

JDV absolved GMA in NBN, Northrail deals – Villafuerte

The purported testimony of former speaker Jose de Venecia Jr. in the dismissed impeachment complaint only doomed renewed attempts to oust President Arroyo from office, Camarines Sur Rep. Luis Villafuerte said.

He said the Pangasinan lawmaker unwittingly cleared Mrs. Arroyo of any wrongdoing because of his "dud" testimony.

Villafuerte cited the controversial \$500-million Northrail project, which De Venecia's son and namesake Joey had used as one of the grounds for the impeachment complaint.

The former speaker surprisingly declared the contract was "above-board," which only caused more con-

fusion in the case, he said.

Even before any investigating panel could clear him, De Venecia absolved himself of any liability, which was based on long-running rumors that he allegedly got huge commissions in the overpriced contract since he was among the principal brokers with the Chinese government.

"He (De Venecia) even completely absolved everybody, saying they are all clean. While he is accusing the President, he is the proponent of Northrail," Villafuerte said.

Villafuerte said De Venecia had admitted that he is responsible for the Northrail deal.

"A person is caught with what comes out of his mouth," Villafuerte

By **DELON PORCALLA**

said. "So who is dirty? Who is the liar? If we will believe him, so the liar is his son."

Villafuerte said Joey filed the impeachment complaint by including the Northrail deal that his father had brokered.

On the other hand, the elder De Venecia professed innocence on the alleged irregularities, in stark contrast to the substance of the complaint, Villafuerte said.

He said using De Venecia as a witness in the complaint only doomed the chances of the opposition to unseat the President since the former speaker did not even defend the complaint that his son had filed.

Another blunder De Venecia committed was when he stated publicly the Chinese government's strict policy against anomalous transactions.

"How can anyone ask for commission from the Chinese government? In China, if you commit corruption or malfeasance, you will be shot by firing squad," Villafuerte quoted De Venecia as saying.

Villafuerte said De Venecia's statements only suggested that both Northrail

and NBN contracts are aboveboard.

Villafuerte also highlighted the "conflict of interest" of Joey de Venecia.

Being the son of then Speaker of the House of Representatives, Villafuerte said Joey should have realized the impropriety of entering into government transactions that could have compromised his father's position in the government.

Joey, representing Amsterdam Holdings Inc., lost his bid in the NBN contract to ZTE Corp.

He came out with guns blazing by implicating First Gentleman Jose Miguel Arroyo and elections chief Benjamin Abalos of coining the deal for the Chinese telecommunications firm.

Both Arroyo and Abalos denied brokering the deal with ZTE. Abalos was pressured to resign as chairman of the Commission on Elections.

Villafuerte explained that under the Anti-Graft Law (Republic Act 3019), relatives of the Speaker – which obviously include offspring – are "prohibited" from entering into government contracts.

"There's corruption if we tolerate and award it to Joey through (his) Amsterdam Holdings Inc.," he said.

De Venecia's statement on the Northrail project likewise did not sit well with House Minority Leader Ronaldo Zamora.

The San Juan congressman only

smiled and shook his head in obvious disagreement when asked why was Northrail included in the complaint if it was indeed aboveboard.

"You remember that we included the Northrail deal even before De Venecia came in as a witness," Zamora told reporters.

Zamora though evaded answering queries on why De Venecia was silent on the allegations of bribery to dismiss the 2005 and 2006 impeachment cases.

De Venecia suddenly became vocal in the latest impeachment complaint filed against his erstwhile administration ally.

The Pangasinan congressman pinned the blame on Mrs. Arroyo and claimed not a single kilometer of railroad track was built despite the executive agreement signed between the Philippines and China in 2004.

De Venecia also tossed the blame on his erstwhile allies who have decided to stay with the Arroyo administration when he discussed at length the allegedly anomalous Northrail deal.

But De Venecia cleared former finance secretary Cesar Purisima, former foreign affairs secretary Delia Albert and incumbent Foreign Affairs Secretary Albert Romulo of any criminal liability in the Northrail project.

"They are clean on this project," he said.