

Source: [Philippine Daily Inquirer](#)

MANILA, Philippines—President Benigno Aquino III has appointed a 71-year-old information technology executive to fill the vacancy at the Commission on Elections (Comelec).

The President's deputy spokesperson, Abigail Valte, announced Wednesday the appointment of Augusto "Gus" Lagman as Comelec commissioner, to replace Nicodemo Ferrer who has retired.

Comelec Chair Sixto Brillantes Jr. said he had no objection to Lagman's appointment.

"I'm okay with him," Brillantes told reporters. "I know him personally. I know his criticism of the PCOS (precinct count optical scan) machines. We have spoken about it for a long time. We shall see his stand on the matter [when he becomes commissioner]. The Comelec is a collegial body, so it will be decided by us. So there's no problem."

Valte said Mr. Aquino signed on April 20 the appointment paper of Lagman, a "certified computing professional" by the Institute for Certification of Computing Professionals in Des Moines, Illinois, in the United States. He will hold the position until Feb. 2, 2018.

"He is a known expert in the field of IT and he has been very involved in the automated elections," Valte said of Lagman at a press briefing.

"We know that he has spoken out on so many issues relating to the automated elections ... and we are confident that he can discharge the duties of his office as capably, as competently, as he has in the past," she said.

Defective machines

On the phone with the Philippine Daily Inquirer, Lagman said he was "most likely" to maintain his opposition to the use of the controversial PCOS machines in future elections.

"My stand is very clear that we don't use those PCOS machines again. They have lots of defects," he said, adding:

"It was a good thing that President Aquino won by a landslide [in the May 2010 elections]. What could have happened if it were a close fight? In the local elections that are currently being protested, there are still many questions."

Valte said Lagman's competence in his field was a factor in the President's decision to appoint him to the Comelec.

Mega Pacific deal

“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 have faced the [Comelec],” she said.

Lagman headed the IT Foundation of the Philippines, which sought and got from the Supreme Court a ruling nullifying the P1.3-billion contract between the Comelec and Mega Pacific eSolutions Inc. for the production of automated counting machines for the 2004 midterm elections.

He will be one of the prosecution witnesses in the impeachment trial of Ombudsman Merceditas Gutierrez, who is being accused of, among other things, failing to charge the Comelec officials involved in the Mega Pacific deal.

Lagman said that instead of purchasing and running a new system for the next elections, the local IT community would be willing to help the Comelec design and develop a quick but workable system for national and local polls.

But he expressed an openness to view the PCOS machines from the perspective of the Comelec. “I’m most willing to listen to logic,” he said.

Release of source code

Lagman and other petitioners managed to convince the Supreme Court to order in September 2010 the release to the public of the PCOS source code, or the series of encrypted instructions and programs on the machines’ software.

The Comelec has yet to comply with the high court’s order as demanded by IT groups and election watchdogs because of disputes on the mechanics for the release of the code.

“We have to follow the law [on automated elections],” Lagman said. “The law says that the source code must be released to any interested body. So I will obviously recommend to the commission en banc that the source code and other documents be made public. They are all lawyers, so I know they will understand.”

Lagman last criticized the PCOS machines in January, when he asked the Comelec to disclose how much it was paying for the storage of the 900 units it had purchased from contractor Smartmatic for the resolution of election protests.

Namfrel nominee

Lagman was nominated to the Comelec position by various groups, including the National Citizens’ Movement for Free Elections (Namfrel), the Automated Election Systems Watch headed by former Comelec Chair Christian Monsod and the Makati Business Club.

Anti-PCOS, IT whiz named to Comelec

Written by By Christine O. Avendaño, Jerome Aning

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He is an incumbent member of Namfrel's national council, and has participated in the watchdog group's quick-count operations.

"We congratulate him. We know him, we know what he stands for, but we are still going to monitor his performance as commissioner. We will not treat him differently," Namfrel secretary general Eric Alvia said in a phone interview.

Alvia said Lagman was the third Namfrel official to be named to the Comelec, the first being Monsod and the second, Commissioner Abdul Gani Marahomsar, who served in the late 1990s.

Not a lawyer

Comelec Commissioner Rene Sarmiento also welcomed Lagman's appointment, saying: "I'm sure he has the sufficient wisdom and sense of patriotism for the good of the electoral democracy in the Philippines."

Both Brillantes and Sarmiento acknowledged Lagman's expertise in IT.

But they noted that Lagman was not a lawyer, and said the commissioners would discuss with him how he could help in the disposition of pending election cases.

Added value

Lagman said his knowledge of IT would be "an added value to the Comelec."

"The other six [commissioners] are all lawyers. I can help in the automation, in the setting of systems and procedures," he said.

Lagman said he would form a legal staff of election law experts to help him in the adjudication of election-related cases.

"The [Comelec] is a collegial body. I'm sure there's going to be a healthy discussion, and as I would listen to them when it comes to questions on law, I hope they would listen to me when it comes to questions on technology," he said.

He added that one of his "would-be requests" to the other commissioners was "to make everything transparent so that the public would know what we are talking about."

Lagman holds a degree in mechanical engineering from the University of the Philippines.

He was the president of the IT Association of the Philippines and of the Philippine Computer Society, and a lead convenor of TransparentElections.org.

According to his curriculum vitae, which Malacañang released to the media, he is the chair of Vinta Systems Inc. (developer of AI-oriented software products) and a director of Systems Technology Institute (STI) College Recto and Biometrics Technologies Inc.

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Lagman is the founding chair of STI and various STI campus colleges. He was also a director of the Subic Bay Metropolitan Authority and the first Hall of Fame awardee of the Philippine Computer Society.