



# PRESIDENT'S CORNER

September 15, 2021

## Tribute to Congressman Luis R. Villafuerte, Sr., 2020 PAASE Distinguished Lifetime Achievement Awardee

*Sir, Cong. Villafuerte, si Giselle po ito, thanks for taking my call, kamusta na po kayo?*

*Salamat at nagkausap tayo muli. Grabe talaga ang pandemya.*

*Update ko lang po kayo tungkol sa projects natin sa PAASE. Kailangan pa rin po namin ang mahalaga ninyong tulong.*

*Taas puso kaming nagpapasalamat muli sa PAASE - the Philippine-American Academy of Science & Engineering - sa lahat ng tulong ninyo sa amin, at sa buong academia, especially the scientific community, mula noong PAASE campaign natin in February 2006 to increase gov't support for Science and Technology in the country. Alam po n'yo - kayo po ang foremost S&T Champion ng PAASE.*

I cannot forget that day in February 2006 - you called me on the cellphone a day after you received the set of PAASE S&T campaign materials that I had delivered to 60 government officials in the Executive Branch, the House of Representatives and the Senate. You were the first and only government official to respond to PAASE.

You told me that for early childhood education, we should make a list of skills that every child should master starting with the 3Rs (Reading, wRiting, aRithmetic), to be incorporated in the Department Education curriculum - what you learned as a child and in youth. and after that focus on STEM education.

Also make a list of 100 S&T projects, and critical thinking and technical skills and competencies, needed for our country's development. You said you always made sure to be the one to defend the DOST budget in Congress.

It was clear you embraced the PAASE advocacy to build the S&T infrastructure and *suprastructure* which is what I called our S&T human capital. Our mantra became "what good is infra without supra?" Our mission and goals were in perfect synchrony.

In August 2006, our PAASE campaign culminated with you bringing us to Malacañang for a meeting with President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo. Earlier, you came to my laboratory at The UP Marine Science Institute to finalize our Powerpoint presentation to President GMA - with meticulous attention to detail.

The rest is history. Your efforts with PAASE, UP and the DOST resulted in the signing by President GMA of Executive Order 583 Establishing the National Science Complex and the Technology Incubation Park in UP Diliman in December 2006.

This was an unprecedented investment of the national government in S&T infrastructure, and you also found the source of funds for the P1.7 billion allocation. At the DOST, more funds were allocated for the *suprastructure* - for Masters and PhD scholarships and more R&D projects.

In our many meetings with scientists through the years, you convinced us to intensify our research on medicinal plants and nutraceuticals. As a naturalist, a self-taught scientist, you were convinced about the nutritional value and healing power of certain plants.

To this day, your books on *Coconut*, *Moringa* and *Abaca* are a mainstay reference used by key scientists in PAASE, including myself. We pursued the *TerraPharma* research program on medicinal plants, where I worked on *Moringa*, and now the DOST is vigorously pursuing the *Tuklas Lunas Herbal Drug* research program.

In studies led by a PAASE scientist, cellulose nanocrystals (CNC) from *Abaca*, which is known for its toughness, are being incorporated into 3D-printed biopolymers for use in the medical industry including tissue engineering.

I recall we spent evenings brainstorming on how to help our poor coconut farmers earn more income through integrated *Coconut* product development. With the Coconut Levy Fund now released to help the farmers, PAASE scientists are proposing more products that can be developed from every part of the Coconut fruit, including cellulose nanowhiskers from the husk!

Above are our humble efforts in PAASE, even as your disciple daughters Mylene and Lalaine, with your guidance and support, have trail blazed to produce high value products from *Moringa* and *Coconut* and helped *Moringa* and *Coconut* farmers in the country!

In 2020, at your acceptance speech after receiving the PAASE Distinguished Lifetime Achievement Award, you advised PAASE to prepare 10 project proposals to submit to the DA Secretary. Well, Mr. Congressman, we met with Secretary Dar and submitted 14 proposals, and our project to produce an *M&M (Moringa & Mungbean) Plus* nutrient bar is in the final stage of review.

This year, I called you about our new position paper: PAASE Recommendations for S&T Human Capital Development. Sir, we wrote the senators and congressmen you suggested and we've gotten promising feedback so far. As you can see, the PAASE Spirit remains vibrant! We resolve to continue pursuing our taglines: *Agham at Kaalaman Para sa Bayan!* PAASE S&T Volunteerism: Outreach to Philippine Regions!

Your life well lived is a life lived with meaning and purpose, pursued with a brilliant mind, a generous heart and diligent, working hands. At our meetings through dinners until the late hours, we listened to you endlessly, permeated by your Socratic and Aristotelian wisdom. We enjoyed seeing how a simple man with simple ways, enjoying simple *Pinoy* food, was obsessed with pursuing scientific ways to help his countrymen down to the community level. Your generous, noble spirit lives on in PAASE. *Hindi Po Kayo Malilimutan ng PAASE, Congressman Villafuerte! Maraming, maraming salamat po* - from deep in our hearts.

*Gisela "Giselle" P. Concepcion, PhD*