

THIRTEENTH CONGRESS OF THE REPUBLIC)
OF THE PHILIPPINES)
First Regular Session)

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SENATE
S.B. No. 1656

RECEIVED BY:

Introduced by Senator Miriam Defensor Santiago

EXPLANATORY NOTE

The Constitution, Article 3, Section 7 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.

Batas Pambansa Blg. 881 a.k.a. the "Omnibus Election Code of the Philippines" Sections 90 to 93, likewise recognizes the importance of this right, by providing for venues and opportunities to inform the people of the qualifications 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 the mass media; and (3) formulate the guidelines for the adoption of the best format for the debates.

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(A) IN GENERAL – The Commission shall be composed of six (6) members appointed as follows:

(i) One (1) member shall be appointed by the Speaker of the House;

(ii) One (1) member shall be appointed by the House Majority Leader, who shall not be a member of the Majority Leader's political party;

(iii) One (1) member shall be appointed by the President of the Senate;

(iv) One (1) member shall be appointed by the Majority Leader of the Senate; and

(v) Two (2) members shall be appointed by the President from among a list of nominees submitted 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 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 (2) (B) of this Section.

(B) QUALIFICATIONS – Members of the Commission may be from the public or private sector, and may include national or local government officers or employee, members of the academe, nonprofit organizations, or other interested individuals.

(C) VACANCIES – Any vacancy shall be filled in the same manner as the original appointment not later than ten (10) days after the vacancy occurs.

(D) COMPENSATION – Members of the Commission shall receive a per diem of Five Hundred Pesos (P500.00) for each day of attendance in the

Commission and actual traveling expenses not exceeding Five Thousand Pesos (P5,000.00) per month.

(3) POWERS; MEETINGS – Except as provided in subsection (4), decisions made by the Commission shall be made by consent of no less than four (4) of the commissioners. The Commission shall meet at a time and a site agreed upon by no less than four (4) of the members.

(4) STAFFING – The Commission shall be responsible for maintaining its own secretariat as well as such other staff as it may deem necessary. Except those detailed from other government offices, the tenure of office of the regular staff of the secretariat shall be coterminous with the tenure of the Commission.

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

(5) DUTIES – (A) It shall be the duty of the Commission to establish a schedule of debate in accordance with subsection (6) as follows:

- (i) ~~One~~ (1) preliminary debate;
- (ii) Not more than two (2) Vice Presidential debates; and
- (iii) Not less than two (2) but not more than four (4) Presidential debates.

(B) The Commission shall decide on the format of the debates taking into consideration the most efficient and effective way to provide useful and necessary information about the candidates to the voting public.

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

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

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

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

(6) DEBATES DESCRIBED –

(A) PRELIMINARY DEBATES – A preliminary debate shall take place no sooner than sixty (60) days and no later than forty-five (45) days before a Presidential election. The time and place of the preliminary debate shall be announced by the Commission no later than ninety (90) days before the scheduled preliminary debate. A preliminary debate shall involve any person who has declared himself a candidate for the position of President or Vice-President of the Republic of the Philippines, as determined by the Commission. The format shall be decided by the Commission. The attendance by any candidate at the preliminary debate is optional.

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

(C) PRESIDENTIAL DEBATES – Presidential debates shall take place no sooner than seven (7) days following the preliminary debate. The time and date of all qualified debates shall be announced no later than ninety (90) days prior to the first scheduled qualified debate. The Commission may alter the time and date of such debates for good cause with the consent of seven (7) members. The

format of debates shall be decided by the Commission, with at least one (1) being of the single moderator format. Presidential debates shall involve persons who are qualified Presidential candidates.

(7) TERMINATION – Each Commission appointed under this section shall terminate on the date following the day of the election for which the Commission was appointed.

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

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

SECTION 7. *Repealing Clause.* – Any law, presidential decree or issuance, executive order, letter of instruction, administrative order, rule or regulation contrary to or inconsistent with, the provisions of this Act is hereby repealed, modified, or amended accordingly.

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

Approved.