

IN FOCUS: ILOCOS NORTE

Rotary Club, January 18, 2018

***VID# 1st Beauty clip of Ilocos Norte: Paoay Kumakaway music**

Thank you very much for that fulsome introduction, I couldn't have done better myself. Good afternoon to all from Ilocos Norte. *Naimbag a malem* sa ating mga *kailian*, knowing that there are few Ilocanos skulking around the room.

I arrived in Ilocos Norte 7 and a half years ago, never in my entire life having lived there. After endless years in Manila and Congress, I have few practical skills to run the province. No public ads, very little patience for all things bureaucratic- well very little patience to stomp to tell the truth. Instead, besides my resounding family name Marcos-Ilocano, I brought only decades-worth of wild and wooly film production, animation, game development and a personal predilection for creative start-ups.

IN Focus: ILOCOS NORTE, perhaps the Ilocanos were even more unprepared for this new governor. It's a girl governor. And just like Rotary they were suspicious. *Ano ba tawag diyan? Governor o "governess"?* Oh no! I hear that she is the one among the kids who took after the dad. So she's gonna be a "governator". This wasn't going to be love at first sight and this Ilocano honeymoon was a bust- but I'm getting ahead of the plot.

I pretended, as I always do that I will just make another movie- **IN Focus: ILOCOS NORTE**. And thus began my "creative governing" and the 7 rules that I developed from 7 years of being governor. It's funnily enough today I believe that my creative background is just what local governance needs. Disruption, inspiration, storytelling, improvisation and crowdsourcing. Governance struggles for as long as we can remember with poverty, ignorance and violence. Age-old problems that never seem to present easy solutions. Where do we find innovation? Where do we find solutions to replace our government's hackneyed promises and failed plans? Like the best in film and art, government today should create a new vision.

Like every movie producer, I have to find first the story: what is the Ilocano story? That big important story that makes us move and laugh and cry. But to find story there is rule 1: "**INfiltrate the cracks**".

You know straightaway when you're in a government building- the grim, the dust, and above all that government smell- that cloy stench of bad indoor plumbing wafting beyond the public urinals. I spent my first day as governor cleaning out public toilets with a mournful janitor whose youngest daughter just left the family yet again no one left to be a domestic. Likewise, there were no plumbers, no electricians, no carpenters as all the good ones had fled for well-paying jobs overseas. Everywhere, the same story. Farmers selling their farms. Teachers falling into debt in order to migrate. Businessmen gone to Hawaii for their green-cards. Migration had become the wicked problem of Ilocos Norte. So intractable and insurmountable that no matter how much money, how many personnel, technology and time you threw at it, it just won't go away. Like traffic in Metro Manila or public housing, migration in Ilocos Norte just grown and grown and grown until it has become this wicked monster of a problem.

True, dollar remittances had reduced poverty to 8.4% - much lower than the rest of the country. But had we become as Ilocanos dollar addicts? Because the social cost of leaving home was everywhere: underemployment and unemployment, growing illiteracy, substance and domestic abuse, incestuous rape and elderly abandonment- was migration still a price still worth paying? Could we ever generate enough well-paying secured jobs in Ilocos at home so that migration merely be another choice?

For the producer in me there is rule 2: “**INspire or expire!**” Now I know I sound like a loony talking about inspiration in government- but would you rather desperation?! I had no choice. The great thing about being Ilocano is that unlike other Filipinos, we have no identity crisis. We know who we are: hardworking, flinty people who love *pinakbet* and hate spending money. We have a legacy of monuments and infrastructure, and the heroic tradition of Juan and Antonio Luna. Pride in our history and culture as inspired and had given the province a new confidence- and in 2013 we became the first in government to be ISO certified from top to bottom including our tiny Cordillera tribal towns and our district hospitals.

2018 is now the 200th birthday of the Province of Ilocos Norte and with our bicentennial we celebrate culture- for just like London and that great city, in our province it is culture that sells. Providing a living for entire communities that not just the privileged or the artsy fartsy. Making heritage tourism a sound and profitable investment.

Inspire or expire, our dual legacies of culture and even more fragile of nature- the Cordillera, our sand dunes, forest diversity. “Clean and green” is no mere slogan in Ilocos Norte but rather an aggressive action plan. We are the only province to establish 30% as a goal for clean and renewable energy through wind, through solar and through hydro. We are the sole LGU to ban entirely and make illegal black sand mining and coal-fired plants. Above all we want a livable, sustainable, and resilient Ilocandia.

Armed with both my story on migration and inspiration of culture and nature. The governor, as producer now began casting- casting our actors. An axiom in the creative industries is that the craziest people, most obnoxious and difficult are unfortunately very often the most talented hence rule number 3: **Always pick the INSANE,** the troublesome and intransigent, those who just maybe just maybe could ultimately be your most dynamic change inducers.

Ilocos Norte was fraught with many angry young people- depressed, hypercritical, and troubled by that promise and seduction of migration. Like me they demanded: why must we migrate to live? We launched “2020 Vision” a campaign that questioned: what is the future that we want? And after endless youth camps, noisy online activism, trainings, summer jobs, Ilocano millennials today are all over the capitol. They have rebooted the great Juan Luna into an irreverent hashtag “Johnny Moon”. Our provincial scholars- SIKA won the Galing Pook award for taking on youth’s grimmest issues- teenage suicide, delinquency, drugs and pregnancy. Every year we talk the nursing, accounting, teaching and accounting boards. And lastly Ilocano students even topped the bar. Call centers and business processing groups that have now opened in Ilocos Norte will attest to the quality and loyalty of young labor in our province.

We proceed to rule 4, all is not well-you must now ‘**INstigate trouble**’ whenever and wherever possible. After infiltrating the cracks in the toilets, the next governor move was to pull down all the fences, all Capitol fences in order that the Capitol would be the open Capitol. Our security was absolutely horrified warning that employees would be mugged and the Treasury will be robbed. But we have to open the Capitol to the people and soon enough with visitors in a new civic park, texting me photos of lazy employees sleeping or shopping in uniform during hours of office. Every day we free open down our Capitol doors to the public on Feb 2 for our “Open Capitol” inviting everyone into the governor’s office and asking them to see where their taxes go in the big old safe containing checks, bankbooks, even cash.

Every market day, I go with the Capitol Express. Yes! To every market place to bring frontline services where the people are. Agriculture supplies, medical and dental assistance, land titles, birth certificates, job openings and scholarships. **“INstigate trouble”** so that all eyes are off the Capitol and the Capitol is everywhere compelling us to provide public service, indeed.

Taking risks is asking for trouble according to politicians and sensible businessmen. Because no one wants to fail- we're all afraid of failure but I am an experimental film maker and a game producer. We fail all the time, out of every 10 movies, seven to eight are doomed to failure. So let's just take the risks, make the change and fail as fast and furiously as possible.

There is a great fear in government, for example of turning power over to the private sector. But we know too well government's capacity to bankrupt every business including monopolies, including public cartels. On the other hand, government can do a great deal to the private sector struggling in business. Firstly, we can safeguard law and order. Ilocandia was once known for warlords, private armies and random violence. Today we are one of the most peaceful areas in the country.

Business-friendly government, with fair and predictable regulation, is our goal. Rather than operate bankrupt enterprises, let's get out of business's way and allow the private sectors' support in infrastructure, research and development, relevant training and job schemes, ready financing and promotion efforts throughout the country. To do all these, not only must I hire the most creative but I must keep them against migration and those dollars they're tempted with.

So rule number 5 for the bureaucracy: **“INcentivize overwork and maybe if you can overpay!”** Hamstrung by the Civil Service and COA regulations, it is tough for us in the government to pay the bonuses, make the promotions, and provide computer, car, and home loans required by the most talented public servants. But we in the movies know that it's the superstars who light up the marquee, fill up the theaters but we can still incentivize in sneaky, creative ways. If you can't give us salary increase in government maybe additional flexible working hours, more travels, study opportunities that all Ilocanos like. Public praise might even work and the shout out by the boss. Incentivize with feelings each time and every time that you can. Sometimes it can take just a little love to make our people work very very hard.

Innovation requires complete commitment. Almost immediately I set up an IT Dept, convinced that technology could make bureaucrats more responsive and responsible. E-government is now a source of countless new ideas, and new provincial departments we have education, tourism, migration department and youth department. If the private sector has entrepreneurs, within Ilocos bureaucracy, we have INtrapreneurship- little hubs of experimentation within the bureaucracy of Capitol's small start-ups for new solutions. Also previously stove-piped departments have now been converged for speed and efficiency. Whole-of-government financing from joint efforts of the assessor, treasury, budget and accounts and planning has incentivized Ilocos Norte for profit and for growth.

But moviemaking, just like real life and “governating” isn't always entirely predictable. Sometimes, really, truly terrible things happen. For farmers in Ilocos Norte, climate change is unmitigated calamity of floods, drought, typhoons, and earthquakes. Our migrants and call center agents also bring with them strange and fatal diseases. New pandemics like SARS, Bird Flu, the MERS virus, AIDS then we have to rely on rule 6: **“INvoke Ilocano social capital”** to avoid making the worst disaster movie in all history!

Much has been written about crisis management, transformational leadership, but for me in Ilocos Norte, leadership has always been a question of trust- trust between the citizens and their leaders, trust among the family members and within the community, trust between migrants overseas and the Ilocano families that they left behind. Resilience is the bulwark of Ilocano unity and social capital. *Timpuyog* is our word for that- encompassing those vast global networks of affection, loyalty, and support provided in times of disaster and tragedy. The Ilocano diaspora, unfailingly generous with capital, financial and social technical skills. Free medical and surgical missions, funds to rebuild schools, libraries, clinics, books, clothing, food and medicines. When you invest in Ilocandia, you too can share in this vast wealth of the Ilocano diaspora.

For Ilocos Norte is ready for business and rule 7 we are **“INviting all of you as our INvestors”**. Our pitch is simple, our province boasts a land area that is 5x the area of Singapore, 3x of Hongkong. We are located 400 kilometers from the greatest market in the world, China, Taiwan, Korea, Japan and the Asian tigers. Our infrastructure is already up- an international airport, a functioning seaport with Star Cruise and other cruise lines already operating. And a 1200 km road network all cemented even if it derives from my father’s 1970’s. We are also now generating over 300 megawatts of wind, solar and hydropower locally, making energy reliable and relatively inexpensive. And best of all we have the Ilocanos, an educated, motivated and loyal workforce.

Opportunities abound in high- value agriculture and processing, light manufacture and packaging. Our province is growing at a fast clip of 12% per year, driven by great foreign investment in the energy sector and business processing as well as tourism.

They say we should make good by doing good. By investing in Ilocos Norte, you are also doing great good by keeping Ilocano families together, rescuing them from the blight of reckless, high-risk migration. Help us generate secure, well-paying jobs that will keep mothers and fathers at home with their children so that one day very soon leaving home will simply be another choice for us. Our 3 bottomlines, the 3 P’s: profit, planet and most importantly our people

We made in the 1980s a very well-known movie in the Philippines called “Himala”, otherwise known as “The Miracle” which was voted by the CNN as the all-time best Asian film. In it the prophetess Elsa, indelibly played by the great Nora Aunor, declared to her followers’ horror, “Walang himala! No, there is no miracle!” Ilocos Norte today defies that movie because we truly believe that there are life’s miracles. We invite you to come to our province to be inspired, to create, to innovate, and with us by investment, produce the epic blockbuster of the future. Thank you and welcome to Ilocos Norte.