

**PRESIDENTIAL COMMUNICATIONS OPERATIONS OFFICE**  
**News and Information Bureau**

**INTERVIEW WITH PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON HARRY ROQUE**  
**BY PINKY WEBB – THE SOURCE, CNN PHILIPPINES**  
**October 2, 2020 [9:10 – 9:28 A.M.]**

**WEBB:** You're watching The Source on CNN Philippines. Our guest today, Presidential Spokesperson Harry Roque. Sec. Roque, welcome to The Source and again thank you for your time, sir.

**SEC. ROQUE:** It's always a pleasure to be back. Good morning, Pinky. Good morning, everyone.

**WEBB:** So Sec. Roque, I just spoke to Governor Miraflores and we talked about the first day of the opening of Boracay. And during the break you told me that you will also be visiting the Island?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Yes. We'll be conducting our press briefing on Monday from Boracay and, of course, this is our little contribution to reopening the tourism industry particularly in Boracay.

**WEBB:** Very important is what Governor Miraflores said 'no, Sec. Roque, and its good to disseminate this to the public also to encourage those who ... siguro may konting alinlangan. The Caticlan Airport pala is solely for the tourists only. Iyon pong airport sa Kalibo is going to be used for the locally stranded individuals and the rest. So iyon daw iyong kanilang paraan para hindi din mapaghalo iyong turista at iyong mga taga-doon.

**SEC. ROQUE:** Yes. In fact, in the IATF resolution that authorized the reopening of Boracay, it was only the Caticlan Airport that was designated as entry point for tourists 'no into Boracay 'no. That also enables the local government to control the entry of individuals to Boracay. Although, those coming in by land from Panay itself 'no, there's also a designated area for them for triage and for presenting their travel documents.

**WEBB:** So you're going there with whom, Secretary?

**SEC. ROQUE:** I'm going there with some of my staff members. Our crew from PTV-4 is already in Boracay, and I will just go with two or three from RTVM.

**WEBB:** I see. What about the President, did he make any mention of a possible visit to the Island, sir?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Well, you know, it's abnormal times but I'm sure he would love to visit the Boracay as well 'no. But right now, he's actually very busy in Malago nowadays 'no so I don't think a visit to Boracay in the near future could happen. But let's not discount it 'no because it's important to encourage people to assist our tourism industry. And after six months of lockdown, I think people from Metro Manila, provided they have their negative PCR test, would welcome also the opportunity 'no to revisit this paradise on earth – Boracay.

**WEBB:** Okay. Let's talk about the House Speakership. Secretary Roque, so the President met with Speaker Alan Peter Cayetano yesterday. Tell us more about that meeting. What do you know? What was discussed?

**SEC. ROQUE:** You know that meeting was really scheduled two weeks ago and that was really a meeting for Brother Eddie Villanueva who is the Deputy Speaker of the House 'no. So they had a pray over. But because Speaker Cayetano was also present 'no, inevitably, they had to discuss what happened in the House 'no. And the President reiterated that he will respect the wishes and the choice of the House members as to who will lead them 'no. And so basically the President said, "*I will not intervene in the internal matter of the House of Representatives.*"

He resigned, the resignation was rejected, and the President respects that.

**WEBB:** But Speaker Alan was not really – please correct me if I'm wrong, sir, ha – was not really scheduled to be with the President. It was just really Brother Eddie for the pray over, sir, and it just so happened that Speaker asked for a meeting with the President too?

**SEC. ROQUE:** No. I understand it's been arranged 'no, because they were going to have a pray over and Speaker Alan and Brother Eddie are of the same faith 'no. So—and it's very difficult actually to gatecrash a meeting unless you're actually part of the original guest list 'no. So I think Speaker Alan has always been in that guest list since two weeks ago.

**WEBB:** So that's clear, hindi po siya nag-gatecrash.

**SEC. ROQUE:** Yes. It was a coincidence.

**WEBB:** Because let's go back to what he said at the floor, sabi niya kasi when he was offering to resign at some point he says, "*I wish to be able to speak to the President about this,*" iyon po 'yung sinabi niya eh.

**SEC. ROQUE:** I know how the Appointments Office works and it does not matter really who you are. If you're not in the guest list, you're not included.

**WEBB:** Okay. Secretary Roque, so now that the President said that and I know even prior to that, you said that you also spoke to the President ano po and you said it's a purely internal matter. What happens to the October 14 agreement? Matutuloy pa ho ba iyon o hindi na?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Well, the President said he respects the decision of the House 'no and—you see, the President only mentioned three sentences when we talked, and to me the three sentences were enough 'no. The first was of course "*Out tayo diyay. No comment tayo diyay...*" and it's a purely internal matter for the House of Representatives 'no.

So of course that's the literal words of the President and if you were to construe that, that would mean really he is leaving it to the House membership to decide who their leader should be as in fact the Constitution says it is the members of the House that who will elect their leadership.

**WEBB:** Well, that is a fact. I need to go back to that October 14 agreement. Why have an agreement and it not be followed?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Well, you see, the agreement was between Speaker Alan and Congressman Lord and, yes, it was brokered by the President. The President I think has done his responsibility to remind both candidates for the position to honor their words but in the end, even two weeks ago, the President said, "*Kung walang numero si Congressman Lord Allan, wala akong magagawa 'no.*" So in effect the President cannot coerce, intimidate, force the House members into voting

one way or the other. He can only remind the two leaders of what was agreed upon but in the end, he recognizes it's not the President's call who to elect for Speaker.

**WEBB:** So clearly, the President was not offended na hindi po natuloy itong agreement na si Speaker magsasalita pagkatapos 'pag October 14 nga magkakaroon ng turnover? Hindi po siya na-offend, na-disappoint, nasaktan doon sa nangyari sa House?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Wala naman po 'no. Actually—ang hirap kasi is because this topic is very sensitive, I avoid saying anything that I did not personally hear for myself coming from the President's—[signal cut]

**WEBB:** Did I lose Secretary Roque?

**SEC. ROQUE:** —allegedly said—the President allegedly said that the agreement has been honored 'no because Speaker Alan did resign from his post. But that's a matter of secondhand information. I did not hear it personally from the mouth of the President. The next meeting I have with the President will be this Monday, and I will inquire if he actually said this 'no because that's I think a very important issue to resolve whether or not the President believes that the agreement that he has brokered has been implemented. I will ask this Monday.

**WEBB:** As a last question on this topic, is there—do you know right now if there is a plan for the President to again meet the two gentlemen or Congressman Lord Allan because he had already met the Speaker?

**SEC. ROQUE:** I can only repeat what the President has said 'it's a purely internal matter of the House.' He will respect whatever the decision of the individual members of the House of Representatives has been or will be 'no. After all, the election of Speaker... you know, it's not fixed in time 'no.

It won't be good if the chamber keeps on changing its leaders but for the time being it seems that despite the fact that Speaker Cayetano offered to resign, this was rejected by his colleagues and the President can only respect that.

**WEBB:** We'll be taking a very short break. We'll be right back.

[COMMERCIAL BREAK]

**WEBB:** [NO AUDIO] ... or even privatized PhilHealth. But let's go back to what he said in one of his statements. He said that he's giving Gierran until the end of the year to fix PhilHealth. I remember that very clearly, sir. So the direction they're taking right now is what, let's first reorganize, wait and see?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Correct 'no. Attorney Gierran knows that he does not have much time. And that's why I think it was important for him to request all the senior executives to file their courtesy resignations 'no because that's the fastest way that he can reorganize. And of course, we support this initiative of Attorney Gierran, we're confident that he will have very good information that will guide him on whose resignation to accept and whose resignations to reject. And I hope too, that he will be guided by the Senate findings, as well as the findings of Task Force PhilHealth.

**WEBB:** And I want to get your personal take on this because there's talk of even privatization or abolishing PhilHealth. I know this is quite close to your heart. You've been, well, been part of this

controversy not as a recipient though, but do you think that privatizing PhilHealth will actually be a good idea? Because if you ask Attorney Gierran, he actually said that this actually might send the wrong signal that we can't seem to trust the government in fixing this.

**SEC. ROQUE:** Well, I do not agree with privatization, because privatization goes against the very principle of Universal Health Care. Universal Health Care is distinguished from private health insurance because it is, number one, a discharge of state obligation to promote the right to health; and it is a commitment that although members will have to pay their dues, in reality, the dues will not be enough and the balance will, of course, be paid for by the government. And that is why, I think, the concept of privatization is simply antithetical and inconsistent with the concept of Universal Health Care.

But as author of the Universal Health Care Law, I've said it over and over again, my original version was to abolish PhilHealth, replace it with the National Health Service. And it was then that I discovered how pernicious the mafia with PhilHealth was because, Pinky, what was approved in the committee level was my bill which provides for Universal Health Care and the National Health Service abolishing PhilHealth, but when it was time for me, ironically, it was I who defended the PhilHealth in the plenary, it became a different bill altogether 'no – it strengthened even PhilHealth. And that's when I saw how pernicious and how influential this mafia was. It took then Deputy Speaker Cayetano 'no to tell me from the rostrum, 'Tama ka nang magwala diyan, we'll just fix it in the Senate.' But of course, that's not appeased me and that of course prompted me to continue my defense of the bill, but it was never fixed in the Senate, and that's why PhilHealth remained and all this happened.

So I think by way of hindsight, all of this could have been avoided if the original version of my bill was followed – simply to abolish PhilHealth and replace it with the National Health Service.

**WEBB:** Last topic that I want to discuss, Secretary, 200 days since quarantine, we are number 20 in the most number of COVID-19 cases. Sir, where are we now and how are we doing?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Still look at the critical mortality rate, we are still at 1.75% which means that although the numbers are up, we are able to take care of those who get severely or critically ill. And that, I think, what matters most 'no because in a pandemic, the fear is that many of us will die. Some are dying, not as many as other countries and, of course, it's because we have improved our critical care capacity and we have, of course, learned from the past and we know how to take care of COVID patients better.

**WEBB:** All right. Very quickly, there was something I read also about an executive order that will be issued supposed to be on the price of the RT-PCR test. We hope that happens soon, Secretary Roque, because there are different costs and some are just way too high for our people to even want to take a test kasi sobrang taas po ng presyo. Kailan ho kaya lalabas ang executive order?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Well, you know, I'm appealing to those who received free machines and free testing kits, mahiya naman kayo – binigay na nga sa inyo nang libre tapos kinakana ninyo pa iyong taumbayan.

But to those who want to avail all of cheap PCR testing, please go to Children's Medical Hospital, to NKTl, to Lung Center, and to Perpetual Help Hospital in Las Piñas. These machines and test kits were donated by Project ARK, and the PCR test costs 1,750 to 2,000. Wala pong justification for anything higher than 1,750 to 2,000.

**WEBB:** There you go. So many people are asking where to go, that's where you can go. Secretary Roque had mentioned it, it's about 1,750 pesos. So, Secretary, hindi lang sa iyo iyong 1,750 ha, pati sa amin?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Yes, of course. [Laughs] Baka malibre ka pa, baka mamaya ma-starstruck sila kapag nagpunta ka roon. So please go there so we can go to Boracay and you can do your program in Boracay and I can do my press briefing in Boracay.

**WEBB:** Take care sir, and thank you for your time. Maraming salamat to Presidential Spokesperson Harry Roque.

**SEC. ROQUE:** See you in Boracay on Monday. Bye-bye.

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