

IN THE EYE OF A TEACHER SERVED AS ELECTORAL BOARD

by:

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Was it worth it? Did I do the right thing? Do I have to experience this to have that honorarium for my service? Those were questions I asked myself when got home last May 10, 2022, three o'clock in the morning after almost twenty-four hours of serving the national and local elections. I was exhausted, starving, and drained that time. I felt like I used every inch of energy and strength.

Being part in the recently concluded national elections last May 9, 2022, was never an easy job. It is a heavy responsibility carried upon our shoulders that must be executed accordingly to bring the desired outcome. Being a part electoral board, puts a lot of pressure especially, because of the process of the election itself.

I was a third member of the electoral board. Just so you know, I am the one responsible for assisting voters feed their ballots to the Vote Counting Machine (VCM), give them their Voter Verification Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) or as they say their receipt and putting indelible in on the left of the index finger.

May 9, 2022, as early as three o'clock in the morning, we were task to prepare ourselves for the upcoming election later that day. We first went to municipal hall to gather paraphernalia needed in our cluster precinct. After such we went to Commission on Elections (COMELEC) office to get other things necessary. We got to our designated cluster precinct at four o'clock in morning and prepared the classroom. We posted signages and any other important information needed on the election process which is to commence six o'clock in the morning of that same day.

As early as five o'clock long queue of people- first time voters, senior citizens even some persons with disability, and normal citizen lined up in front of the school's gate wanting to get inked and marked their participation in the election. Then the time came, exactly six o'clock in the morning, the school gate was opened, and voters started to gather and lined up to cluster precincts where they are designated to vote.

We opened the voting at exactly six. First voter, a senior citizen casted the first ballot of the day, first trial of the feeding was unsuccessful, I was not nervous because I know the VCM will work. Then I suggested to flip her ballot and try feeding again. It worked. First ballot in my precinct was casted and read. However, to a great misfortune, the second voter and following voters who casted their vote were unsuccessful. Despite the effort to fix and try initial troubleshooting it did not work. So, we proceed to manual voting up until eleven in the morning.

This unexpected circumstance became the cause of delay of the voting process in our clustered precinct. People who are under the heat of the sun, without a proper social distancing started to complain. At this time, although tolerable, I was hungry but busy assisting the voters. While waiting for a contingency VCM I was about to eat my snack, however COMELEC suddenly came in with their contingency VCM. So, I was not able to finish my light meal. Then voting continued. With the long queue of people outside due to the delay and malfunction of the first VCM, I was not able to eat lunch.

When it was two o'clock in the afternoon, I started to feel something not good. I was very dizzy, and my vision gradually became fuzzy. Maybe because I did not have enough sleep. I felt starving. I know for a fact that I need to eat however, I can't leave my post and be a cause of another delay. I felt that I was going to pass out. Despite that, I still did my part as part of the EB. I still helped voters feed the machine in the VCM, cut their VVPAT's and put ink on their fingers.

On the afternoon, I vomited and almost faint. I was drained, exhausted and starving. It was so hot, I was standing for already almost 10 hours, doing my duty as part of the electoral board. At that moment, I thought and questioned, was it worth it? Am I doing the right thing? Do I have to experience this to have that honorarium for my service?

Then, with all the strength I had, I tried very to get through the election, and luckily, I lasted and was able to finish the election process. I regained my energy when I was able to eat my first meal of the day at six o'clock in the afternoon. Then another couple long hour was consumed because of printing of the election returns, other pertinent report like the audit logs and the struggle of transmitting the result.

It was exactly one o'clock of May 10 when we were able to transmit the result in our cluster precinct. It was three o'clock when I got home. Twenty-four long hours, I was awake, standing and serving my co-citizens. Practicing our right of democracy and contributing meaningfully to the country. When I was about to sleep and closed my eyes, I contemplated. I was able to answer my own questions. Was it worth it? I said yes! Despite the struggle I felt and went through that day, I still felt the fulfillment that I was able to serve my country in the simplest possible that I can. Was I doing the right thing? I realized; I was. Serving my countrymen for the common good will never be wrong. Do I have to experience this to have that honorarium for my service? I said no! I did not decide to be a part of the electoral board just because of that amount. Nothing beats the feeling of fulfillment when you know that you did something significant to your country and contributed meaningfully to its growth and success. As John F. Kennedy said in one of his inaugural speeches, ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country.

And I asked if I am willing to be part of Electoral Board again, I would still do, but next time I will do better! It really felt good whenever I thought that I was part of the process to serving to the country's democracy and somehow being part of its success.

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