

Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City

SEVENTEENTH CONGRESS
Third Regular Session

House Bill No. 8549



Introduced by Representative **RAMON V. A. "RAV" ROCAMORA**

EXPLANATORY NOTE

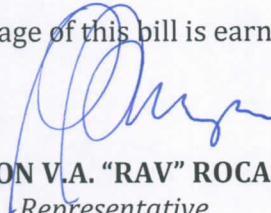
A key ingredient in a thriving and dynamic democracy is an informed electorate. One of the ways the electorate can be strengthened is by giving them the chance to discern for themselves who they want to represent and lead them. But this choice presupposes that the people are fully informed, understand and support the ideals that a particular candidate espouses. This can only happen through clear and systematic communication openly made between the candidates for public office and those who will place them in these positions.

An avenue that can be created for this purpose is the institution of a public forum. In such a forum, organized alternatively as a debate, the electorate can be informed of the beliefs, ideas, and programs of the candidates. From here, the similarities and differences of these candidates can be highlighted and this can give the electorate a chance to better identify with whom they want to choose as their representatives and leaders. Unfortunately, the Philippines has yet to fully embrace this practice.

This bill seeks to spark this shift in the culture of citizen engagement by mandating the organization by the Commission on Elections of public debates. Attendance by candidates to these debates will be mandatory upon them, with failure to do so (without a valid reason) being considered as an election offense and becoming a ground for a petition for disqualification.

I firmly believe that this bill, when passed into law will enhance our democratic election process as it strengthens the right of the people to be officially informed of the qualifications of a candidate and allow them to make proper choices as to who should lead them.

Thus, in view of the foregoing, early passage of this bill is earnestly sought.


RAMON V.A. "RAV" ROCAMORA
Representative
Lone District, Siquijor

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1 **AN ACT AMENDING THE OMNIBUS ELECTION CODE OF THE PHILIPPINES TO**
2 **INSTITUTIONALIZE ELECTORAL DEBATES AND TO COMPEL THE ATTENDANCE OF**
3 **CANDIDATES THERETO**

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

6 **SECTION 1.** Section 68 of the Omnibus Election Code of the Philippines is hereby
7 amended to read as follows:

8 "Section 68. Any candidate who, in an action or protest in which he is a party is declared
9 by final decision of a competent court guilty of, or found by the Commission of having (a)
10 given money or other material consideration to influence, induce or corrupt the voters or
11 public officials performing electoral functions; (b) committed acts of terrorism to
12 enhance his candidacy; (c) spent in his election campaign an amount in excess of that
13 allowed by this Code; (d) solicited, received or made any contribution prohibited under
14 Sections 89, 95, 96, 97 and 104; (e) violated any of Sections 80, 83, 85, 86 and 261,
15 paragraphs d, e, k, v, and cc, subparagraph 6, OR (F) FAILS TO ATTEND THE COMELEC-
16 ORGANIZED PUBLIC DEBATE, IN VIOLATION OF SECTION 92-B HEREOF shall be
17 disqualified from continuing as a candidate, or if he has been elected, from holding the
18 office... X X X"

19 **SECTION 2.** Section 92 of the Omnibus Election Code of the Philippines is hereby
20 amended to read as follows:

21 "Section 92-A. Comelec time. – The Commission shall procure radio and television time
22 to be known as "Comelec Time"... X X X

23 **SECTION 92-B. COMELEC PUBLIC DEBATE. – THE COMMISSION IN COOPERATION WITH**
24 **AT LEAST THREE (3) LOCAL CIVIC ORGANIZATIONS OR PEOPLE'S ORGANIZATIONS,**
25 **SHALL ORGANIZE AT LEAST ONE PUBLIC DEBATE AMONG THE CANDIDATES RUNNING**
26 **FOR THE SAME POSITION AT EVERY LEVEL DURING THE CAMPAIGN PERIOD. BEFORE**
27 **THE DEBATE ITSELF, THE COMMISSION MUST MEET WITH THE CANDIDATES OR**
28 **THEIR REPRESENTATIVES TO AGREE ON THE MOST CONVENIENT TIME, DATE, VENUE,**
29 **FORMAT, AND RULES OF THE DEBATE. PROVIDED, THAT EACH DEBATE MUST INCLUDE**

1 A DISCUSSION OF THE PRIORITY PROJECTS/PROGRAMS OF THE CANDIDATES AND
2 THEIR STANDS ON THE MOST PRESSING LOCAL AND NATIONAL ISSUES AFFECTING
3 THEIR RESPECTIVE CONSTITUENCIES.

4 CANDIDATES ARE REQUIRED TO ATTEND THE SCHEDULED PUBLIC DEBATE, EXCEPT
5 FOR THE FOLLOWING CIRCUMSTANCES:

6 1. HOSPITAL CONFINEMENT;

7 2. TEMPORARY DETENTION;

8 3. OR, OTHER ANALOGOUS CIRCUMSTANCES PREVENTING THEIR ATTENDANCE.

9 FAILURE TO ATTEND THE PUBLIC DEBATE CONSTITUTES AN ELECTION OFFENSE.”

10 **SECTION 3. *Separability Clause.*** If any provision of this Act or any part thereof shall be
11 declared unconstitutional or invalid, the other provisions, as far as they are separable,
12 shall remain in force and effect.

13 **SECTION 4. *Repealing Clause.*** All laws, decrees, orders, rules and regulations or parts
14 thereof which are inconsistent with the provisions of this Act are hereby repealed,
15 amended or modified accordingly.

16 **SECTION 5. *Effectivity.*** This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its publication in
17 the Official Gazette or in at least two (2) newspapers of general Circulation.

18 Approved.