

August 12, 2007

Dear people of the Commonwealth,

For most of the last seven months, I have been resisting the notion of running for office this year, and for various reasons. I did not feel ready, for one. At the age of 26 I have very little political experience, and I was reluctant to enter into a political arena that has been dominated for so many years by career politicians and frustrating local politics. I had always thought that ideally, if I were to run, I would run simultaneously with a band of other new, likeminded candidates.

Moreover, I did not want to run this year because I thought that I could still do more to build a grassroots movement of ordinary citizens becoming actively involved in the affairs of our government and our community. I believed, and still believe, that the problems of our Commonwealth cannot and should not be solved only by our elected leaders, and that we need the participation and vigilance of concerned citizens as much as we need honest and effective leadership. I did not want to run for office as long as I believed that I could still do more as a concerned citizen, and as long as I hoped that there would be many others – a new generation of leaders -- willing to step forward to run for public office.

I first began to reconsider my resistance to running for office after the Senate session several weeks ago, when Eugenio Sablan and I marched up to the Legislature to testify on behalf of an Open Government Act bill that had been quietly and radically watered down without our knowledge and with no public notice. I was deeply disheartened by the experience, but after much reflection I came to realize that the Legislature's dysfunction is not to be attributed to only a few individuals, but to a whole governmental culture of mismanagement, complacency, and inadequate accountability. I came to see that changing that governmental culture requires not people who know how to play the "game" of politics, but people who believe that government is not a game to be played.

A second factor that caused me to think about running for office is that I had been disappointed in the scarcity of new political candidates this year. I mean no disrespect to any of the incumbents and former elected officials running for office now; my point is simply that like many others I had been hoping to see more new faces in this election. I began to ask myself and many others, where are they? Where are my peers? What are we all waiting for? And at some point I had to turn those questions to myself. How could I complain that there were so few new political candidates this year, when I was among those who were biding their time, and excusing themselves for not being ready? How could I tell others that we can't simply wait for change to happen and for others to take the lead, and that we must take the initiative ourselves to work for change now -- when I was also one of those people waiting for change, waiting for new leadership?

A third factor that influenced my decision to run is that I realized that being a good citizen and being a good public official are not mutually exclusive: that, in fact, good public servants should *be* good citizens. I became aware that if I ran for public office, there was no reason for me to stop any of the things that I have been involved with as a private citizen – if anything, running for office would be more reason to continue and

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expand upon these activities. I could continue to host forums, write letters, organize petition drives, share information with the media, and strive for maximum transparency and accountability from public officials, as I have been doing as a private citizen, and I could do even more if elected, including conducting formal public hearings, and drafting and reviewing legislation.

The final factor that clinched my decision to run for office was the hope that my candidacy might encourage that new generation of leaders I have been looking for to step forward in 2009 and in the years to come. There is simply no denying that we need an infusion of new blood, new energy in our government -- a new generation of people who come into public office with their eyes wide open and their hearts in the right place; people who don't pretend to have all the answers but are willing to talk, willing to listen, and willing to learn; people who take their jobs seriously and refuse to play games with their colleagues or constituents; people who don't feel threatened by other citizens asking for information and wanting a voice in their government; people who realize that public office in the Commonwealth hasn't always been about public service, but that it *should* be.

And so, for all of the reasons I listed above, I decided a little over a week ago to file my candidacy for the House. I intend to conduct the kind of campaign that I have always wanted to see in our community: an open, transparent, respectful, and issue-driven campaign that encourages the participation of ordinary citizens. There will be more letters, more public forums, more discussion groups, and house-to-house visits. My platform will be based not only on my own convictions and ideas, but also on the experiences and observations that others share with me during the course of these forums, discussions, and house meetings. I will make myself as available as I can be to meet and talk with fellow citizens about the issues that are affecting us all in the Commonwealth.

If others reading this letter wish to share their questions, thoughts, ideas, or advice with me, please contact me by email at tinasablan@gmail.com, or by phone at 483-3935.

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