

Lopez, Piñol secure CA nod, Aguirre deferred

The *ad interim* appointments of **Hon. Ramon M. Lopez** as secretary of the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) and **Hon. Emmanuel F. Piñol** as secretary of the Department of Agriculture (DA) were confirmed by the Commission on Appointments (CA) yesterday, in its plenary session presided by President of the Senate / Chairman of the Commission Aquilino “Koko” L. Pimentel III.

The trade and industry chief sailed through without hitches as there was no opposition to his appointment and he earned much trust from the CA members during the deliberations on his appointment at the trade and industry committee headed by **Rep. Wes Gatchalian**. In his sponsorship speech before the Commission body in the plenary, Gatchalian mentioned that “the good secretary was actively involved in his advocacy to champion the interest of small-medium enterprises, earning him the admiration and respect of business investors and financial groups, thereby helping alleviate the economy of the country.” Rep. Julieta R. Cortuna and Sen. Juan Miguel F. Zubiri seconded Gatchalian’s endorsement.

Lopez’ government career started in 1981 when he was appointed as Senior Staff Assistant to the Presidential Management Staff, before serving as Industry Development Analyst of the DTI in 1982 and as DTI’s Chief Trade Industry Specialist/ Planning Officer V in 1987. In 1990, he became Director III of the National Economic Development Authority (NEDA). He got his Master in Development Economics degree at Williams College in Massachusetts, USA in 1988 and earned his AB Economics degree at the University of the Philippines in 1981. He is the former vice president and executive assistant to the president and CEO of RFM Corp. (1994-2016) and executive director of *Go Negosyo*.

Piñol, on the other hand, is a graduate of the University of Southern Mindanao, with a Bachelor of Science degree in Development Communication, Major in Community Broadcasting in 2006 and a Master of Science degree in Rural and Economic Development (MSRED) in 2008. He has an on-going doctoral studies in Rural and Economic Development in the same university. He first entered government service in 1978 as public relations officer of the National Grains Authority. In the same year, he became the editor for the Philippine News Agency where he worked for four years. His career in media also included serving as senior copy editor and sports columnist for the news tabloid *Tempo*.

A seasoned public servant, Piñol was first elected into public office in 1995 when he ran for mayor as a substitute for his father in his hometown of M’lang North Cotabato. Then in 1998, he was elected as North Cotabato’s provincial governor which he held for three consecutive terms. Piñol ran and won as the vice governor of the same province in 2007 until 2010.

The confirmation of Piñol’s appointment was recommended to the plenary by **Rep. Abraham “Bambol” N. Tolentino**, chair of the agriculture and food committee, who noted that “the good secretary’s experience and mastery in the field of farming and agriculture, his “farmer’s spirit,” will enable him to effectively lead the Department of Agriculture.”

Sens. Franklin M. Drilon, Ralph G. Recto and Francis “Kiko” N. Pangilinan seconded Tolentino’s motion to have Piñol’s appointment as agriculture secretary confirmed. “In my mind there is no other person that can lead the agency at this time but Manny Piñol. He has had his hands dirtied as governor and has the hands-on experience in alleviating poverty in the countryside by developing the agriculture sector,” Drilon said in his seconding speech. Recto, for his part, emphasized that, “Justice can be delayed, but eating is not postponeable. The country can survive without a President but not without food. People will queue patiently for the MRT, for passport... but if they start lining up for rice, the Republic will fall. Food security depends on good governance... With this farmer at the helm, the Department of Agriculture will truly become a *departamento ng magsasaka*...”

Meanwhile, the confirmation of the *ad interim* appointment of **Hon. Vitaliano N. Aguirre II** as secretary of the Department of Justice (DOJ) was deferred until February 15 due to the opposition filed by Sen. Antonio F. Trillanes IV. Trillanes was not around during the committee hearing as he was on official business abroad. Sen. Panfilo M. Lacson moved to favorably recommend Aguirre’s appointment for confirmation at the plenary session and was duly seconded by Sen. Juan Miguel F. Zubiri. CA Minority Floor Leader Sen. Ralph G. Recto, however, manifested to the body that Trillanes be allowed to personally raise his opposition to the justice secretary when he becomes available on the next scheduled hearing, which the justice committee eventually approved.