec. Emilia Boncodin would underscore in some forum-discussions on fiscal policy and the budgeting process: especially on the sticky issue of pork barrel allotments, it was always a challenge during budget hearings to deal with the more parochial concerns and demands of House Members compared to what were generally more policy-oriented questions from (some, certainly not all) Senators.

## **Forwarding Bicameralism with Stronger Parties**

It is in the bicameral conference committee that differing versions of a bill as passed in either house are discussed and harmonized. It is in this venue that policy implications and parochial concerns collide, an arena where the competition of ideas and issues pertaining to a legislative measure are structured.

Ideally, as in the earlier stages of the legislative mill, more programmatic and ideological themes - as propounded by strong, well-organized political parties - define and shape a debate in the bicameral conference level, an oft-bruited 'third house of Congress.' This implies that strong political parties enrich and deepen the deliberative, checks-and-balances process that the bicameral set-up provides.

As political scientists would underscore, it is the development of stronger political parties that will help close the democratic deficit in a 'weak state' like the Philippines, where a 'patronage and personalistic democracy' has failed to be effectively responsive to the interests of the marginalized, poor majority.

Strong political parties in either a unicameral or bicameral legislature augur well for the shaping of a structure of

political competition that allow for more substantive deliberations and the wider representation of the interests of the poor and marginalized sectors.

Democracy, as theorists would posit, becomes meaningful or takes on a realistic character only if it is based on significant changes in the overall distribution of power, and challenges highly inequitable socio-economic structures in society. A legislature, being the highest policy-making body in a republican government, ought to reflect this state of affairs - and the longer, albeit more tedious, route of checks-and-balances and the richer deliberations which bicameralism provides, arguably enshrines this.

In the absence of a mature, established party system, a bicameral set-up guarantees better the restraint on the abuse of power as a derivative of a political culture of patronage and personality, and ushers (or forces) greater discussions on policy. What, then, has been the effect of bicameralism on our system and present state of affairs?

Bicameralism has provided the polity with checks and balances, and opened avenues for redress, however limited. It has, with a second chamber as a countervailing force against a first chamber, provided 'breathing room' for the institutional processes to mature or play out more fully.

In the impeachment proceedings against President Joseph Estrada in late 2000, the country was transfixed via the nationwide reach of television and radio to the unfolding of an institutional dynamic of a Senate turned impeachment court, with the Senators sitting as Senator-Judges, and selected members of the House as prosecutors. While the process was aborted because of People Power-EDSA II, which caused Estrada's downfall, the country was given a first-hand, front-seat view to a live lesson in civics, and offered the people an understanding of the complex interplay between two houses of Congress.

It will be recalled that Estrada had actually more allies in the House and in the Senate at the time, and the latter group had served to block the entire impeachment effort, but the swift (some say scheming, others say inspired) transmittal to the Senate of the articles of impeachment (as soon as this was signed by one-third of the members of the House) by then Speaker Manuel Villar forced the second chamber to perform its institutional role of addressing a public's clamor to investigate charges of graft and plunder against the incumbent President.

The power of inquiry and oversight which the Senate exercised considerably amidst a worsening climate of public dissatisfaction with the Arroyo government and nagging questions

about its legitimacy, helped alleviate tensions in the body politic, blunting the edges of the political crisis. And while the executive responded with drastic and rather draconian measures like EO 464, Proclamation 1017, and the CPR policy of the police, the Senate's actions were perceived to have maintained on a whole a position of fierce independence vis-à-vis the Palace.

There may have been no real institutional closure to the political crisis since 2005, yet to the people's credit - and the resilience of a fledgling democracy - they ostensibly, if intuitively, understood what American President Woodrow Wilson described as the "informing, inquiring function of Congress, even preferred as it should over its legislative function." The results of the 2007 national elections, with a resounding victory for the opposition in the Senate, clearly manifest this.

The Filipino electorate responded to a Senate that, for the most part, stood its ground. Electing an opposition-dominated Senate even as the House remained solidly in the hands of the administration, was a clear message for bicameralism, for a Senate to chart a path that maintained its institutional independence and fiscalizing role, the better to provide the 'breathing space' for institutions to evolve and carry out their functions fairly - even in the face of a regime that seemed bent

on corrupting or manipulating them for its survival or the consolidation of its power.

### **Resurgence of Bicameralism**

Despite what some studies would observe to be the disappearing justification for second aristocratic chambers in a modern, more egalitarian era, there is a notable resurgence of bicameralism worldwide. Without necessarily embracing federalism, many countries are now pursuing decentralization policies, which call for clear representation at the national level.

In countries undergoing transitions to democracy and the strengthening of the rule of law, the need to engage all sectors of society makes the bicameral model essential, as it assumes a 'cohesive role' and helps ensure stability in the transition process.

The diversification of representation through bicameralism enables a process of reconfiguring the parliamentary or legislative system that respects more diverse and complex national circumstances. Furthermore, bicameralism is seen as a modern means of ensuring the separation of powers, where majority rule systems (with government and a ruling majority being one and the same) necessitate a second chamber independent of the first chamber, precisely because it could not be readily



subject or held hostage to majority rule or sheer numerical superiority.

Studies will also show how, contrary to references to unicameralism's efficiency, a bicameral model fosters efficiency by enhancing the legislative process. For a country buffeted by the harsh winds of globalization, and faced with more complex challenges attending relations between and among countries, the Senate spectacularly rose to the occasion in September 1991, and by its action redefined nationalism singularly in a post-colonial world witnessing the end of the Cold War.

The Senate rejected the renewal of a treaty allowing US military bases on Philippine soil, ending a century of American military presence that began with US colonial rule at the turn of the century. Jose Luis Gascon, youth leader-activist and Constitutional Commissioner who voted for unicameralism, would remark wistfully after this watershed Senate vote how he was after all grateful for a bicameral system in place.

In a world under threat and facing the gargantuan and convoluted challenges of disease and pandemics, volatile financial markets, climate change, environmental despoliation, massive migration, grinding poverty and inequality, and persistent strife and conflict, the increasingly complex and technical-scientific nature of issues makes imperative nothing less than clear-

minded, substantive legislation. As one legislative journal points out, this in itself justifies the existence of a second chamber that could examine more painstakingly legislative bills and perform automatic review of measures passed in a first chamber.

Moreover, and for our own unique national circumstances, a body like the Senate ought to exercise broad powers of inquiry and oversight to restrain the abuse of State or executive power and to keep the people's faith in the institutional recourses for continuing redress and renewal in the body politic.

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