

Some Reflections on the Elections

In the past month or so, the Canadian media have been speculating on the possibility of a summer election if the opposition party decides to defeat the present minority government. Long before these recent reports however, many Canadians have felt like elections are always looming in the horizon, as the political bickering and mudslinging seem to be occurring non-stop in the context of the present minority government. Therefore, one cannot help but be suspicious that the political leaders' every move is calculated towards the main objective of defeating their political opponents and winning the next election.

On the other hand, Filipino-Canadians in Toronto had a recent breakfast gathering (Kapihan) to hear visiting Philippine Senator Francis Pangilinan speak. Senator Pangilinan not only spoke about the current state of Philippine affairs but also candidly admitted his aspirations for the highest seat in the land. For now, he is running for the vice-presidency as he believes that while he feels that he is ready for the job, the Filipino people may not yet be as ready to accept him as President of the country. He then went on to encourage Filipinos in Toronto to register and vote in the 2010 Philippine national elections. Although I have no reason to doubt his competence and sincere aspirations for the Filipino nation, I also cannot help but be skeptical about whether the upcoming elections will bring any significant change to the current Philippine socio-political and economic conditions.

Why do we need to participate in elections and believe in what politicians have to say or promise? The theme of my article last month was that media and politics play an important role in our democratic systems. This time, I would like to go further and state that public participation and response to the interplay of media and politics play an even more important role in our society. I would like to believe that it is still the people (or the electorate) who hold the key to the success or downfall of those who wield political power.

At the breakfast forum, someone in the audience asked, what can we do to help our motherland, the Philippines? The response given was to the effect that while there are several things we can do, directly or indirectly, to help our motherland, this is a personal choice that only we can make. I can only agree. I strongly believe that every time we choose to do something that helps uplift lives other than our own, then we are contributing our just share in not only making our democratic systems work, but also in creating a much better world.

The same is true for those of us who hold dual citizenships. We can be useful members of both the Philippine and Canadian societies not only through our votes or economic contributions, but also by dealing with everyone else in an honest, humane and respectful manner, regardless of our differences.

If we elect political candidates based on these fundamental standards that we ought to apply in our own lives, then there may be some hope that elections will become a truly beneficial aspect of our democratic systems and not just a futile exercise that it often turns out to be.

Fact and Rumour about the Live-in Caregiver Program (LCP)

In the past few months, I have repeatedly been asked whether live-in caregivers can still apply for permanent resident status after working for two years as full time live-in caregivers in Canadian households or whether they will just be granted temporary work permits indefinitely. After having been asked this question at least a dozen times, I started to wonder where this rumour came from and why anyone would spread this inaccurate news that has caused panic and extreme anxiety to many.

As far as I am aware, the LCP has not been changed and that it is still a hybrid program which allows caregivers to apply for permanent resident status after satisfying the condition of working as full time live-in caregivers for two years within three years of arrival in Canada.

While the House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration has recently issued a report with recommended reforms to the LCP (including that of granting conditional permanent resident status to caregivers upon their arrival in Canada), none of these recommendations have been enacted or implemented as of this writing. Until these recommendations are acted upon, the current LCP provisions remain. CIC Minister Jason Kenney has also hinted at introducing substantive changes to the LCP before the end of this year. However, there is yet no concrete policy pronouncement, legal or regulatory reform in this regard. Hence, the LCP is still what it is, and the struggle to achieve genuine reforms continues.

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