

SPEECH

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First District, Pampanga

(Delivered at the Clark Aviation Conference 2014 at Holiday Inn, Clark Field Pampanga on May 16, 2014)

It is my great honor and pleasure to join you in this conference today as a faithful advocate of development in Clark and as a legitimate stakeholder in the future -- both for the country and for the industry -- we collectively seek in Clark, Pampanga.

For this reason, allow me to congratulate the organizers of this event and thank them -- particularly the Global Gateway Logistics City -- for coming up with a much-needed sequel to last year's aviation conference.

I am also extending my heartfelt appreciation to our gracious participants, who have come to share with us their expertise, encouragement and support, which, hopefully will help bring us closer to our shared vision for Clark.

Our hearts are in the right place and we are moving in the right path. This, we're very sure of.

What today's conference is all about is the promise that Clark holds -- not just for Pampanga or Central Luzon -- but for the entire Philippines. However, it is a promise that time and circumstances have unfortunately been holding back.

To achieve that promise, I submit that the first requirement is for the government to make a simple declaration of policy -- an official word about what it plans to do about Clark airport. From where we are right now, you might call this a silver bullet. It is the

key that can open the door to enormous possibilities – some of these might even exceed what we now imagine.

The exciting part is, all the models and concrete examples that we need to get us going with purpose and direction are already available. This conference is surely an important step. But an uncompromising road map has yet to be made public. The world needs to know and see. Dreaming big, building big, and acting big are the steps we are trying to pursue.

Fortunately, our national leaders headed by President Aquino are acutely aware of what needs to be done: they want to move this country forward. As a Filipino, I am truly grateful for the good things that have been happening under the current dispensation. Having said that, I want to reiterate that the present government should leave no shadow of doubt and declare what its plans are on Clark airport. This is the heart of the current issue. Rhetoric is fine; it uplifts. But only road maps can get us to where we want to go with Clark airport.

I say this with a sense of urgency and some knowledge of what “miracles” Clark can bring about in this part of the world.

For my part, as an advocate for the development of Clark, I filed two bills related to Clark’s development on the first day of the 16th Congress: House Bill 320 and House Bill 321. Let me tell you briefly about these two bills.

HB 320 seeks to convert Clark Development Corporation into an Authority with structure and powers similar to that of the SBMA. This will grant CDC wider authority

and leverage, especially in granting investment incentives, enabling it to attract more locators and investors to the Clark Economic Zone. The proposed bill also seeks to cure the perceived “lack of stability” in CDC’s leadership -- which many business managers see as a limiting factor -- by giving the head of the newly created authority a fixed term. The bill is pending with the Committee on Economic Affairs.

House Bill 321, meanwhile, seeks to transform the CIAC into an Authority. It supports the vision of making Clark the Philippines’ next premier international airport. While major airports like Manila and Cebu are managed by their respective Airport authorities, I see no reason why a major international gateway like Clark should not be given that same right and privilege. Converting CIAC into an Authority will give it broader powers, allowing it to pursue an unhampered development plan that will ultimately lead to the promotion and use of the airport as a major hub and gateway in Central and Northern Luzon. Since its creation in 1994, CIAC has gone from being under the CDC, to being under the Bases Conversion and Development Authority or BCDA, under EO 360, s. 1996. It has been merged with the CDC – through EO 7, s. 2001, then moved to BCDA under EO 186, s. 2003, back to CDC under EO 193, s. 2003, to MIAA, under EO 341, s. 2004, back to BCDA again under EO 716, s. 2008, and most recently, under EO 64 in 2011, as an attached agency of the Department of Transportation and Communications. The bill, once approved, will also provide stability to this very vital agency. I am happy to note that the joint Committees on Privatization and of Transportation and Communications have approved the bill at the committee level.

Years back, a best-selling book cited a single enterprise in the United States that employed about 37,000 workers and created 60,000 other jobs. The enterprise was not

a company or a corporation. It was an airport in Atlanta, Georgia.

The book, written by Alvin Toffler, was published more than two decades ago. Here we are talking of something big and awesome as if it was something new. For other countries in the world, this may have already been history. In the meantime, other countries are yet envisioning and building new airports from a totally new and different perspective. The underlying concept in all the current models on the drawing board or those that are even now under construction is that of a value-added airport.

It is the idea of an aerotropolis – to my mind, a very similar concept to the value-added airport. Basically, the operational principle is to create as many economic and business opportunities for communities within and outside the airport.

Although I am not an economist, I see that such a concept -- implemented in Clark -- can do much to address poverty and other problems in nearby communities and beyond.

Last January 28, I delivered my first privilege speech in the House of Representatives. I dwelt substantially on the output of the two past conferences on Clark airport: the Clark Aviation Conference in 2013 and the Clark Challenge Summit I organized in January this year. I also drew from personal experiences and the insights I gathered abroad on official and private trips.

The speech was both personal and official to me. I brought my moral and political conviction to bear as I pleaded for government attention. At the heart of that conviction was my belief that through Clark we can do a lot to alleviate the age-old

plight of many of our people in the province, in the region, and in other parts of the country.

I asked our national leaders to come up with a more definitive policy on the development of Clark airport through a pronouncement from the President; the inclusion of Clark as a destination in the first phase of government's mass railway system; and the release of funds for the construction of the budget terminal. I thought I presented a compelling case, not only from the standpoint of potential gains and real possibilities for growth in the local and national economies. I also reiterated what I believed were critical issues on safety and security at the NAIA as repeatedly raised by aviation experts here and around the world.

On both aspects, I emphasized the practicality, necessity, and urgency of developing Clark as an alternative, complementary, and viable, solution.

I was not disappointed by the official reaction to my speech. Colleagues in the House responded warmly and pledged their support for my advocacy. The current administration also issued positive statements in response to my appeal. A few weeks later, I wrote a personal letter to the President requesting that the developments at Clark be included in his State of the Nation Address this July.

As a member of the House Special Committee on Bases Conversion, I also co-sponsored a resolution that seeks to revive the railway connection to Clark as well as the widening of NLEX. Both moves are seen as providing added impetus to the development of Clark. Also, our committee, along with the Central and Northern Luzon Block members in the House of Representatives has sought an audience with the

President to ask his Excellency to fast track the development of Clark.

I would like to think that probably this conference is being held today because Clark stakeholders want government to move consistently along those responses.

I am sure this conference, like the previous one, will eventually issue another manifesto in that regard. That should merit another privilege speech in the House. In fact, I look forward to it because part of the promise and commitment I left with my constituents in the First District of Pampanga was that I would continue to push for the development of Clark airport. And I have no intention of walking out on that pledge. With about two years to go before my first term and President Aquino's term end in 2016, I am hopeful that we will succeed in this endeavor.

On this optimistic note, I am confident that this conference will yield the results that we need to further the cause that we all have signed in for the good of our people and our nation.

Thank you very much.