

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

**INTERVIEW WITH PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON HARRY ROQUE**  
**BY PINKY WEBB – THE SOURCE/CNN PHILIPPINES**  
**October 7, 2020 (9:01 A.M. – 9:28 A.M.)**

**WEBB:** Secretary Roque, welcome to The Source, and thank you for your time.

**SEC. ROQUE:** Thank you, Pinky. I feel awkward though, talking about the leadership row in the House when it comes from a different branch of government. Of course, the House is an independent branch of government and the President has taken the view that the leadership row is a purely internal matter of the House of Representatives.

**WEBB:** I understand that you have actually been saying that because ang sinabi po sa inyo ni Pangulo, out tayo diyan, no comment and this is a purely internal matter. However, there was a meeting between the President and Congressman Lord Allan Velasco. What do you know about this meeting?

**SEC. ROQUE:** I was only authorized to give one quote. And that quote is, Congressman Velasco asked for permission to seek the Speakership and the President said that is your right, pursuant to your agreement with Speaker Alan Cayetano. So, that's a single line quote which I was authorized to release to the public. Beyond that, I can't say anything else.

**WEBB:** But you do know more just, you know, for additional information that you can't share. Do you know more about this actual meeting or is that the only line you know, Secretary?

**SEC. ROQUE:** That's the only thing I know and so far, the President has only authorized me to share with the public three of his quotes. The first quote is, I hope that the two of them will honor their agreement, but kung walang numero si Congressman Allan Velasco, wala na akong magagawa. The second quote, that he authorized me to share with the public is what you just mentioned, out tayo diyan, no comment tayo diyan, it's a purely internal matter of the House. And the third being, in response to the information that Allan Velasco will seek the Speakership, that it is his right to seek the Speakership pursuant to his agreement with Speaker Alan Cayetano.

**WEBB:** Doon po sa right pursuant to the agreement, would it be right to say, Secretary, that the President gave Lord Allan Velasco permission to run for the Speakership and bahala na po siya if he has the numbers? Did he give his blessing, will that be the correct word?

**SEC. ROQUE:** I hesitate to annotate. But that seems to be the meaning 'no, construing it with the earlier statement of the President na, "pero kapag walang numero si Allan Velasco, wala akong magagawa." So, I guess, if you construe it, of course, it is the right of any congressman to run for the Speakership. He probably has the right too because he had an agreement that

he will be Speaker after 15 months. But in the end ‘no, it’s still an issue of numbers because the Constitution – and even Congressman Allan Velasco acknowledges this – the Constitution clearly says that it is only members of the House of the Representatives that can choose their leaders.

**WEBB:** Would you be able to – I’m just going to try, Secretary – confirm what Congressman Leachon said, quoting the President that “Lord, it is your time na. It is your right time now. I have already spoken; you have to insist your right based on the term sharing agreement.”?

**SEC. ROQUE:** I cannot confirm that because that is not the quote I was authorized to share with the public. And of course, I have to be doubly careful because Congressman Leachon has accused me of misquoting the President. He accused me of misquoting the President on what happened in that meeting for both Speaker Alan and Congressman Lord Allan were present. And I said that simply impossible for me to have misquoted the President because I did not say anything about that meeting because I was not authorized to say anything about that meeting. My next statement came a day after, after what had happened in the House already, where the members of the House rejected the resignation of Speaker Alan. And my statement was “The President said, out kami diyan, no comment kami diyan, at it’s a purely internal matter of the House.”

**WEBB:** Are we supposed to assume then that hindi na po mag i-intervene si Pangulo regarding this issue over the Speakership?

**SEC. ROQUE:** I think he has said that kung walang number si Congressman Lord Allan Velasco, wala akong magagawa. So, it’s up to Congressman Lord Allan now to get the votes ‘no, if he can muster the votes. That is how it works in any election, in any case.

**WEBB:** You know, Secretary, the last time we spoke, we were talking about this and you told me that ito pong sinasabi ng October 14 na deadline on the turnover of Speakership, you said – because there are two camps, there are two sides to this – one camp is saying there was an October 14 date, the other camp is saying walang October 14 date. And you told me, you will find out more about this. Mayroon po bang usapan na may October 14 turnover?

**SEC. ROQUE:** That is why I could not have misquoted any of the parties because I did not say anything. You know the camp of Congressman Alan will say, there was October 14 na magri-resign siya, pero kinakailangang magkaroon ng numero si Congressman Lord Allan. And the other camp would say, there was simply an agreement that by October 14, Speaker Alan will resign ‘no. And because of the different constructions of both camps, I opted to keep quiet and also because there was no specific order from the President to reveal anything as far as that meeting is concerned. So, I kept quiet and I still will not be able to say anything because I was not in that meeting.

**WEBB:** Yeah, I have to say, you did say that to me. I do remember that, you are quite careful about that. But you also told me that aalamin mo sa Pangulo iyong katotohanan dito sa October 14. Nalaman po ba ninyo, Secretary?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Lumabas na po the following day that the President is hands off 'no. Because I really did not speak until I had the chance to speak with the President and that is why my policy on this issue is, I will literally repeat the words of the President and the next words of the President were out *tayo diyan, no comment tayo diyan, that's a purely internal affair of the House.*

**WEBB:** Yeah, but still doesn't answer the question, Secretary. Was there an October 14 deal? That is what I am asking you, that is what you told me na aalamin po ninyo. Ang question ko, nalaman po ba ninyo kung mayroon talagang deal na October 14 galing sa Pangulo ha, sir?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Well, ang alam naman talaga natin is between them, there is an agreement that they will share the Speakership 15 months and 21 months. So, that's all that we know. Ang punto lang, ang pinag-aawayan nila is whether or not the President said na talagang after the 15 months ay kailangan si Congressman Lord Allan Velasco na ang uupo. And what I am saying is, on the basis of an earlier statement, the first statement that the President said, which I heard personally is that sana nga matupad ang kasunduan, pero kung walang numero si Congressman Lord Allan, wala akong magagawa.

**WEBB:** Just a last question on this. Would you know if, that offer to resign of Speaker of Alan Peter Cayetano last week, iyon na po ba iyong pag-honor noong term-sharing deal kasi nga supposedly magkakaroon ng turnover sa October 14? So, iyong kaniyang offer to resign was that already, para po bang natupad na po ba iyong agreement by doing that?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Well, what we all heard and saw was he tendered a resignation. And what we also heard and saw is that at least 180 plus members of the Lower House rejected the resignation. So, whether or not that's in compliance with the gentleman's agreement, I leave it to the parties. But you see in an issue such as this, there is no judge eh, even the courts cannot intervene because the organization and the leadership of the House is a purely internal matters; and the executive cannot really interfere in the choice of who the next Speaker will be.

**WEBB:** All right, we will be taking a very short break. This is The Source on CNN Philippines.

[COMMERCIAL BREAK]

**WEBB:** You're watching The Source on CNN Philippines. Our guest today, Presidential Spokesperson Harry Roque.

Secretary Roque, let's talk about the budget. So the budget now passed on second reading at the House of Representatives with the Speaker suspending budget deliberations until

November 16. Two questions: First, is this a surprise to Malacañang? And number two, will this sit well with the President?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Well, in fact, we thank the House for its speedy action in passing the budget ‘no. As you know, when a proposed law is passed on second reading, the third reading is ceremonial ‘no, plus there really is a need for time because they would have to reprint or print the final version of the proposed law ‘no before they could approve it on third and final reading.

So, it is always the case that there is a time lag between the approval on second reading of the budget and the third reading because we’re talking of three volumes of very large books to be printed by the House. As it is, what appears as a printed copy is the National Expenditure Program which came from Malacañang. So, after approval on second reading of the budget, then for the first time you will have a printed version of a consolidated House bill. Now, it really takes a while for it to be printed.

Meanwhile, what is important is that the House has already commenced its deliberation on the budget. Meaning, the Senate can also act on the budget already, because there is no requirement that the Senate must wait for the approval on third and final reading. It is enough that the budget has originated from the House; and I think the fact that it has been approved on second reading, it is enough for the Senate to, at least, proceed with its own deliberations of the budget on the basis of the NEB. Although, they will still have to await the final copy of the House bill ‘no before they can themselves approve it.

So, the expectation is when they come back on November 14, the House will approve on third and final reading the printed copy of the House bill. And meanwhile, even during the break, the Senate by tradition holds hearings, budget deliberations on its own.

**WEBB:** But couldn’t this have even made the process faster if nagpatuloy po ito, they pass it on second reading and then even before they went on break or go on break on October 14 or 17, na-pass na po nila ito on third and final reading. Wouldn’t that be a faster approach?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Again, I’m talking as a former professor of constitutional law ‘no. What is important for the Senate to proceed full-blast on its own deliberation is that the House budget should have originated from the House. And I think now that it’s been approved on second reading, and in fact even prior to approval of second reading, we know in the news that the House is already—not the House, but the Senate has already commenced with its deliberation on the House budget.

So I don’t think it will have any effect on passing the budget on time because they have passed it on second reading, for all intents and purposes approved; they just have to wait for the printed copy of the House bill.

**WEBB:** Let me bring this in though, Senate President Tito Sotto was saying that the House actually disregarded the priority request of the President to pass the 2021 national budget. He says, “There is no way we can finish the budget if it is not submitted to us before the mandated break, after October 14. Do not blame us.”

**SEC. ROQUE:** Well, I think everyone is just playing safe ‘no because—again, what is important is, it must have originated and as construed by the Supreme Court, originated does not mean it has to be passed in final form ‘no. It is enough that they have actually originated discussion in the budget and I think the approval on second reading is a clear evidence ‘no that they have already originated the House bill in the House which enables the Senate to proceed with its own deliberations.

**WEBB:** But we’ve been talking about this for quite some time. And from my understanding, Secretary, there was supposed to be a self-imposed deadline at the House of Representatives to pass the budget by October 14. And now, what they are looking at is passing the budget at the earliest is on November 16 when they resume session.

**SEC. ROQUE:** But you see, for all intents and purposes, the budget has been approved in the House eh, because on third and final reading, you can no longer move for amendments eh. That’s already the final version of the House bill. It’s either you vote for or against the measure.

And now, we’re expecting of course that as soon as it is printed and brought to the floor for the third reading, that all the administration parties, all those supportive of the President will cast an ‘Aye’ vote or a Yes vote.

**WEBB:** Would it be possible or would it be imperative at some point for Malacañang to possibly even call for a special session between this break of October 17 and November 15 so that the House can actually pass the budget on third and final reading between that time?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Again, I’m speaking as a professor for constitutional law ‘no. What is important now is for the Senate to proceed with its deliberations. And what will enable the Senate to proceed with its deliberations without violating the Constitution is if the House has already originated the passage of the budget, and I think they have ‘no since they’ll pass it on second reading.

**WEBB:** So clearly, you do not think that this will in any way or form, delay the passage of the budget, what happened at the House yesterday?

**SEC. ROQUE:** That’s correct. Because the message of the President to both Speaker Alan Cayetano and Lord Allan Velasco is do what you may have to do, but the budget cannot be delayed. We cannot have a re-enacted budget.

**WEBB:** And that cannot happen, that will not sit well absolutely with the President because we cannot have a re-enacted budget because the budget needs to really focus on health, education and of course, the economy for next year?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Correct! Because last year, when we had the re-enacted budget, we did not have COVID, this is the first budget that has built in measures intended to respond to COVID-19 and that's why this is probably the most important budget that the President has proposed to both Houses of Congress.

**WEBB:** And because you were a member of Congress as well, I want to ask you as a former congressman, ito ho bang pag-suspend ng deliberation and resuming session on November 16, ito ha ba ...is this in order, what the Speaker did, or this could possibly be illegal?

**SEC. ROQUE:** It's not illegal. But I would think it's a very astute political move because it avoided intramurals that could have possibly happen in October 14. So, for what it is worth 'no, I think you need to have the experience of Speaker Alan Cayetano because he has dealt with the same rules 'no, not only for three terms as congressman – this is already his fourth term as congressman – but also as a two-term senator.

**WEBB:** So because you said that, there will be no showdown on October 14 because they won't be back until November 16? Imposible na pong mangyari iyon?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Yes, yes. Yes, because there was a plenary vote that they will go on break already. That means no one can question already the Speakership on October 14. The earliest that they can do that is November 14.

**WEBB:** Yeah. Just a last question on that: What about, probably, the objection of some congressmen na mini-mute po sila? They were not able to speak because they're on Zoom and their microphones were on mute.

**SEC. ROQUE:** Whether or not you're on Zoom or on live, that has been done by House leaderships actually. It's not the first time in the history of either the House or the Senate that mics have been muted 'no.

Remember, when there was also a coup against then Speaker Alvarez, basically the proponents or the supporters of GMA could not be heard because they turned off the mic. In fact, GMA was proclaimed Speaker with the mic turned off.

And another thing that they literally do when they want to achieve a major objective is they run away with the seal. *[Laughs]* So it's the mic and the seal, that's very important. *[Laughs]*

**WEBB:** That's right, taken out of the rostrum. Secretary Harry Roque, we need to take a very short break. We'll be back.

[COMMERCIAL BREAK]

**WEBB:** You're watching The Source on CNN Philippines. Our guest today, Presidential Spokesperson Harry Roque. Secretary Roque, last Monday the President also made mention of this. He said he had concerns on the EJKs, extrajudicial killings so he ordered a discreet hearing on this. Do you know when this was and who conducted this hearing?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Well, you know, the DOJ formed the Inter-Agency Committee to look into the killings. So this could be what the President has been all referred to 'no and of course within the PNP itself, they have established procedures to ensure that the policemen especially when there's a killing 'no did not use disproportionate force 'no. Because after all, the rule is you could shoot back if your life is threatened provided that the danger was in fact there and the use of force was necessary and that this was proportional to the threat 'no.

So I keep on telling the people that the President is a lawyer. He was a criminal lawyer. He was a prosecutor. He prosecuted murder cases. He knows the elements of murder and while he has taken the side of the state in almost all the instances that I've heard 'no, where there's evidence that in fact there was unnecessary use of force and the use of force was not proportionate, such as in the killing of Kian, then he will order the killing of Kian – not the killing – but he ordered the prosecution, probe the erring state actors.

**WEBB:** But, Secretary, what he said kasi is parang discreet hearing eh. So if you're referring to the DOJ and even the PNP, we wouldn't really categorize that as discreet. What it sounded or seemed, was that he had somebody else do this quietly, parang ganoon po eh. Hindi ho kaya iyon ang ibig sabihin ng Pangulo?

**SEC. ROQUE:** Well, alam mo, my experience has been if he wants something looked into, he calls on Usec. Quitain and this is the case for all rough cases and I supposed 'no, all investigations that he wants to be done is referred to Usec. Quitain. And Usec. Quitain is a very low profile person but delivers very well as far as the President's impression on the investigations.

**WEBB:** ABS-CBN, Secretary Roque, any reaction from the Palace on the comeback of ABS-CBN shows, entertainment shows through Zoe TV. It's going to be called A2Z Channel 11.

**SEC. ROQUE:** Well, what has happened is ABS-CBN has become a content provider so that's a distinct line of business that does not require a franchise 'no. So I guess the fans of Probinsiyano and the other soap operas 'no can look forward to them on Zoe TV.

**WEBB:** So, does Malacañang welcome this?

**SEC. ROQUE:** We have no reaction to it because they are a content provider 'no and for all intents and purposes, it is Zoe that will be subject to regulation because Zoe is the franchise holder.

**WEBB:** All right. Was it mentioned though because I know that week, last week there was a pray over of the President together with Brother Eddie Villanueva who supposed to own Zoe TV. Napag-usapan ho ba noon?

**SEC. ROQUE:** I wouldn't know. I was also not in the meeting. I get my orders on what to say from the President himself, which spares me from having to go to all the meetings, otherwise I won't have a license [laughs].

**WEBB:** All right. Presidential Spokesperson Harry Roque, sir, as usual maraming salamat po sa inyong oras.

**SEC. ROQUE:** Maraming salamat po at magandang umaga po.

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