

Budget chief Diokno gets CA nod

The *ad interim* appointment of **Hon. Benjamin E. Diokno** as secretary the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) was 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. Budget Secretary Diokno was the first cabinet official of President Rodrigo Roa Duterte’s administration to be taken up and confirmed by the Commission.

The budget chief sailed through without hitches at the committee level. As there was no opposition to his appointment and no questions were raised by any of the CA members, it did not take long for the budget and management committee, headed by **Sen. Juan Miguel F. Zubiri**, to recommend for the approval of Diokno’s appointment to the plenary - one of the fastest confirmation proceedings in a Commission panel.

Diokno distinguished himself as a seasoned public servant having been part of the Cabinet in three different administrations - recently being his third tour of duty in the DBM. In 1986, he initially joined the DBM as assistant minister under the administration of former President Corazon C. Aquino. He also served the department in various capacities until 1991 as deputy minister, undersecretary and acting secretary, providing technical assistance to several major reforms including the design and sponsorship of the 1986 Tax Reform Program and the preparation of the draft legislation for the Local Government Code of 1991. He was also the budget chief during the administration of President Joseph Estrada, where in his three-year stint in the budget department, he directed it towards reforms aimed at enhancing transparency and improving efficiency of public service delivery.

A true “maroon” and “iskolar ng bayan,” Diokno earned his Bachelor of Arts and Master’s degrees in Public Administration from the University of the Philippines (UP) in Diliman, Quezon City. He also holds a Master of Arts degree in Economics from the same university, a Masters in Political Economy from the John Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland, USA and a Doctor’s degree (Ph.D.) in Economics from the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs at the Syracuse University in New York, USA. An academician himself, he started as a Research Aide at the UP College of Public Administration immediately after his graduation in 1968. He then served as a professor at the School of Economics in UP from June 1974 until his retirement as Professor 10 in March 2013. He was chairman of the Pamantasan ng Lungsod ng Maynila’s (PLM) Board of Regents and concurrently as chairman of the Ospital ng Maynila Medical Center’s Board of trustees from 2014 - June 2016 prior his appointment as budget chief.

In his sponsorship speech before the Commission body in the plenary, Zubiri regarded Diokno as a “guru on public finance” who walks with the mantra “what Congress had appropriated, the Executive should have expended.” Zubiri also expressed that, with Diokno’s impressive academic and government service and expertise in fiscal policy, he is confident that the budget chief will be true to his vow of being a transparent and responsible “keeper of the

purse.” He also emphasized that no less than President Duterte “vouched for Secretary Diokno’s honesty, integrity and commendable work ethic and has stated that he is among the type of officials who would over-perform in the completion of his tasks.” A believer that higher public infrastructure spending is crucial to sustain economic growth, especially in the rural areas and “lagging regions,” Diokno also has “the welfare of the Filipino, especially the poor majority who are left behind, and efficient and effective expenditure of public funds as his primordial concern,” he added.

Sens. Ralph G. Recto, Loren Legarda and JV Ejercito seconded Zubiri’s motion to have Diokno’s appointment as budget chief confirmed. Recto, in his seconding speech, spoke highly of Diokno as a fellow Batangueño, who, he regarded “not only as an academic but also an activist” and expressed that he “has got what it takes and has all the guts to perform one of the hardest jobs in the Cabinet.” He also pointed out that Diokno “has been involved in preparing or executing 12 national budgets from the time of typewriters to the age of twitter, and that alone, speaks volumes of his competence for the job.” Senate finance committee chairperson Legarda, on the other hand, commended Diokno for being a “hardworking and competent government officer” while Ejercito expressed that the budget chief “possesses a high degree of professionalism” and that “his passion and dedication for quality and genuine public service deserve commendation and support from other institutions and public officials.”

Also taken up during yesterday’s plenary session was the election of **Rep. Jerry P. Treñas** as Assistant Minority Floor Leader of the Commission on Appointments. He took his oath of office before President of the Senate / Chairman of the Commission Aquilino “Koko” L. Pimentel III during the plenary session.

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