

# The Message of President Quezon on Amendments of the Constitution of the Philippines \*

Mr. Speaker, Gentlemen of the  
National Assembly:

As you are convened in special session to consider amendments to the Constitution, I deem it appropriate to address you upon certain proposals which have engaged the attention of our people and upon which the Nationalist Party, in national convention assembled, has taken a positive and definite stand. I refer to the proposed amendments regarding the term of office of the President and the creation of a Senate elected at large.

The question of amending the Constitution is a very serious matter requiring most careful deliberation. The Constitution is the highest expression of the people's will. It is the supreme law of the land; the organic law of the state. It sets up the framework of the whole government. Unlike ordinary legislation, it must be considered as of a permanent character and should not be subjected to the transient changes of the public mind. But while the constitution should not be amended unless there are powerful reasons demanding such action, it would be most unwise to attach to that instrument the character of immutability generally attributed to the laws of the Medes and Persians. Social and political conditions are dynamic, and a constitution, like a living organism, should be adapted to the changing social and political order. The essence of constitutional government in a democracy is not that the constitution remain

the same for all time, but that all constitutional changes be effected only in the manner prescribed by the constitution itself.

Linked with the proposal to amend the Constitution regarding the term of office of the President is the movement to induce me to become a candidate for reelection.

It would be of no avail to ignore the fact that the idea of amending the Constitution in this respect was originally conceived and advanced for the only purpose of permitting my reelection. Since the beginning of my administration I have been receiving insistent requests from different elements of our population to consent to run for a second term. Municipal councils, provincial boards, labor unions, civic associations, and other political and social entities have passed resolutions endorsing the movement to secure my reelection. The Nationalist Party, to which almost every elective official of the national and local governments belongs, held as you know, a national convention last month and, with practical unanimity, urged the amendment of the Constitution so as to permit my continuance in office for another term. Quite a large number of members of this Assembly have repeatedly expressed themselves in favor of my reelection. On the occasion of my visits to the various provinces, cities, and municipalities throughout the country, I have been received with public demonstrations evincing a desire on the part of the people to have me continue in

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office. All these manifestations of public sentiment have created a general impression that a large majority of our people are in favor of amending the Constitution in order to permit my reelection. It is hardly necessary for me to say that these generous expressions of popular approval and appreciation which, rather than as personal tributes to myself, I take as evidences of public support of the policies of my administration and of the efforts that I have exerted to promote the general welfare, have touched me very deeply and have filled my heart with profound gratitude.

It is of vital importance that amendments to the Constitution be considered upon the high plane of principles rather than upon considerations of personal character, and in order that your action on the proposed constitutional amendment regarding the term of office of the President may not be influenced by the movement for my reelection, I desire to make my position clear on this matter.

From the very beginning I have tried to discourage any attempt to make way for my reelection. I must confess that, at first, I did this for reasons of personal preference or inclination—the longing to retire to private life with all the joys that it holds forth to a man who has been in the public service continuously for well-nigh forty years. Later on, however, when I realized that the movement to have me continue in office had rapidly gained ground, I felt that only considerations of public interest should be allowed to sway my decision on the question. The welfare of our nation was, as it now is, my prime concern. Consequently, I have given the matter the deepest thought and most careful deliberation in the spirit of a duti-

ful citizen ever willing and glad to serve his country regardless of the consequences to himself and his family. I sought guidance from the teachings of history. I tried to visualize the prevailing conditions in our country and essayed to scan the future in an effort to find the right course to pursue. I have weighed all the arguments advanced both for and against my continuance in office beyond my term of six years. I have come to the conclusion that, from the standpoint of the promotion of democracy and liberty in our country, the wholesome effect of my retirement at the end of my present term will far outweigh whatever benefits might be derived from my continuance in office beyond said term.

Fortunately, the affairs of our nation are such as to justify confidence in the future stability of our government. Law and order prevail throughout the land. The different parts of the program which I had set out to accomplish upon taking the reins of government are either completed or in the process of completion. The Government of the Commonwealth is fully organized. Our trade and other relations with the United States are on the way to a final and satisfactory settlement. We have initiated the work of economic planning and development and have stimulated wealth production to augment the national income. We have set our finances in order and have insured increasing revenues for the support of essential public services. We are rapidly building up a system of national defense that should prove adequate to safeguard our national security. We have established wholesome precedents in the government that should assure competency, honesty and economy in administration

and a just and efficient use of governmental powers. We have defined the basis of relationship between capital and labor and have created the machinery for the settlement of industrial disputes and for the protection of the rights of the working man. Social justice has been advanced, and we have set in motion powerful human forces that should bring about the attainment of our social objectives. What remains to be done can well be performed under the leadership of other men who may be elected to succeed me.

I have carefully considered the suggestion made by those who favor my reelection that to insure our country's welfare we should maintain the unity of our people and that I am, perhaps, in a better position than anyone else at this time to maintain that unity. Nothing gives me more concern than the possibility of our people being divided into two or more political camps at this critical period of our history, when divided counsel and antagonistic efforts may be of fatal consequences to the nation. But I have enough faith in the intelligence and patriotism of our people to believe that they will not fail to see the dangers of partisan strife, that reason rather than passion will rule their conduct, and that they will not allow our national solidarity to disintegrate.

There is one thought that has given me the gravest preoccupation in connection with the proposal to amend the Constitution so as to permit my reelection. It is the dangerous precedent that might be established in amending a constitutional or legal provision affecting a person in office who is in a position to exert some influence in securing the amendment and allowing him to benefit by it. In the future, some ambitious and unscrupulous politician might invoke

such a precedent in order to perpetuate his power. This would endanger the liberties of our people, and I am horrified at the thought that I might in any way be the cause of the destruction of those liberties for which I have fought and to which I have consecrated my life.

Gentlemen of the National Assembly, I have laid before you my attitude and views on the question of my reelection. With a keen sense of my responsibility and with the welfare of our people at heart, I wish to state frankly that if my present term of office is allowed to run its full length, I would consider it my inescapable duty not to make myself available for reelection.

As I stated to you on a previous occasion, I shall be forced to become a candidate only if my present term of office is reduced, but I hope that this will not be done. No practical results can be obtained by keeping me in office for two years more. The proposal to shorten the term of office of the President from six to four years, if adopted, may be given a prospective effect so as not to disturb my present tenure.

In the light of the principles of democratic government, the term of six years fixed in the Constitution for the President would seem to be too long. The American constitution provides for a four-year term only, without any limitation as to the number of times the incumbent may be reelected. This system seems to be more in harmony with democratic principles than the one we have adopted—a six-year term without reelection. But I do not have any strong opinion in favor of one system as against the other. I am inclined to the belief that considering the

present existing conditions in our country, if the six-year term is maintained, reelection should be prohibited, and if a four-year term be preferred, then only one reelection should be permitted.

I shall now turn to the question of the creation of a Senate. There are countries which have adopted a unicameral legislature, but even in these countries, the establishment of the system has been viewed as an experiment. In the United States only one State has adopted the unicameral system. In this country our experience prior to the establishment of the Commonwealth has been with a bicameral legislature. The adoption of a unicameral legislature by the Constitutional Convention was not the result of a pre-conceived plan. On the contrary, the original report submitted by the Committee on Legislative Department of the Convention recommended a bicameral legislature with a Senate elected at large. The adoption of the unicameral system was merely due to an irreconcilable divergence of views among the members of the Convention as to the manner of electing the Senate, and not because of known or admitted evils of the bicameral system, nor on account of the pressure of public opinion.

In advocating the creation of a Senate, I do so with full appreciation of the excellent work of the National Assembly. It is only fair to state that a bicameral legislature could not have done better than this Assembly. But notwithstanding this fact, I am convinced that in the long run it would be to the best interest of our country to have a bicameral instead of a unicameral legislature. The contention that a unicameral legislature is a forward stride in democratic government is premised on the

theory that the second chamber represents not the people but special interests, such as the nobility, the church, the intellectual aristocracy, capital, or as it used to be in the United States, the several states of the Union. The proposed Senate, however, will be an elective body.

Before the establishment of the Commonwealth the senators were elected by senatorial districts; as now proposed they will be elected by the people at large. The two chambers, as contemplated, will have separate functions. The lower house would express the sentiment of the people in the different localities or districts while the senate would express the sentiment of the nation as a whole. The lower house would voice local interests and views, while the Senate would reflect the relative importance that the whole nation gives to such interests and views. The House would have the vision and aggressive enthusiasm of youth, while the Senate would be tempered by the hard lessons of experience. Furthermore, the consequent double consideration and discussion of legislative measures will give time for a more mature judgment and the crystalization of public opinion. The passions of the moment would not easily sway the members of both houses at the same time. As the members of the Senate are to be elected at large, their perspective of national problems will be broad and discriminating. They will not represent provinces or districts, but the entire nation. They will, therefore, think and act not in regional but in national terms.

Moreover, the creation of a Senate elected at large will offer a greater opportunity for the formation of national leaders. As the candidates for the Senate will have

to be nominated by national political parties, the electoral campaign will be waged throughout the country on the basis of principles and not on personalities.

Lastly by the creation of a Senate, we will remedy a most dangerous defect in our Constitution with reference to impeachment. With a bicameral legislature, the House would initiate the proceedings and the Senate would try and pass judgment on the charges, whereas now the National Assembly, through its Commission on Impeachment, is the accuser, and also the judge when, as a body, it decides impeachment cases.

Gentlemen of the National Assembly, in proposing that you share with another body, the powers of legislation which now you alone exercise, I know that I am asking something which, being human, it would be natural for you not to grant, but I beseech you to consider the question not as it affects you personally as members of this body but as it concerns the paramount and enduring interests of our country.

Before closing, I think this is an appropriate occasion for me to submit for your serious consideration the need of safeguarding by constitutional provision the purity

of the elections. This is far more important than the question of whether a presidential reelection should be permitted or not. As long as elections are held at reasonable intervals and the people are permitted freely to elect the man whom they desire to entrust with the highest office of the land, self-government will remain unimpaired and democracy and liberty preserved in this country.

The provision embodied in the Constitution against the reelection of the President was prompted by the fear that an incumbent of that high office might use his great power to frustrate the will of the electorate. To preclude the possibility of any chief executive interfering with the elections, I propose that an office, independent of the executive, be constitutionally created to take charge of the enforcement of the election law. Appointment to such an office should be for a definite term, and the incumbent should be removable only through impeachment or judicial proceedings.

Gentlemen of the National Assembly: May God give you light in your deliberations and may your decision be for the greater happiness and liberty of our people.

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