

THY WILL BE DONE by Atty. Angelo M. Cabrera

ABC of Dynasty

Representative Sonny Angara sees nothing wrong with political dynasties. In an interview after he filed his certificate of candidacy for senator last October, he said that they (the Angaras) were qualified and that they have a good track record, as evidenced by the progress in their province of Aurora, where he, his aunt Bellaflor Angara-Castillo and uncle Arturo Angara currently serve as congressman, governor and mayor of the capital town of Baler, respectively; these, apart from his father, Senator Edgardo Angara, who is serving his last term as senator. In what has become a shameful game of political musical chairs, three of them are running for the positions that their relatives will relinquish on account of their disqualification to run for reelection due to term limits.

Vice President Jejomar Binay holds a similar view. He was quoted to have said, "I don't believe in prohibiting dynasties. Why should there be a law to prohibit someone who is qualified when the people want him? The real spirit of democracy is the will of the people—vox populi." The children of the vice president are running either for mayor, congresswoman or senator in 2013.

Senator Allan Peter Cayetano has a different take. He distinguishes between corrupt and non-corrupt dynasties. "It is wrong and unfair," he was quoted, "to rail against political dynasties. The question here is who is corrupt and who isn't. It would be better to have a family of politicians in the government with clean track record than a single government official who is so corrupt." Cayetano currently serves as senator together with his elder sister Pia Cayetano and is running for reelection in 2013. His wife is the incumbent mayor of the city of Taguig and is also running for reelection.

What do we make of these?

The constitutional provision against dynasties is quite explicit: "The State shall guarantee equal access to opportunities for public service and prohibit political dynasties as may be defined by law."

With his educational background and experience as a three-term legislator in the lower house, there is no doubt that Representative Angara has all the qualifications and makings of a good senator like his father. Neither is there question about his track record in uplifting the quality of life in his home province. But clearly, this is not about qualifications and track records, as important as they may be. This is about recognizing a fundamental state principle that a political office is not a property nor an heirloom that can be bequeathed amongst members of the family; that the desire and passion to serve also reside in the hearts of many equally deserving and qualified Filipinos and are not the monopoly of a few good families. The reason for the prohibition is to provide equal access to opportunities for public service. It can't get any clearer than that.

Vice President Jejomar Binay spoke of the voice of the people as the real spirit of democracy. He might have forgotten that the people had already spoken and made their voice heard quite emphatically when they overwhelmingly ratified the 1987 constitution with 77% of the electorate voting for it. What could be louder than that? Once ratified, a constitution in its entirety becomes the fundamental law of the land and it becomes the duty of every citizen, particularly those in government who have sworn by it, to live and uphold every principle and provision contained therein. Vox populi.

Senator Allan Peter Cayetano differentiated between corrupt and non-corrupt dynasties, implying of course that they belong to the latter; ergo, it is alright for his family of politicians to hold public office simultaneously. But isn't plastering police patrol cars and other government properties with the name of a mayor carrying the surname of the good senator a form of corruption? Isn't placing television ads way ahead of the official campaign period a form of corruption? Sure, they may not fall within its legal definition but something is certainly amiss and morally corrupt and reprehensible about these practices. Yes, political expediency many times blurs the vision even of righteous public servants.

This blatant display of arrogance on the part of these political families is an alarming sign that things can only get worse. If left unchecked, this insidious practice may lead the country to the dark ages where political and economic power rests in the hands of a few ruling families and that could spell abuse.

The 2013 elections is perhaps the best opportunity for us to do something to prevent this situation from arising. Just as we overwhelmingly chose the straight path over the narrow and crooked mindset in 2010, so could we choose to reject candidates representing political dynasties and thereby give meaning, once and for all, to the constitutional mandate, which politicians have shunned for far too long.

Angara. Binay. Cayetano. Dynasty.

And don't forget, the alphabet includes the letters E all the way to the other end, V and Z.