

The IT expert criticized the automation technology used by the Comelec during the last presidential elections

MANILA, Philippines – President Aquino has appointed information technology expert Augusto “Gus” Lagman as Commission on Elections (Comelec) Commissioner, replacing Nicodemo Ferrer whose term ended in February.

Deputy Presidential Spokesperson Abigail Valte told reporters today, April 27, 2011, that Lagman, whose appointment was signed on April 20, 2011, would serve until February 2, 2018.

“He is a known expert in the field of IT and he has been very involved in the automated elections. We know that he has spoken out on so many issues relating to the automated elections when it came to the Commission, and we are confident that he can discharge the duties of his office as capably, as confidently as he has in the past,” Valte said.

She said the competence of Lagman, who is a Certified Computing Professional (CPP), “essentially clinched the decision of the President to put him in the Comelec.”

Valte added: “If you recall a few months back, whenever asked about a prospective appointment, the President would always say that he wanted an IT expert given the issues that had faced the Commission in the past election, he would want to have an IT expert as part of the Commission.”

Lagman, who was nominated to the post by the National Citizens’ Movement for Free Elections, said Aquino never talked to him about the position and that he only learned about his appointment from “some people from Malacanang” last Monday, April 25.

Lagman was never interviewed by the search committee that was formed by the Palace to vet nominees to crucial government positions. “They did not have to. They know me, I know them. They know my stand,” Lagman told Newsbreak.

Lagman may have a point as it was Philip “Popoy” Juico, who was earlier reported to be a member of the search committee, who sought his assistance during Aquino’s presidential campaign. Juico was a former Cabinet member of the President’s late mother, former President Corazon Aquino.

“I organized a group of 10 IT experts who prepared the system that coordinated the efforts of the different [initiatives] of the [Aquino] campaign,” he said. “In that system, we recorded the names of new volunteers and the schedule of sorties.”

Lagman has criticized the technology chosen by the Comelec in implementing the automated polls last May 2010, as he feared then that it could lead to “wholesale cheating.” Instead, he

Gus Lagman is new Comelec commissioner

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pushed for the adoption of the Open Election System (OES), noting that while it was “not cheat-proof,” the system at least made cheating “detectable.”

He also scored the poll body’s lack of transparency. “The source code should have been made transparent,” he said.

He also criticized the botched deal between the Comelec and Mega Pacific, the company that won the contract to modernize the 2004 elections.

Lagman is a convenor of the Movement for Good Governance, lead convenor of TransparentElections.org.ph, former president of Information Technology Foundation of the Philippines (ITFP) and the Philippine Computer Society (CSP), and former Technology Chief of the National Movement for Free Elections (Namfrel).

He chairs Vinta Systems, Inc., a developer of artificial intelligence-oriented software products, and is a director of STI College in Recto and Biometrix Technologies, Inc.

Asked why it took the President some time to decide on the replacements of former Comelec Commissioners Gregorio Larrazabal and Ferrer, who both retired on February 2, 2011, Valte said that the President wanted to be thorough in choosing the “right persons.”

Ferrer’s replacement—Christian Robert Lim was announced last April 4. — with a report from Purple Romero

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