

“STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS”
MAYOR EVELIO R. LEONARDIA
City of Bacolod
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INTRODUCTION

Time flies, indeed. It seems like it was only yesterday when, last October 2010, I also stood before you to deliver my State of the City Address, which by now, I believe, has become a tradition in Bacolod City after I was the first Mayor to deliver this Address way back in 1995.

Not a few times, I had been asked by our constituents why did I start this local governance practice for transparency and accountability and how was I able to comply with my pledge to report to you each year that I was sitting as Chief Executive. There are a number of major reasons why I did all these but one thing is clear – I always go through this exercise simply because there is always something to report!

It is also heartening that at the recent annual Philippine Business Conference of the Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry, where Bacolod City was among the National Finalists in the “Most Business-Friendly City in the Philippines” contest, President Benigno S. Aquino III himself said that “transparency and accountability are the basic foundations of good governance.” Yes, we all agree that is not debatable at all.

And what has been a motivating factor all these years is that - for all that is there in local governance and politics – its twists and turns, ups and downs, the challenges and other unpredictable and even unimaginable things that could happen - the privilege and honor of serving our people is still a rewarding and fulfilling endeavor.

And one of our latest sources of encouragement and inspiration came from no less than the very Department of the national government that has the direct supervision, guidance and authority over our local government units. We are happy to have been informed that the Department of Interior and Local Government has given us the “Seal of Good Housekeeping” after their comprehensive monitoring and evaluation. Here, we belong to the only 43 cities out of the 138 cities in the country today that have been given this honor and distinction.

This DILG project aims to recognize local government units with good governance performance in internal housekeeping particularly in four (4) areas, namely, Good Planning, Sound Fiscal Management, Transparency and Accountability, and Valuing of Performance Monitoring.

The focus of the DILG testing was in key governance areas in planning, budgeting, revenue mobilization, financial management and budget execution, procurement, and resource mobilization.

The results of the rigid evaluation of the DILG is another validation that, for sure, Bacolod City is among the LGUs with sound local government practices. While other prestigious and credible agencies and organizations have already recognized the growth and fast development of our city, this time, it is no less than the competent authority in local governance that has officially given us its stamp of approval.

It has been another robust year for our city in many areas of local governance, infrastructure, social services and in many other fields, especially the economy in general. But before we go to some highlights of the year just passed, may I thank Vice-Mayor Thaddy Sayson and the Sangguniang Panlungsod Members for hosting me again in this - - my 11th State of the City Address.

FISCAL MANAGEMENT

For the period July 1, 2010 to June 30, 2011, we collected revenues amounting to P1.213 billion. Collections for the second half of 2010 amounted to P685 million or 49% of the target collection for calendar year 2010, while that of the first half of 2011 totaled P685 million or 58% of target collection for calendar year 2011.

For year 2011, the target collection is P1.180 billion. P585 million was collected from January 1 to June 30, 2011. In only half a year, this is already 58% of target. If this trend continues, then it is likely that the city will be able to reach its collection target of P1.180 billion.

Last year, when I said that the revision of our Local Revenue Code was overdue - it was really overdue! This is when we consider the fact that it was a long way back in 1993, or 18 years ago, when we last amended our LRC. Today, it becomes even more imperative in the light of the “double whammy” that is sure to hit us and all other cities because of the creation of 16 new cities and the reduction of the national revenue collection 3 years ago which is the basis of our Internal Revenue Allotment (IRA).

These two financial “tsunamis” will result to a reduction in our 2012 IRA by about P78-million. Expectedly, this will substantially decrease our budget for next year. The only consolation for us, if at all, is that all cities existing before the new 16 cities were created, under very questionable circumstances, are similarly situated. Misery loves company, they say.

Seriously, however, when faced with these financial ramifications, it would seem that the only logical and immediate antidote to our predicament is the passing of a revised Revenue Code. We hope the business sector, especially the giants, will find our intention to raise revenues more than justified. They have harvested the bonanza of the relatively low tax rates that have been prevailing in this vibrant city for almost 18 years. It is the right time that the city imposes a more realistic and appropriate tax rates given the needs and demands of a growing and progressive environment.

CALL CENTERS

Our city’s call center operations continue to grow and looks very promising. There are now twenty-one operators in our city. Among the major players are global firms such as Convergys, Pan-Asiatic Solutions, TelePhilippines, Teletech, and Transcom Worldwide. These are giants in the industry and their continued presence provides stability and stimulates the vibrancy of our economy.

Call centers employ about 9,000 to 10,000. Just recently, Pan-Asiatic announced that it is commissioning 1,000 more seats. Convergys is also eyeing the 14-storey SanParq 2 Building for its expansion.

We estimate the payroll paid to call center employees at P142.5 million monthly, meaning 9,500 employees earning an average P15,000 a month, or P1.710 billion annually.

It is worth mentioning again that Bacolod City was declared among the Top 3 of the “10 Next Wave Cities of the Philippines.” Aside from this, strategic adviser New York based, Tholons, Inc.,

listed Bacolod among the Top 100 Outsourcing Cities in 2010! Our stature and reputation are factors that keep investors looking toward our direction.

PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURES

Our City Engineer’s Office completed projects worth P166.4 million for the period ending June 30, 2011. The lion’s share went to roads at P57.72 million, then followed by buildings and structures, P51.97 million and water facilities, P30.34 million. Drainage systems were also attended to at a cost of P12.52 million, while some P10.11 million was spent for streetlights.

Our engineers are now working on on-going projects worth P199.95 million, with the biggest chunk allotted for roads at P126.05 million and bridges, P49.95 million.

Included in the ongoing projects is the development cost of the Granada-Vista Alegre Resettlement Area at P99.98 million which is 91.75% complete as of June 30, 2011.

The allotment for bridges of P49.95 million consists of the following:

1. Gatuslao Extension/Robinson Bridge for P19.31 million at 21.53% completion
2. Banago Bridge for P16 million at 92.21% completion
3. Alijis-Taculing Bridge for P14.59 million at 54.52% completion

After waiting for almost 7 years, we now have our first flyover courtesy of the national government. It was way back in 2004 when the President's Bridge Program team came to the City to discuss the flyover construction with the Mayor's office. But all is well that ends well, so the flyover not only facilitates traffic in the major junction of Lacson and the Circumferential Road but it also complements the operations of the 2 big north-bound terminals.

We consider this infrastructure as a symbol of a growing and progressive city.

It is also interesting to note that the published cost of this 195-meter fly-over is P365 million. We would like this viewed in comparison to the massive P394 million New Government Center structure with a floor area of more than one hectare plus an imposing lagoon with fountains.

We wish to directly address this to those who, clearly motivated by negative politics, attacked the NGC project alleging that it was over-priced. It is on record that the NGC went through at least two technical inspections by the Commission on Audit and it passed both audits with flying colors. When the Ombudsman dismissed the 13 cases filed against me and those who supported the project, it said that "we find nothing anomalous in the construction of the Bacolod City Government Center."

Furthermore, when we consider that, as reported, the new City Hall of a neighboring city will cost about P 720 million, where does that put our New Government Center? When compared to other government infrastructure projects, therefore, the NGC is now smelling like a rose.

PRIVATE CONSTRUCTION

Private construction projects and their multiplier effects contribute greatly to the economy of the city. Thus, we are happy to note that the construction industry is booming.

After years of consistently registering more than a billion pesos in construction estimates, we have finally breached the 2-billion peso mark! Yes, this is another record and a definite indicator that our economy is moving fast forward when we consider employment generation and its effects on commerce and trade, among others.

Based on data from the building permits issued by the Office of the Building Official in 2010-2011, total construction cost reached P2.034 billion, with 1,235 permits granted covering a total area of 240,391 square meters.

Last year, I made an advance announcement that two giant structures would change the landscape of Bacolod. Today, we can see, in steel and concrete, two of our tallest buildings almost finished. We have an 8-storey structure along B. S. Aquino Drive and the imposing 14-storey San Parq 2 building along Lacson Street in Mandalagan which, considering its location, in a manner of speaking, serves as some kind of a "welcome tower" to our visitors arriving from the Bacolod-Silay Domestic Airport.

And come to think about it, 2 big-bus terminals, a flyover and a high rise structure literally greet all those coming to our city from the north. Indeed, they instantly paint a picture of how far and high Bacolod City has gone.

EMPLOYMENT, OFWs AND LIVELIHOOD SERVICES

For this year, the Public Employment Service Office (PESO) of the city performed creditably well as evidenced by the local and regional awards it received as best performing PESO in Negros Occidental and Region 6. In fact, this office has consistently topped the region in the last 7 years. In the 2011 National PESO Congress held in Davao City, our PESO was adjudged # 3 Top Performer in the country.

This service office helped employers and job seekers meet in the internet and in person. For the period covered, they processed 17,395 job applicants, of which 8,347 were placed and deployed as follows: local employment, 2,317 and 6,152 for overseas .

Our Sectoral Concerns Office assisted Bacolodnons working overseas and their families left behind in the various problems that they went through.

In 2010, the facilities of the office were provided to 20 Overseas Filipino Workers (OFW) and for the first half of 2011, another 13 were assisted in their various concerns such as the areas of lost contact/communication, legal assistance and repatriation.

The City Cooperative and Livelihood Development Office was a major partner of the League of Cooperative Development Officers and the Cooperative Development Authority in holding the 5th National Tripartite Conference on Development of Cooperatives last September which brought about 2,000 delegates into our hotel rooms.

This office is now finalizing its plan to put up a showroom in the first floor of the City Hall for products created by small producers it helped organized.

HOUSING AND RESETTLEMENT

Our concerns with informal dwellers continue to be a priority. We must accept the reality that as the city progresses and provides more opportunities, many from other towns and cities will come in search for that proverbial greener pastures. Consequently, however, many of them will end-up as informal dwellers. But that is how it is and we simply have to attend to all of them, even when we do so subject to certain policies and regulations we may impose.

Among cities, we have one of the largest resettlement sites. It means a total land area of 188.9 hectares divided into 12,521 lots.

The initial development of Granada-Vista Alegre Phase 2 will soon be completed offering 1,379 lots that will be awarded to those already served with eviction notices and those living in danger zones as identified by the Task Force Baha.

The National Housing Authority and the Housing and Urban Development Coordinating Council (HUDCC) committed to provide funds to develop additional areas, between 5 to 10 hectares, of the Granada-Vista Alegre 2.

AGRICULTURAL PROJECTS

Our City Agriculture Office supported the different barangays by dispersing vegetable seeds to 1,076 beneficiaries and 1,696 fruit trees and vegetable seedlings to 195 recipients.

Our Bantay-Dagat undertook 216 sea-borne patrol operations against illegal fishing and made 68 apprehensions.

SLAUGHTERHOUSE & VETERINARY SERVICES

For the first half of 2011, the city collected from the slaughterhouse P657,216, while for the entire year of 2010, it collected P1.275M and for 2009, P1.014M. The average monthly collections in 2011 is P109,536. Considering that before the operation of this new slaughterhouse, this was an expense account of about P9 million annually, this has been reversed to become an income generating unit. But, more importantly, its operation is our assurance of safe and sanitary meat products, which was sorely lacking in the old and dilapidated set-up.

For the year ending June 30, 2011, large animals slaughtered totaled 17,180 heads equivalent to 3,119 metric tons while small ones, 94,674 heads or 6,752 metric tons.

They also vaccinated 38,213 dogs and cats owned by 22,014 clients under its mass vaccination program funded by the city and supported by a grant of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation which donated 2,531 vials good for 23,510 vaccinations.

HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

Our City Population Office installed Community-Based Demographic Information System in 50 of our 61 barangays as they advocated for inclusion of Population and Development concepts in the Barangay Development Plans.

It conducted 30 symposia/orientations on Adolescent Health and Youth Development Program in the barangays and schools. Also, it conducted 70 classes on Responsible Parenting to 1,400 couples for food, 1,000 couples for 4Ps beneficiaries and 1,000 new acceptors of family planning.

DAY CARE SERVICES

The Department of Social Services and Development continues to successfully run the 115 Day-Care centers catering to 8,140 children. 27 Child Development Workers are also attending to 810 two-year old toddlers under the supervised neighborhood play facilities.

Our well-balanced programs in this field has consistently made our city recipient of the Most Child-Friendly City award in the regional level and for this year, we are again Malacañang-bound as a National Finalist for the same award. In fact, for many years now, we had consistently been a National Finalist.

EDUCATION

Education is still a top priority of our city. We are pleased that due to the substantial increase in our real estate tax collections, the share of the Special Education Fund for our public elementary and high schools has now reached P140 million.

The enrollment in our elementary schools for school year 2010-2011 was 60,598 while it was only 59,129 last year. High school enrollment in school year 2010-2011, on the other hand, dipped to 28,294 from last year's 29,212.

The Superintendent of Schools for the District of Bacolod reported that for school year 2010-2011, our student to classroom ratio of 40:1 met the requirements of the Fair and Equitable Access to Education Act.

Living up to the covenant of this administration with our public school teachers, 2,730 received a total of P38 million for their Emergency Cost of Living Allowance (ECOLA). Each teacher received P1,500 a month or P18,000 a year as assistance of the city to help strengthen the quality of our educational system.

BACOLOD CITY COLLEGE

The Bacolod City College enrolment increased by 20 per cent from 2,752 last year to 3,329 this year. This is attributed to the entry of 1,743 freshmen and the biggest enrolment is in the two-year ladderized Associate in Computer Technology.

with 810 students. Of course, it is something to marvel at when we consider that it was only 135 students when I established this in 1997. And now it is already 3,329.

We forged an agreement with the United States Peace Corps Volunteers, through the initiative of Mr. Justin Tabor, for the establishment of the Media Resource Center and Training Program at BCC Taculing.

Our City College garnered, again, a higher passing percentage over the national average passing rate in the Licensure Examination for Teachers held on Sept. 26, 2010. BCC has consistently hurdled the examinations since

2006 with a topnotch 14th Placer in the 2008 LET in the person of Jayson Asuelo. Our Teacher Education is the flagship curricular program of the College.

Let it be on record that the tuition fee is still P30 per unit, one of the lowest in the country today.

SPORTS DEVELOPMENT

As a measure of the level of sports development, our students representing Bacolod reaped 35 gold medals during the Palarong Pambansa and another 36 golds during the Philippine National Games.

A big boost to interest in sports came from several big regional, national and international events staged here in our city. These include the Philippine Azkals vs. Mongolia football match, the Asia-Pacific Softball Competition, the Philippine Sports Commission and Samahan ng Basketball ng Pilipinas International Women's Basketball Invitational, the 35th National Milo Marathon Bacolod Eliminations and the Philippine National Games 2011.

Our city also played host to two boxing bouts of our very own world champion Donnie "Ahas" Nietes, one of which was his historic victory to clinch the World Boxing Organization Light Flyweight Championship, his second world title. And what is most significant is - it was the first world boxing championship ever held in our city.

HEALTH SERVICES

While our City Health Office made inroads in some fields, what was most remarkable was the 91% drop in our Dengue cases. From a high of 3,744 cases in the January to October period in 2010, we recorded only 327 cases within the same period this year. This is very significant when we consider the seriousness of Dengue that has alarmed our community many times.

But of course we cannot let our guards down because Dengue continues to be a threat and we must pursue continuous information and education campaigns and attack mosquito breeding grounds with anti-larvicidal chemicals. Community and barangay involvement and participation will always be a key factor in combating Dengue.

The CHO continues to offer several examinations, diagnostic and therapeutic services availed by thousands.

We provided assistance to the tune of P9.2 million to 5,148 patients hospitalized in the Corazon Locsin Montelibano Memorial Regional Hospital (CLMMRH) while we contributed P1.5 million to the Red Cross in support of its blood banking operations benefitting patients from our city.

One of our significant contributions to specialized health services is the city-funded construction of the now operational Bacolod City Eye Center which is managed by the CLMMRH and assisted by our manpower services. This responds to the needs of a large segment of our population who, because of the aging process and other attendant conditions, must attend to their eye care.

Meanwhile, the lying-in center we opened last year as a joint venture with the Riverside Medical Center has proven to be a big help to our clientele recording 1,266 births. This has helped decongest the regional hospital, which used to be the traditional birthing facility.

SENIOR CITIZENS

Our city has thrown its full support to the senior citizens in their efforts to organize, support each other, and to avail of benefits provided to them by law.

For the first half of 2011, 3,344 identification cards and 7,237 booklets were issued bringing the totals issued from January 1, 2007 to 20,061 cards and 64,576 booklets.

The four Nugabest therapy machines acquired by the DSSD that provide therapeutic massage to the elderly, has conducted 5,911 sessions in only the first half of the year, that sums up to a total of 41,055 sessions since it started in January 2007.

TOURISM

The tourism sector continues to impact our economy with sustained tourist arrivals justifying the investments poured into additional room capacity by local investors.

In 2010, 363,617 tourists came. Domestic accounted for 224,364, foreign, 101,484 and OFW, 37,769. South Koreans, mostly students taking special courses in English language, still topped the list of foreign visitors at 67,901.

Based on an Average Daily Expenditure of P2,918 per guidelines of the Department of Tourism, we estimate the total receipts of the 363,617 tourists at P1.061 billion. This development is also reflected in the dramatic increase in our room capacity from only 1,612 rooms in 2004, when I assumed as Mayor, to 2,678 at present. Total bed capacity is already 5,356.

Our MassKara Festival has grown by leaps and bounds. The innovations adopted by our local organizers and artists coupled with the enthusiasm and intensity of the participants in the different highlights resulted to making the festival among the most colorful and popular in the country today.

A very strong indication of the reach and drawing-power of the MassKara is reflected in the early hotel bookings and the full occupancy status that occurs in all our accommodation facilities inspite of having the most number of hotel rooms in Western Visayas, outside of Boracay.

The Bacolaodiat is not far behind either. The crowds that this Chinese New Year celebration can gather is now catching up with that of the MassKara. The prospects of this tourism event reaching its full potentials in the near future excite stake holders in the local tourism industry.

We really can claim now that we are one of the very few cities with two major festivals.

After so many sisterhood pacts that we had forged between our city and other cities in the domestic and international fronts, we have finally signed an agreement with our neighbor and natural partner for development-- Iloilo City. We greatly value this "twinning" relations because our proximity and similarities in resources, culture, business, trade and industry provide us with limitless potentials and possibilities to grow together if we combine our forces.

We make special mention of Mayor Jed Mabilog who was major factor in this endeavor, and we are happy to note that this agreement has already resulted to Iloilo City deciding to establish its own city college patterned after our own Bacolod City College.

PEACE AND ORDER

In a survey conducted by reputable agencies, our city was cited as 2nd best in the country in terms of "Quality of Life" which is an indication of how well "the environment and the safety and security in the city" is taken cared of. This is a validation that we are relatively peaceful.

Late last year, the Bacolod City Police Office was given a new Director who reinvigorated the police force and devised new strategies, programs and plans. As a result, our police records registered no high profile crimes. Likewise, crime incidents went down significantly from 2,367 to 1,640 showing a decrease of 727 or 30.71%. Despite having only 515 personnel and a police-population ratio of 1:1,059, the local police was able to keep the citizens of Bacolod City generally safe from lawless elements.

The Crisis Management Committee and the Critical Incident Management Task Group were organized to address crisis/hostage situations. In addition, the city government allocated P1.5 million for the training and

acquisition of equipment for our Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) Team, while still processing the acquisition of 6 additional patrol cars worth P3.4 million to acquire and enhance police visibility. To cater to the needs of our foreign and local tourists, the City Director ordered all police stations to organize their respective Tourist Assistance Desks.

TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT

A new head was appointed to the Traffic Management Unit who, at the same time, was made to handle the Bacolod Traffic Authority Office. New strategies were implemented particularly in the downtown area and major thoroughfares.

As a concrete example of public-private partnership, Robinson's Place installed, at their own expense, traffic lights that vastly improved the flow of vehicles in that highly congested area in Barangay Mandalagan, especially during the peak hours.

The South Terminal ordinance was implemented. Vested interests questioned the move but nonetheless we pursued the same leading to the decongestion of the Libertad South Market area and smoother flow of traffic in the vicinity.

When our history books are written someday, this period will stand out as the time when the traffic system in Bacolod underwent a major and bold restructuring to decongest the central parts of the city by transferring the north-bound terminal to an area near the boundary of Bacolod and Talisay. This effectively prevented the entry, into the inner parts of the city, of public transport vehicles from all towns and cities in the north. We are now spared from the congestion that the thousands of trips in and out Bacolod could bring about. There was a substantial reduction of motor vehicles plying city streets while at the same time, Bacolod-based public utility drivers were provided with more income opportunities.

Because of the resounding success of the north-bound terminal transfer, it is now ripe for us to finalize the study and pursue the implementation of the transfer of our South-bound terminal to a similar arrangement.

DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

The city intensified its preparedness and the dissemination of awareness on the reality of floods and how to deal with them when they come. This is now a reality we have to face as we have seen the damages and dangers that climate change has brought to other parts of the country as well as in other countries. As one top Department of Science and Technology official, referring to climate change, said "what was abnormal before is now considered normal".

Since we cannot stop nor run away from the forces of nature, we have only one recourse – that is to prepare for any eventuality.

Through the effort of our concerned offices, the Infrastructure Development Committee of the Regional Development Council has officially endorsed our request to have a Master Drainage Plan that was subsequently approved by the Department of Public Works and Highways. An initial P6 million was released for the first stage survey of our existing drainage system that will result to the eventual comprehensive master plan for our city.

SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT

Our city allotted substantial resources to its Department of Public Services (DPS) so that it can satisfactorily perform its duty of cleaning our streets, collecting our garbage and maintaining our dumpsite.

During the calendar year ending December 31, 2010, The DPS collected 56,319 metric tons of garbage with a volume of 165,578 cubic meters, using 40 units of equipment.

The construction of our Sanitary Landfill located in Barangay Felisa is expected to be completed soon. This will put

us in the league of the first few cities to comply with this major requirement of Republic Act 9003 or the Ecological Solid Waste Management Act.

In keeping up with modern trends and practices in other major cities, we should now finalize our study and strategy to privatize the collection of garbage which has been proven efficient and effective in other localities. Given the red tape and hindrances that usually come with government operations, this is a step expected to improve our garbage collection system which has become gigantic and complex considering our rapid economic growth and continuing increase in population.

WHERE WE ARE NOW

My beloved people of Bacolod, one of the most pleasing things to hear is when we meet visitors and balikbayans and they would tell us that Bacolod City has made a giant leap, changed a lot, that said transformation is evident and the face of the city is far much more different and improved than what it was some years back.

Even just to hear those positive things about our city is exhilarating. But more than that, we have solid and concrete signs that indeed our city is surging ahead. And this is because we have our fundamentals in place.

To put things in their proper perspective, let us again summarize some highlights of our achievements in our quest to make our city one of the premiere growth areas in the country.

The construction boom we have been experiencing in the past years is unprecedented. For the first time ever, we have breached the P2 Billion mark for construction projects within a span of one year! Commercial, industrial and residential buildings are sprouting in many areas and our landscape is dramatically changing. The two tallest buildings are symbolic that the city is reaching greater heights.

In our last report, we highlighted that the Commission on Information and Communication Technology, Department of Trade and Industry and the Business Process Outsourcing

Association of the Philippines identified Bacolod City as # 3 among the “10 Next Wave Cities of the Philippines.”

They also revealed that in the areas of “business environment and risk management,” Bacolod City is # 1.

Then more recently, the international strategic advisory firm for global outsourcing and investments, Tholons Inc., announced that Bacolod City is ranked # 100 in their list of the “Top 100 Outsourcing Cities” in the world. Of course, when we consider that there are probably thousands of cities all over the globe, being # 100 is something to crow about.

When the Asian Institute of Management, the United States Agency for International Development and the German Technical Cooperation first released the results of the Philippine Cities Competitiveness Ranking Project, we were given the top trophy for “Best in Compliance with Government Mandated Programs.” More interestingly, later, when they submitted a more comprehensive survey results, we were informed that Bacolod ranked # 2 out of the “10 Growth Centers of the Philippines” on the basis of:

1. Dynamism of the Economy
2. Cost of Doing Business
3. Infrastructure
4. Human Resource Training
5. Responsiveness of LGU to Business Needs and
6. Quality of Life.

According to their evaluation score card, in the aspect of “Responsiveness of LGU to Business Needs” which is defined as “the degree to which the LGU facilitates or hinders doing business,” we are very proud to announce that Bacolod City is ranked # 1!

“Quality of Life”, on the other hand, is defined as “the quality of the environment and the level of safety and security in the City” and here we ranked # 2.

A few years back, the Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry proclaimed Bacolod as the “Most Business- Friendly City in the Visayas” in 2006 and in 2007 and also the “Most Business-Friendly City in the Philippines” in 2007. This year, we are again among the National Finalists in this contest.

During the past months, with much interest, we have been watching the developments of the move of the Provincial Government of Negros Occidental to open for business venture their prime 7-hectare property located in the heart of Bacolod City. We are not privy to the details of the transactions but we feel flattered that the business empires of the Ayala and SM groups are fighting over a piece of the action inside Bacolod City.

If these titans “who know their business” would exert extra efforts to invest in Bacolod, there must be something good here. They must have seen “gold mines” in Bacolod City, so to speak. They could not be wrong and that is inspiring and reassuring for us Bacolodnons.

Another cause for celebration is, as mentioned earlier in this speech, the DILG has bestowed upon us the “Seal of Good House Keeping.” This, according to Secretary Jesse Robredo, is “a recognition of Local Governments that accord primacy to the principles of accountability and transparency which are essential in building the long term foundation of a responsible local government system in the country.”

The “Seal” is in addition to our recognition by the European Union Funded Project Partnership for Democratic Local Governance in South East Asia where they decided to select Bacolod City as the only pilot city out of the 122 cities in the Philippines. Their criteria, among others, include “good track records in exercising local government functions; solid potential of human resources and strong leadership of the Mayor and senior local government officials.”

All these tell us that our City is very positively viewed consistently by credible, prestigious, competent, scientific and non-political agencies and institutions. This is not just something sporadic. We have been consistently making it. This is now our reality. And our biggest challenge and mandate is - we must sustain our growth and momentum. We must protect our gains and maintain our lead.

In spite of all these positive developments however, we have to hurdle coming challenges. As pointed out earlier, the financial troubles that may come about because of the IRA reduction to the tune of P78 million will force us to likewise reduce our proposed budget for 2012. At the same time, the implementation of the Salary Standardization Law is inevitable, which means allocating P40 million fixed for that purpose alone. This gives us lesser flexibility with our resources.

Allow me, therefore, to once again appeal to our business community and the general public - - let us accept the revision of our Local Revenue Code in the light of realities that this is long overdue. Other cities of similar stature as ours had amended their Revenue Code three or more times in the last 18 years while we have never done so. We need more resources now to provide for the needs of our fast growing city.

To our Vice-Mayor and Sangguniang Panlungsod Members, I seek your support and cooperation on this vital issue. I suggested this in my last Address and I am appealing once again for the early passage of the Revised Revenue Code. And it is also essential that this Code should take effect by January 1, 2012 because this will have a definitive bearing on our revenue collections for the next budget year.

DOING BETTER THAN OUR BEST

But then I continue to have a positive outlook. Because, as a people, we are known for our capability to face adversities. Even our very own MassKara Festival is a celebration of our fighting spirit, capacity to survive, and resiliency. So we will face these challenges head-on and we shall overcome. Because, in the past, in the many obstacles and trials that we went through, we have always struggled, survived and bounced back with vengeance. And we did make it because we always try to do our best.

Among the major factors why our city has continued to surge ahead is because of the generally peaceful and harmonious relationship between our Executive and Legislative branches. Against the prediction of doomsayers when this new set of city officials assumed office in June 2010, that it would be a shaky and tumultuous administration, we have proven them wrong. We have set aside political differences to achieve our common goals. For this, I am satisfied as I know this is what our people expect from us – to work together for the good of our city.

As we move closer to the next political exercise in 2013, however, there are now some political quarters who are out to torpedo the relatively peaceful and harmonious relationship we have worked for and developed. These political manipulators are not happy that our collective administration is leading our beloved city to progress and prosperity. Their agenda is precisely to stop this administration from achieving its goals and objectives. Because for them, if we fail, they will succeed in their political ambitions. But we cannot afford to fail, because if we do our city will also fail. We must not allow that to happen.

There are moves to sow intrigues and divide us. Divide us, so they can rule. May I therefore appeal to my fellow political leaders, let us not give these dubious groups the chance to dislocate or derail what we have already established. Let our conscience rule us. Let us run this administration according to what is good for the best interest of the city.

These opposing political forces will do what their political agenda will push them to do, but let us decide according to what is going to be the greatest good for the greatest number. Let us not allow them to pollute our thoughts nor blur our vision for a better Bacolod. Please, my esteemed colleagues, let us not allow them.

As I conclude, once again, I say that the only way we can move fast forward is when we can work together as a team. For all the major programs and projects that we have undertaken and achieved, I thank Vice-Mayor Thaddy Sayson and the Sagguniang Panlungsod Members, all the barangay and purok officials, the departments heads and all employees of the Bacolod City Government. There would have been no modern Slaughter House, New Relocation Site, Sanitary Landfill, North Bound Terminal and even our New Government Center, if not for them because they share with me the vision to make Bacolod City the best place to live in the Philippines. It is true that when we do our best – we also get the best.

So, my beloved people of Bacolod, to preserve our gains, sustain our growth and prosperity and achieve our goal to bring Bacolod City to greater heights – let us do better than our best. When we are faced with adversities and also when we are faced with the challenge to maintain and even accelerate the growth and development that we have achieved, this is one time that we are expected to be doing better than our best. As our city continues to grow, move forward and surge ahead, our lifestyle will become more sophisticated and the needs and the demands of the times will also become bigger and much more challenging, our people expect us to be **DOING BETTER THAN OUR BEST!**

And may the Almighty continue to shower us with His richest blessings.

Maayong hapon kag madamu gid nga salamat sa inyo tanan!!

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