

Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City



SIXTEENTH CONGRESS
Second Regular Session

House Bill No. 5269

Introduced by Representative ESTRELLITA "GING" B. SUANSING

EXPLANATORY NOTE

Article III Section 7 of the 1987 Philippine Constitution recognizes the right of the people to information on matters of public concern. This right reinforces the equally important right to suffrage. A well-informed voting population would be able to carefully choose their future leaders.

Sections 90 to 93 of Batas Pambansa Bilang 881, otherwise known as the "Omnibus Election Code of the Philippines," likewise recognize the importance of this right, by providing for venues and opportunities to inform the people of the qualification of candidates.

This bill complements these laws by seeking to establish a Presidential Debate Commission which will: (1) schedule the debates for the Presidential and Vice Presidential candidates; (2) submit reports evaluating the debates scheduled by the Commission itself and by other agencies, organizations or associations, or the mass media; and (3) formulate the guidelines for the adoption of the best format for the debates.

The Presidential Debate Commission shall also obligate all Presidential and Vice Presidential candidates to participate in the debates and, thus, will help the voting population discern who to vote for.

The Filipino people deserve to witness the candidates' capacity to clearly present their platforms, program of government, and provide answers to questions on global issues that will affect our country.

Hence, approval of this bill is earnestly sought.


ESTRELLITA B. SUANSING
1st District, Nueva Ecija

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AN ACT

ESTABLISHING THE PRESIDENTIAL DEBATE COMMISSION

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the Philippines in Congress assembled:

SECTION 1. *Short Title.* – This Act shall be known as the “Presidential Debate Reform Act.”

SECTION 2. *Declaration of Policy.* – It is the policy of the State to recognize the right of the people to information on matters of public concern.

SECTION 3. *Definition of Terms.* – As used in this Act:

(A) “Candidate” refers to any person aspiring for or seeking an elective public office, who has filed a certificate of candidacy by himself or through an accredited political party, group, or coalition of parties; and

(B) “Regular Election” refers to the election for President and Vice President, which, unless otherwise provided by law, shall be held on the second Monday of May.

SECTION 4. *Establishment of Presidential Debate Commission.* –

(A) *Establishment.* – Not later than one (1) year before the date of each general election for the offices of President and Vice President of the Republic of the Philippines, beginning with the next national

election, in which the President and Vice President shall be elected, a Presidential Debate Commission, hereafter referred to as the "Commission," shall be appointed in accordance with this section with respect to such election.

(B) *Membership.* –

(1) *In General.* – The Commission shall be composed of six (6) members appointed as follows:

- (a) One (1) member shall be appointed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives;
- (b) One (1) member shall be appointed by the House Majority Leader, who shall not be a member of the Majority Leader's political party;
- (c) One (1) member shall be appointed by the President of the Senate;
- (d) One (1) member shall be appointed by the Majority Leader of the Senate; and
- (e) Two (2) members shall be appointed by the President from among a list of nominees by the two (2) dominant political parties.

Provided, That, the members to be appointed in the preceding items (a), (b), (c), and (d) shall not be members of the same political parties from which the appointees of the President will be selected. *Provided,* further, that not more than three (3) appointees shall come from any political party. *Provided,* finally, that the appointees, shall as much as possible come from the different sectors provided in paragraph (B)(2) of this Section.

Candidates for President and Vice President are automatically disqualified from becoming a member of the Commission as well as their relatives within the fourth degree of consanguinity and affinity.

(2) *Qualifications.* – Members of the Commission may be from the public or private sector, and may include national or local

1 government officers or employee, members of the academe,
2 nonprofit organizations, or other interested individuals.

3 (3) *Vacancies.* – Any vacancy shall be filled in the same manner as
4 the original appointment not later than ten (10) days after the
5 vacancy occurs.

6 (4) *Compensation.* – Members of the Commission shall receive a per
7 diem of Five Hundred Pesos (P500.00) for each day of
8 attendance in the Commission and actual travelling expenses
9 not exceeding Five Thousand Pesos (P5,000.00) per month.

10 (C) *Powers; Meetings.* – Except as provided in subparagraph (D),
11 decisions made by the Commission shall be made by consent of no
12 less than four (4) of the commissioners. The Commission shall meet
13 at a time and a site agreed upon by no less than four (4) of the
14 members.

15 (D) *Staffing.* – The Commission shall be responsible for maintaining its
16 own secretariat as well as such other staff as it may deem necessary.
17 Except those detailed from other government offices, the tenure of
18 office of the regular staff of the secretariat shall be coterminous with
19 the tenure of the Commission.

20 Each Commissioner shall also be entitled to a personal staff of
21 two (2): *Provided*, however, that the tenure of office of the regular
22 personal staff of each Commissioner shall be coterminous with his
23 own tenure of office.

24 (E) *Duties.* –

25 (1) It shall be the duty of the Commission to establish a schedule of
26 debate in accordance with subsection (F) as follows:

- 27 (a) One (1) preliminary debate;
28 (b) Not more than two (2) Vice Presidential debates;
29 (c) Not less than two (2) but not more than four (4)
30 Presidential debates.

31 (2) The Commission shall decide on the format of the debates
32 taking into consideration the most efficient and effective way to

1 provide useful and necessary information about the candidates
2 to the voting public.

3 (3) The Commission shall coordinate with the different government
4 agencies charged with the enforcement and administration of all
5 laws relative to the conduct of elections for the purpose of
6 ensuring free, orderly, and honest elections, and with other
7 organizations or associations concerned with the elections.

8 (4) The Commission shall, after the termination of its term, submit
9 a report on the debates conducted, describing in detail the
10 presentation strategies and techniques used, evaluating the
11 effectiveness of the format adapted, and recommending the best
12 format.

13 (5) The Commission shall closely monitor all other scheduled
14 debates for Presidential and Vice Presidential candidates
15 initiated by the mass media or other government agencies or
16 private organizations, and submit another report evaluating the
17 effectiveness of said debates.

18 (6) The Commission shall, after taking into consideration all the
19 submitted evaluation reports, formulate guidelines for the
20 adoption of a debate format which will best achieve the policies
21 adopted by this Act.

22 (F) *Debates Described.* –

23 (1) *Preliminary Debates.* – A preliminary debate shall take place no
24 sooner than sixty (60) days and no later than forty-five (45) days
25 before a Presidential election. The time and place of the
26 preliminary debate shall be announced by the Commission no
27 later than ninety (90) days before the scheduled preliminary
28 debate. A preliminary debate shall involve any person who has
29 declared himself a candidate for the position of President or Vice
30 President of the Republic of the Philippines, as determined by
31 the Commission. The format shall be decided by the
32 Commission. The attendance by any candidate at the
33 preliminary debate is optional.

1 (2) *Vice Presidential Debates.* – Vice Presidential debates shall take
2 place at least seven (7) days following the preliminary debate.
3 The time and date of all Vice Presidential debates shall be
4 announced no later than ninety (90) days prior to the first Vice
5 Presidential debate. The Commission may alter the time and
6 date of such debates for good cause with the consent of all
7 members. All Vice Presidential debates shall involve persons
8 who are *bona fide* candidates. The format of debates shall be
9 decided by the Commission.

10 (3) *Presidential Debates.* – Presidential debates shall take place no
11 sooner than seven (7) days following the preliminary debate. The
12 time and date of all qualified debates shall be announced no
13 later than ninety (90) days prior to the first scheduled qualified
14 debate. The Commission may alter the time and date of such
15 debates for good cause with the consent of all members. The
16 format of debates shall be decided by the Commission, with at
17 least one (1) being of the single moderator format. Presidential
18 debates shall involve persons who are qualified Presidential
19 candidates.

20 (G) *Termination.* – Each Commission appointed under this section shall
21 terminate on the date following the day of the election for which the
22 Commission was appointed.

23 SECTION 5. *Appropriations.* – There are authorized to be appropriated to
24 each Commission appointed under this Act such sums as may be necessary
25 to carry out its activities with respect to the election involved.

26 SECTION 6. *Separability Clause.* – If any provision or part thereof is held
27 invalid or unconstitutional, the remainder of the law or the provision not
28 otherwise affected shall remain valid and subsisting.

29 SECTION 7. *Repealing Clause.* – Any law, presidential decree or issuance,
30 executive order, letter of instruction, administrative order, rule or regulation

1 contrary to or inconsistent with the provisions of this Act is hereby repealed,
2 modified, or amended accordingly.

3 SECTION 8. *Effectivity Clause.* – This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days
4 after its publication in at least two (2) newspapers of general circulation.

5 Approved.

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