

**Cabinet Secretaries Castriciones, Romulo-Puyat, Guevarra,  
COMELEC commissioner, DFA senior officials,  
AFP Chief and ranking officers breeze through the CA**

The Second Regular Session of the 17th Congress wound down on *sine die* adjournment with the *ad interim* appointments of three of President Rodrigo Roa Duterte's key cabinet officials approved in plenary session. In addition, one Commission on Elections (COMELEC) commissioner, two Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) senior officials and five ranking officers from the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) got the Commission on Appointments' (CA) nod today, during plenary session presided by Senate of the President / Chairman of the Commission Vicente C. Sotto III.

The *ad interim* appointments of Cabinet Secretaries **Mr. Jon Rualo Castriciones** of the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR), **Ms. Bernadette Fatima Romulo-Puyat** of the Department of Tourism (DOT) and **Mr. Menardo I. Guevarra** of the Department of Justice (DOJ) were recommended for confirmation at the plenary following separate deliberations held by their respective committees.

Castriciones, 56, was born in Bayombong, Nueva Vizcaya, and has served in government as Legal Consultant at the Land Transportation Franchising and Regulatory Board (LTFRB); Assistant Spokesman, Deputy, Task Force *Gabay Tagapagligtas sa Karagatan*, and Director of the Investigation, Security and Law Enforcement Service (ISLES) in the Department of Transportation and Communications (DOTC). He was Undersecretary in the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG-NAPOLCOM) prior to his appointment as agrarian reform chief. He distinguished himself as a legal professor and teacher in various subjects including Corporation Law, Obligations and Contracts, Sales Investment Laws, Public and Private International Law and Civil Procedure at the Arellano School of Law. He was also an MCLE lecturer for three years for subjects in International Law Arbitration and Adoption Law, among others. Castriciones graduated Magna cum Laude with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science from the then Trinity College of Quezon City, now Trinity University of Asia. He studied law at the San Beda College of Law and Arellano Law School where he was a consistent Dean's Lister. After passing the bar exams in 1990, he pursued further studies and obtained a master's degree in Comparative Government and International Law (LLM) from Notre Dame University in London Law Centre, UK. He is the incumbent President of the Mayor Rodrigo Roa Duterte National Executive Committee (MRRD-NECC), the group that supported Duterte's presidential run in the 2016 elections.

Sen. Grace Poe, chairperson of the Committee on Agrarian Reform, in favorably endorsing Castriciones' appointment to the plenary, said that, "He may also not possess the wide experience on, and deep exposure to agrarian reform we expect of a person who will spearhead a very important social justice program, but he presented himself as a mission-oriented professional who is a quick study and who gets things done."

Before today's confirmation, Castriciones' *ad interim* appointment had gone through the Commission's grueling hearing and deliberations last March 14, and 21 and May 29, 2018 and was met with sworn oppositions at the committee level by Akbayan Citizens' Action Party List

Representative Tomasito S. Villarin, Mr. Leonardo Q. Montemayor, Ms. Antonia H. Pascual and Mr. Ferdinand Gaité.

On the other hand, Rep. Jerry P. Treñas, chair of the Commission's Committee on Tourism and Economic Development, pushed for the confirmation of Romulo-Puyat's appointment. He favorably endorsed her saying that, "her appointment as Tourism Secretary has been well-received by various sectors... Known for her clean record, she has not been involved with any case of corruption in her 24 years in government. Despite being younger than most government officials, she is already a veteran in public service and is well-versed in various issues concerning our country."

Romulo-Puyat, 49, fondly known as Berna, finished her Bachelor of Science degree in Economics, *Cum Laude*, from the University of the Philippines, School of Economics in Diliman, Quezon City. She also pursued her Master of Arts in Economics and graduated *Magna cum Laude* from the same school. She started her professional career as professor/lecturer at the UP School of Economics, teaching Economics 11, Macro, Micro and Public Economics. Certainly not new in government service, Romulo-Puyat worked as an Economic Consultant at the Housing and Urban Development Coordinating Council and the Presidential Management Staff, Office of the President, Malacañang. She recently left her position as Undersecretary for Administration, Agribusiness and Marketing and Regional Engagement at the Department of Agriculture (DA) upon accepting her tourism portfolio following the resignation of her predecessor Secretary Wanda Tulfo Teo.

Sen. Juan Miguel F. Zubiri, in his seconding speech, expressed that Romulo-Puyat's appointment as Tourism Chief came in the most opportune time to promote responsible tourism. "Clearly, with her wit, charm and great composure under extreme pressure, she is THE ONE that will raise the bar for our country's tourism industry," he added.

Guevarra, a true blue Atenean, is a certified achiever. He was a deputy of Executive Secretary Salvador Medialdea prior to his appointment to the DOJ to replace resigned Secretary Vitaliano Aguirre III. He also served as Deputy Executive Secretary for Legal Affairs in Malacañang and has also been appointed commissioner at the Philippine Competition Commission during the term of former President Benigno Aquino III. He started his government service right after college, serving as an economist at National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) and Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) for 12 years. A former faculty member of the Ateneo de Manila School of Law, Guevarra has been a consistent honor student from his primary to post-graduate education. After graduating from Law School and placing second in the 1985 Bar examinations, he served as a technical staff member of the 1986 Constitutional Commission.

Sen. Win, Gatchalian, chair of the Commission's Committee on Justice and Judicial and Bar Council, is convinced Guevarra is up to the task of being a DOJ Secretary based on his credentials and experience. In his sponsorship speech, Gatchalian said, "Secretary Guevarra's considerable experience in government, from entry-level positions all the way to the highest levels of the executive branch, should serve him well in his new role, as will the expertise in criminal law he has amassed over decades of experience as a veteran private practitioner and law professor." Gatchalian also added that Guevarra pledged "to reform the DOJ's image and transform the department into a "cornerstone of our justice system," to use his own words."

Meanwhile, the Commission also confirmed the appointment of **Ms. Socorro Balinghasay Inting**, as COMELEC commissioner, for a term expiring on 02 February 2025, vice Arthur D. Lim. Inting started her government career at the Public Attorney's Office and later became a prosecutor in Davao City, Cebu City and Manila. She served as Court of Appeals Associate Justice for nine years prior to her appointment as poll commissioner. Sen. Cynthia A. Villar, chairperson of the

Commission's Committee on Constitutional Commissions and Offices and the other members of the committee, did not find any problem that would obstruct the confirmation of the appointment of Inting. Hence, the favorable recommendation of Villar to confirm her appointment in the plenary.

Likewise, two nominations of senior officials from the DFA were confirmed by the Commission. Sen. Panfilo M. Lacson, chair of the Commission's Foreign Affairs Committee, recommended the confirmation to the plenary of **Mr. Sulpicio Miguel Confiado**, Chief of Mission, Class II, as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to the Arab Republic of Egypt, with concurrent jurisdiction over the Republic of Djibouti, the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, the State of Eritrea, and the Republic of the Sudan, and **Mr. Akmad Atlah Sakkam** as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan with concurrent jurisdiction over the State of Palestine, with the salary and emoluments of a Chief of Mission, Class I., with no objections raised.

The promotion of five AFP senior ranking officers led by **AFP Chief of Staff General Carlito G. Galvez, Jr.** also got the Commission's approval. Rep. Roy M. Loyola, chair of the Commission's Defense Committee, recommended to the plenary for confirmation the *ad interim* appointments of General Galvez, **Rolando R. Rodil** to the rank of Brigadier General, **Joselito F. Maclan** to the rank of Brigadier General, **Nelson P. Collantes** to the rank of Brigadier General (Reserve) and **Emmanuel A. Mahipus** to the rank of Colonel, Philippine Air Force (Reserve). Loyola, in favorably recommending the AFP Chief's appointment to the plenary, expressed that, "With General Galvez, Jr. at the helm of the AFP, I am confident that we will see a world-class Armed Forces, one that represents a national pride, capable of protecting the Filipino people, the Philippine sovereignty and our territorial integrity."