

2007 Green Electoral Initiative

A. CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENERGY

1. Will you support a moratorium on proposed coal-fired power plants and the transition of existing ones to renewable energy sources as a means to reduce the country's greenhouse gas emissions and help in the international effort to contain global warming? Will you also support a moratorium on other greenhouse gas emitting sources such as "sanitary" landfills, "waste-to-energy", cement kilns, etc?

I share the global concern about global warming. I will support a moratorium on coal-fired power plant projects, as well as the shift of existing coal-fired plants to renewable energy sources. However, I am also concerned about the impact of such moratorium without first establishing viable alternatives. If renewable energy sources are immediately available, and a transition is viable without disrupting power supply, then I am for it. In the end, we have no option but to shift to environment-friendly fuels and reduce or eliminate sources of greenhouse gases if we want to ensure the future of the human race.

The United Nations has said that, global warming is "very likely" caused mostly by human activity – in particular carbon dioxide emissions from the burning of fossil fuels. The Kyoto Protocol has called for the reduction of greenhouse gas emission of first world countries, but the Philippines, a third world country, must also do its share in the reduction of greenhouse gases.

Government must implement a phase out program for coal-fired power plants and those that use fossil fuels in favor of plants that use renewable and non-polluting energy sources like wind, solar, geothermal and tidal power. Investments for developing renewable energy sources are huge, so Congress must pass a law that will give incentives to companies that will invest in renewable energy. It must encourage the use of bicycles among workers, students and other commuters. A bicycle costs about P1,500. If a commuter spends P25 a day on transportation. This translates to P1500 for 60 days – enough to pay for a bicycle. In addition to health benefits resulting from biking, the commuter effectively saves P750 a month at P25 a day – for food and other needs. Bike lanes must be provided for commuter safety.

Government must also ban the importation of used diesel engines and vehicles using them as they are no longer environment friendly. A priority project should be to require public utility vehicle operators to replace their engines with brand-new engines. The government can assist by importing, duty-free, brand-new engines for distribution to operators, payable in annual installments coinciding with the renewal of vehicle registration.

This will also put less stress on the DOH as it will lower the incidences of upper respiratory ailments. Studies show that there are about 4,000 illegally operated buses, most of which are heavy air pollutants, in Metro Manila. The efficient implementation of existing rules covering these needs to be done now.

The use of sanitary landfills in the disposal of garbage has to be reassessed. Standards have to be tightened and their locations further studied so as not to cause additional environmental damage.

Pollutants in coal used as fuel must be separated and removed at the source before using it for fuel.

2. Will you support strong renewable energy legislation with high and binding renewable energy targets that will reduce our dependence on fossil fuels and assure genuine energy security for the country's future?

Yes I will. Legislation to provide for a permanent program for renewable energy development is a priority.

3. What legislative measures (i.e. demand side management, market incentives, integrated resource planning) will you initiate to mainstream energy efficiency in the country?

The wind-powered generating plants in Ilocos Norte are a good example of an endless supply of "fuel" to produce electricity without hurting the environment. I will propose measures to encourage more of such projects through incentives, including generous tax holidays, to proponents and those who will use them. We do not have to wait for another crisis to introduce such policy. It is not only for energy conservation but also for the conservation of the environment.

B. WATER

1. Are you willing to commit a specific percentage of your Countryside Development Fund (CDF) for the development of septage and sewerage management, treatment and infrastructure?

Yes, but even if I commit my entire CDF (to the detriment of other pro-poor projects) it will just be a drop in a bucket. In addition to my CDF, more funds from the national government's annual appropriations must be allocated for this purpose.

There must be a prohibition on the use of powerful pumps to source ground water for fish ponds and prawn farms as well as individual household needs as we are now experiencing salt water intrusion in many provinces where the prawn farms are found as well as in urban areas.

Potable and non potable water distribution lines must be separate and distinct. Presently, we use drinking water to wash cars, toilets, maintain gardens, etc.

There must be conscious efforts to reach out to all calling for lifestyle change especially to children starting in the pre school levels up to high school.

We have to adopt measures such as:

1. Require restaurants to serve water only when asked. It takes 10 times the water in the glass to clean the glass afterwards – even if the water was untouched.

2. Turn off taps when not needed during baths, brushing teeth, shaving, doing laundry and washing dishes.

3. Hotels and commercial laundry operators must have water treatment mechanisms before allowing them to operate.

4. Environmentally friendly washing and disinfecting agents must be developed to replace non biodegradable ones. Wastewater treatment plants and water desalination plants must be established in densely populated areas.

5. Architectural and engineering plans for residential, commercial and industrial use must provide for maximum recycling of water for drinking, washing and landscaping use before construction permits are issued by the LGUs by January 2010.

2. *The pollution of our sources for clean water (e.g., freshwater, groundwater) is exacerbating the water crisis, with the prospects of severe water shortages in the future looming large. What legislative measures would you propose to ensure stricter protection of our aquifers (groundwater), as well as providing stiffer penalties to polluters of water sources?*

I will propose the adoption of a no-man's zone around watersheds within which no human settlement or activities such as logging, mining, garbage dumping, etc. will be allowed. There must be a ban on the establishment of industrial plants nears rivers and lakes, and the clean-up of rivers that have been polluted by existing factories, at their own expense. The construction of new golf courses must be allowed only after systems for recycling wastewater are in place. They must not be allowed to use potable water to maintain their courses.

3. *What steps will you undertake to ensure people's fair access to water and guard against monopoly?*

Ownership of shares of stock of franchises and concessionaires must be publicly-listed and equitably distributed.

C. SOLID WASTE

1. *The Ecological Solid Waste Management Act of 2000 (R.A. 9003) mandates the closure of all dumps and the establishment of Materials Recovery Facility (MRF) or ecology center in every barangay or cluster of barangays. Six years after the law took effect, the country remains littered with more than 1,000 open and controlled dumps. To date, only 1,723 MRF's or ecology centers exist in the country's 42,000 barangays. What legislative action will you take to ensure the effective implementation of RA 9003?*

Ecology centers must double up as livelihood centers, where the jobless, poor residents of the barangay will receive a share from the income generated from the recycling of waste materials, either by using these materials to produce saleable products or selling them to scrap processors. The ecology centers could be joint venture enterprises between the barangay and its residents. Large corporations can be tapped to adopt such projects in exchange for tax breaks.

I note that Payatas continues to operate as an open dump despite the prohibition under the Solid Waste Management Act. Mike Defensor, during his tenure as secretary of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, failed to close Payatas, which is located in the district in Quezon City, the 3rd District if which he represented when he was congressman.

2. Thousands of families subsist by collecting discards from bins and dumps. R.A. 9003 barely responds to the waste pickers' socio-economic, health and other needs. How do you plan to plug this legislative loophole in R.A. 9003 so that waste pickers, including itinerant and dump based waste pickers will be recognized as integral players in the ecological and safe management of discards?

To begin with, there should be no room for waste pickers in any humane, progressive society. Given a choice, no one would choose to live off a garbage dump. Health needs of citizenry should be one of government's primary concerns. The existence of waste pickers only shows how government has failed to provide safe, sustainable livelihood opportunities for its people and shows how indifferent it is to the plight of its poor. However, since this is a reality in our society, they must be provided with:

1. Adequate protective gear
2. Skills training and massive reorientation programs
3. Education

3. Will you support legislative measures that will compel companies to phase out toxic substances in their products, in packaging and in production systems as well as institute take back systems for their end of life products (e.g. computer wastes, etc.)?

Yes, within a specified time frame.

4. Do you support banning certain types of plastics and disposables which contribute to our worsening waste problems? What are your views regarding slapping a kind of "sin" tax on disposable plastics packaging, taking into account that citizens and tax payers are currently shouldering the costs of disposal of these types of waste materials?

In addition to or complementary to a "sin" tax on plastic packaging, I will propose the integration of education programs to encourage the use of biodegradable packaging as early as to pre school students, union workers, farmer's association and chambers of trade and industry.

D. TOXIC WASTE TRADE & JPEPA

The most controversial provision of the JPEPA regarding the environment is the authority given to Japan to export to our country their toxic and hazardous wastes in exchange for the sending Filipino care givers and nurses to Japan. They need us more than we need them. This is in violation of the Basel Convention which prohibits the trans-boundary movement of toxic and hazardous waste from the first to third world countries.

As Secretary of Department of Environment and Natural Resources Mike Defensor wrote a letter to the Department of Trade and Industry, the lead agency that negotiated the JPEPA, stating that the provision in the JPEPA allowing the shipment of hazardous and toxic waste to our country is in violation of the Basel Convention. However, when he assumed office as presidential chief of staff, he did not exclude or at the very least manifest his continuing objection to the inclusion of the said questionable provision in the JPEPA.

Secretary Angelo Reyes, later, imposed certain conditions but nevertheless continued to allow the dumping of hazardous wastes.

This violates the Basel Convention and Republic Act 6969 or the Toxic and Hazardous Waste Act. Japan has a record of violating the Basel Convention. As fully documented by the Basel Action Network. Japan continues to dump hazardous and toxic wastes into China and African countries.

The Senate should not ratify JPEPA. Any senatorial candidate that will support JPEPA does not deserve to be in the senate.

1. Malacanang has submitted the Japan-Philippine Economic Partnership Agreement (JPEPA) to the Senate for ratification. Considering the concerns raised by different sectors over the absence of democratic consultation and participation of civil society, and also regarding the toxic and nuclear waste trade, and other exploitative provisions under the proposed treaty, will you vote to reject or ratify JPEPA? Why?

I will vote to reject JPEPA.

2. Parties to the Basel Convention adopted in 1995 the Basel Ban Amendment which prohibits the transboundary movements of hazardous waste from developed to developing countries for any purpose. The Philippines is a party to the Basel Convention but is yet to ratify the Basel Ban Amendment. Will you initiate and support the ratification of the Basel Ban Amendment in the 14th Congress, and work to amend RA 6969 which contains a loophole that allows toxic and hazardous wastes to be sent to the Philippines for “economic reasons”?

Yes, I will.

3. The dumping post consumer goods from developed to poorer countries containing toxic wastes, such as electronic waste, is becoming a global concern. There are efforts underway in the developed world, particularly in Europe to hold manufacturers of these products responsible for the take-back and proper recycling of their products at its end-of-life. Will you support legislative measures that will hold manufacturers accountable for their products at end-of-life?

Yes.

E. GENETICALLY MODIFIED ORGANISMS (GMOs)

1. What steps will you take to protect the country’s biodiversity and public health from the contamination and unpredictable adverse effects of the release and use of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in agriculture and food?

I will initiate an inquiry into GMOs and their effects on human, not only as in aid of legislation but also to educate the public on GMOs, including the extent of their use in local agriculture and food manufacturing.

2. Despite widespread rejection of genetically modified (GM) rice in the markets worldwide, illegal genetically modified rice is being sold in Philippines supermarkets and approval for the use of another GM rice strain for food, feed and processing is currently pending at the Bureau of Plant Industry. Do you support the introduction and commercialization of GM rice in the country?

If the world is rejecting GMO rice, why should the Philippines allow its entry and consumption? I assume that countries that have rejected GMO rice did so after extensive studies; we should benefit from the results of such studies, too, and protect the health of our people in the process.

3. Would you support the mandatory labeling of all products containing GM organisms sold in the Philippines?

Yes. Consumers must be given an informed choice of the products they are purchasing. It is unfortunate that until now, the Arroyo administration has no significant policy on GMOs, and has not even undertaken a program to inform the people about the risks of using products containing GMOs.

F. SUSTAINABLE & ORGANIC AGRICULTURE

1. Will you support a legislation that will remove subsidies to synthetic farm inputs as well as measures that would significantly reduce the use of pesticides and agricultural chemicals in the country? Will you support that these subsidies be re-channeled to the promotion of organic agriculture practices?

It may be impractical and may even cause unwanted effects on food supply, if we remove subsidies outright. The first step should be to stop subsidies to synthetic inputs that could be eliminated without significantly affecting production if there is such a thing. The savings could be channeled to the promotion of organic agriculture production. Right now, organically produced farm products already enjoy a premium among consumers, so it should not be difficult to encourage more organic farming in our country. Can organic farm inputs be quantified and accurately measured to get the right formula for increased yield? Organic agriculture products command higher market prices. We are caught in between making low cost food available to 85M people vs giving them healthy food. Should we deprive those who cannot afford organic food to go hungry because GMO's are unhealthy? This has to be further debated. Poverty gives people no choice on many instances.

2. Will you support a legislation that will shift the DA's policy orientation from chemically based and synthetic agriculture towards the development of sustainable and organic agriculture as defined by Executive Order 481 or the Promotion and Development of Organic Agriculture in the Philippines?

If we do so, yields will not be as high immediately. Although, over the long run, it can be the same or higher depending on the amount of organic fertilizers put in. As it is right now, we are importing 20% of our food requirements for rice and almost all requirements for flour and dairy products. Maybe if we did not have such a large population to feed, it could be feasible to depend on organic farming practices immediately.

G. LOGGING

1. What measures would you propose to advance community-based forest management and enforcement of laws against illegal logging? Do you agree that natural forests should be kept free from commercial logging or conversion into other uses?

I believe that direct participation of residents where our forests are located guarantees the effectiveness of forest management and conservation. We have very few, if at all, natural forests left that can be logged or converted to other uses, so I agree to prohibit commercial logging and conversion for at least 10 years.

To make matters worse, government actions contradict its pronouncements about protecting our forests. When Mike Defensor was secretary of DENR, a law was passed, which provided that 15% of the incremental revenue from the expanded value added tax be set aside to finance a comprehensive national reforestation program. At an annual additional VAT collection of P89 billion, the reforestation program should have received P13.5 billion. So far, the amount spent on reforestation has not even reached P200 million. Where did that money go?

DENR Secretary Angelo Reyes received wide publicity when he launched his highway greening project. Today, none of the trees planted, at great expense, along the highways are still standing, because nobody took care of the trees after the photographers left.

2. Will you support a five year moratorium on commercial logging to allow our forests to regenerate and while our communities are trained to do community-based forest management and in monitoring their respective areas?

10-year moratorium. I will also work for the enactment of the Sustainable Forest Management Act, which will encourage private sector participation in the reforestation of the government. We also need to be vigilant in monitoring the implementation of laws that protect our forests, which is the responsibility of the executive branch, whose record on enforcement of laws has not been satisfactory in the least, and extremely questionable in some instances.

For instance, after the killer floods killed thousands and rendered hundreds of thousands homeless in the provinces of Aurora and Quezon in November 2004, the DENR suspended 20 Timber License Agreements (TLAs). Then Mike Defensor was appointed DENR secretary. One of his first official acts was to lift the suspension in January 2005, or just two months after it was imposed. One of the TLAs that were released from suspension belonged to Toplite Lumber, a company owned by Belen Chua.

Defensor even reinstated Toplite's license, which was earlier revoked by Undersecretary Bibeth Gozon. Later, Defensor stood as sponsor to the wedding of a son of Belen Chua.

Graft and Corruption! Poverty! Population pressure! Guarantee the destruction of our forests and seas! Under any administration, the highest ranking officials always become protectors of illegal operators that destroy the environment.

H. MINING

1. What legislative measures will you initiate to make mining companies accountable in the acute and long term impacts caused by their activities on public health and the environment?

In addition to the environmental impact certification requirement prior to undertaking mining activities, I will propose regular monitoring of mining areas to ensure that safety, environment and other standards are constantly complied with. In addition, mining companies should be required to rehabilitate mined-over areas as a condition prior to mining.

We should not forget that mining is an exploitive industry, and what the Earth took 50 million years to develop the mining companies, with the help of the government, want to extract in a few years. We should insist, through legislation and strict enforcement, that mined-over areas remain at least environmentally sound after the mining companies are done carting away our mineral wealth.

The right to mine 9M hectares was granted by Pres. Arroyo! That's 1/3 of our land area!

2. Will you support a community-based, environment-friendly small scale mining legislation?

Yes, but with strict supervision and monitoring so they adhere to safety and environment friendly standards. We have allowed small scale mining but have failed to account for the wealth generated and have lost significant revenues to smugglers who card out gold through the back door.

3. How do you intent to uphold the Indigenous People's Rights Act (IPRA) and National Integrated Protected Area System (NIPAs) especially in the context of the said laws' outstanding conflicts and inconsistencies with provisions to the Mining Act?

We may need to review the provisions of the Mining Act side by side with the IPRA and NIPAs and to introduce amendments in favor of indigenous people and environment protection. We should also look at the provisions allowing not only full foreign participation but also full repatriation of income and investment, which means that after our mineral resources are gone we would be left holding an empty bag. Thus, only a fraction of the estimated US\$840 billion worth of mineral deposits will remain in the country because of the excessively generous provisions of the Mining Act.

Incidentally, the government has approved 228 Mineral Production Sharing Agreements, but none has been reported to Congress as mandated by the Mining Act. In addition, despite its projection on income and employment to be generated, the government has yet to report any substantial benefit that the country actually received from opening the exploitation of mineral resources to foreign companies.

I. AIR POLLUTION

1. Air pollution remains a serious threat to public health. What legislative step will you initiate to make the Philippine Clean Air Act of 1999 more effective? Would you support a ban on the importation of dirty, second-hand diesel engine?

Government must ban the importation of used diesel engines and completely build up vehicles using them as they are no longer environment friendly. A priority project should be to require public utility vehicle operators to replace their engines with brand-new engines. The government can assist by importing, duty-free, brand-new engines for distribution to operators, payable in annual installments coinciding with the renewal of vehicle registration.

This will also put less stress on the DOH as it will lower the incidences of upper respiratory ailments. Studies show that there are about 4,000 illegally operated buses, most of which are heavy air pollutants, in Metro Manila. The efficient implementation of existing rules covering these needs to be done now.

2. What legislative measures will you propose that would mainstream the production and use of clean fuels, increase motor efficiency and reduce fuel consumption?

The recently passed Biofuels Act is a step in the right direction but I think the target ethanol blend of five percent for gasoline and two percent for diesel is too low to create a significant impact. Other countries like Brazil have already succeeded in using biofuel with higher ethanol or methyl ester content. We should amend the law and raise the blending requirements to speed up the shift to green fuel, which has been shown to increase engine efficiency while eliminating pollution-causing emissions.