



*Featured Article*

## **On the Proposed Removal of Ethics in the GE Curriculum: A Moral Exposition against a Structural Injustice**

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### **Abstract**

The Department of Education (DepEd) presented its proposal to the House Committee on Basic Education and Culture (Edcom II), chaired by Representative Roman T. Romulo, to remove Ethics from the General Education (GE) Curriculum. In this paper, we argue that removing Ethics from the GE Curriculum constitutes a form of

epistemic, socio-economic, and political injustice. The proposed removal may appear, at first glance, as a mere structural adjustment. Yet on closer examination, this policy reflects a deeper ideological shift—one that recasts education in the image, in fact, of market efficiency, technocratic control, and neoliberal rationality.

**Keywords:** Ethics; General Education Curriculum; EDCOM II; Structural Injustice; DepEd

## Introduction

Every institution of higher learning participates in moral formation, whether explicitly or not. The only question is whether that formation is intentional, reflective, and perhaps even committed to moral seriousness, or whether it simply lets students absorb the unexamined assumptions of the world around them. Ethics in the General Education Curriculum is about being able to participate in a shared societal goal: that the university must not only prepare graduates for the labor market but also the perpetual moral challenges of everyday ordinary life. In other words, to include ethics in the GE curriculum is to participate in pursuing the ever-elusive and oftentimes underestimated concept of the common good.

There is a general misconception that ethics in college is merely a repetition of early moral instruction, that is, our GMRC (Good Manners and Right Conduct). But ethics at the tertiary level is no longer a repetition of that important subject in basic education. Ethics is elevating the topics of “the good” and “the right” to the level of the philosophical. In other words, it is about asking better questions. A skill required here is reflection (which requires a bit of a higher form of imagination developed in childhood). Reflection would allow the student to raise questions that pierce the surface of assumed norms, reveal contradictions in one’s thinking, and expose the ethical tensions in real-life decision-making. At best, the student would learn that life, particularly the moral sphere of life, contains tragic moments that ought to be dealt with full responsibility, which, in turn, can only be achieved in maturity.

To study ethics is to slow down, to become aware of the reasons behind moral choices, and to recognize that values are not isolated opinions but interwoven with society’s history and institutions. In the

opening chapter of his famous work *After Virtue*, philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre reminds us that modern individuals often inherit fragments of moral language without understanding the traditions that give them meaning. A college-level ethics course offers students the rare opportunity to recover coherence in how they think and speak about right and wrong. Maturity in the ability to make decisions is critical as we seek to address vital issues that trouble the human world. This sense of maturity is important for a young adult to be able to understand their role in the scheme of things and to realize the necessary commitment that is needed. To quote from the Position Paper of the *Social Ethics Society*:

Ethics requires maturity. Our Senior High School students are not predisposed into learning the ethical theories and their application. The technical panel only sees ethics from the vantage point of a Manila-based academic but ignores the context and content of the course, which is framed based on the experiences of our communities, taking into consideration our attachments to local history, culture, and religion. Edcom 2, for whatever it's worth, reduces the meaning of the good life into something mechanical and economic.<sup>1</sup>

It goes without saying that what we aspire for is not to create perfect moral subjects. Such an aspiration would be naïve and, in any case, impossible. What we aim for is more grounded: we would want to form graduates who can think beyond short-term gains, people who can organize their thoughts into responsible action, and who can recognize moral complexity even in mundane matters. Perhaps we

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<sup>1</sup> Social Ethics Society, 28 May 2025, "Statement of the Social Ethics Society expressing its Opposition to the Removal of Ethics in the GE Curriculum." <https://social-ethics-society.blogspot.com/2025/05/statement-of-ses-expressing-its.html>. Aside from the SES, the other associations that expressed their sentiments against the proposal to remove ethics from college include the Union of Societies and Associations of Philosophy in the Philippines, the Philosophical Association of the Visayas and Mindanao, the Bukidnon Philosophical Association, the Philosophical Association of the Philippines, among others. The Philosophy Departments of Ateneo de Manila University, the University of the Philippines, and the University of San Carlos, among others, also expressed their opposition.

need no highfalutin ideals to describe such students. It is enough, for now, to hope for young people who know what they're talking about, who pause before they judge, and who know how to justify their claims in a way that respects others and the gravity of shared life. This is precisely the reason why there has been a strong opposition to the proposal to remove ethics from the General Education (GE) Curriculum.

### **The Proposal to Remove Ethics from the General Education Curriculum**

On May 28, 2025, the Department of Education (DepEd) formally presented to the House Committee on Basic Education and Culture, chaired by Representative Roman T. Romulo, a proposal to remove three General Education (GE) courses—Art Appreciation, The Contemporary World, and Ethics—from the mandatory tertiary curriculum.<sup>2</sup> The central argument rested on vertical alignment with the revised Senior High School (SHS) curriculum, asserting that the content and competencies of these subjects have been adequately absorbed at the secondary level and are therefore redundant in higher education. This framing aligns with the full implementation of Republic Act 10533 or the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013, which institutionalized the K–12 system in the Philippines.

Under the law, SHS was envisioned to furnish students with a range of foundational competencies—intellectual, social, ethical, and artistic—intended to prepare them for either immediate employment or tertiary specialization. The findings by the Second Congressional Commission on Education (EDCOM II) reflect this proposal by citing the higher number of GE units required in Philippine universities compared to regional counterparts in the ASEAN, arguing that this contributes to longer program durations and inflated educational costs. To resolve these inefficiencies, EDCOM II recommended a realignment of curricular content between SHS and college, leading to the removal of perceived overlaps.

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<sup>2</sup> Committee on Basic Education and Culture, 28 May 2025. *Live-streamed Hearing, House of Representatives of the Philippines*, YouTube video, 2:15:34, May 28, 2025, timestamp 0:12:30–0:13:15, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yoDzorEfZA0>.

A major restructuring of SHS has since been introduced. The original four fixed academic strands have been consolidated into two macro tracks: Academic and Technical-Professional (TechPro). These tracks are now supplemented by elective clusters, including Arts, Social Sciences & Humanities, STEM, Business, and Sports & Wellness. This redesign, officially piloted in Grade 11 during the 2025–2026 school year, was formalized under DepEd Memorandum No. 048, s. 2025.<sup>3</sup> Under the new structure, the SHS core curriculum has been reduced to five primary subjects: Effective Communication, General Mathematics, General Science, Life and Career Skills, and Pag-aaral ng Kasaysayan at Lipunang Pilipino.

Philosophical reflection and contemporary social analysis are no longer taught as stand-alone disciplines, but are instead “embedded” within elective clusters—especially in the Arts and Social Sciences & Humanities track, which now offers a flexible “doorway option” for interdisciplinary elective combinations. The Department of Education emphasized that the revised SHS curriculum already incorporates the intellectual content of the three contested General Education (GE) subjects: *The Contemporary World*, *Art Appreciation*, and *Ethics*. DepEd argued that ethics previously offered at the tertiary level are now embedded within values education and other subjects that cover the supposed learning competencies, thereby making a separate college Ethics course redundant for most degree programs.

Ethics, under this rationale, would be retained only in fields where moral reasoning is professionally essential—such as law, education, and health-related disciplines. For all other programs, Ethics would be removed from the college-level curriculum to streamline the GE load and align with ASEAN curricular standards.

The Department of Education stressed that SHS is no longer a preparatory option but a fully operational and mandatory level of education. DepEd emphasized that this comprehensive redesign aims to eliminate curricular redundancies between secondary and tertiary levels, with pilot implementation already underway in hundreds of schools. Full nationwide rollout is expected by the 2026–2027

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<sup>3</sup> Department of Education, *DM 048, s. 2025*. 14 June, 2025. *Pilot Implementation of the Strengthened Senior High School Curriculum for Grade 11 in School Year 2025–2026*, DepEd Memoranda, [https://www.deped.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/DM\\_s2025\\_048.pdf](https://www.deped.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/DM_s2025_048.pdf).

academic year, contingent upon evaluation of data from the pilot implementation.

Precisely, while this issue is essential to nation-building, policymakers often make their decision on technical grounds. Ethics should be a special case because the matters it deals with are beyond any numerical evaluation. It concerns the human being. Bernardo Caslib Jr. writes: “When Socrates said, 'know thyself,' he was reminding the Athenians that to know oneself is the key to living a moral life. Without proper knowledge of the self, incapable of monitoring the soul, one falls into the pit of moral decay. Bereft of opportunities to nail what virtues are, how can one be expected to do what is right?”<sup>4</sup> Learning is a lifelong process. It is the same when it comes to learning the meaning of moral virtues.

### **The Practical Reasons and Logical Connectivity of the Curriculum**

The EDCOM 2 argues that some of the GECs are already taught in the Basic Education Curriculum, and they want to expand the internship period for college students. Concerning Ethics, they see it as with GMRC and Values Education (VE), and every discipline has its own ethics. The problem with this reasoning is that it doesn't recognize the uniqueness of the course. It should be emphasized that GMRC and VE are concerned with shaping citizens in accordance to the nationalistic norms. It is true that some topics in Ethics, like Virtue Ethics, are present on those subjects, but these topics are tailored not to see the wisdom or relevance or one's character in decision making, but it deals mainly on the question of what virtue a man should possess.

Values, however, are ambivalent.<sup>5</sup> Apolinar Henry Fernandez writes on the matter in the context of the Filipino: “This ambivalence or incongruence seems to be a product of a long and complex confluence of factors brought about by our equally complex history as a people and as a nation.” Concerning the idea that every discipline has a different type of ethics, it gives a bias that ethics is just a discussion

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<sup>4</sup> Bernardo Caslib, Jr. “Why Intellectual Virtues Matter.” *Kritike* Volume 11, Number 2 (2017): 95.

<sup>5</sup> Apolinar Henry Fernandez, “Ethical Relativism and the Ambivalence of the Filipino.” *Ethics in Contemporary Philippine Society*, Volume 1, Edited by Christopher Ryan Maboloc. Davao City: SMKC Publishing, 2020: 262.

of professionals in their respective field that may compel us to somehow respect their “ethics” even if it goes against our moral valuation, since they are the experts. It cuts off the overriding and encompassing nature of ethics from the discussion and instead focuses on the bureaucratic image of ethics that implies a pause in the discussion about the good and just follows what has been given, a legalistic rather than a reflective sense.

### **A Form of Structural Injustice**

The proposal to remove Ethics in college marks more than just a structural realignment. It signals a deeper philosophical and political shift in how the purpose and definition of education are conceived. What is quietly being redefined is not only curricular content, but the moral function of schooling itself. Education is increasingly tethered to a utilitarian logic—measured in terms of job readiness, productivity, and efficiency—while questions of justice, meaning, and ethical life are sidelined. Without ethics, one may not be able to question the Western paradigm of moral theorizing. For instance, John Weckert and Roger Bayod argue that indigenous ethics, for instance, has encouraged people “to resist the more Westernized way of life based on capitalism, materialism and individuality.”<sup>6</sup>

Removing Ethics reveals the structural injustice in this curricular transformation, which is simply an alignment with the neoliberal agenda that prioritizes market efficiency and individual utility over broader societal and ethical considerations.<sup>7</sup> It is a symptom of a technocratic paradigm that reconfigures education as a delivery system of competencies, rather than a space for cultivating judgment, moral discernment, and civic responsibility. This narrowing of the educational mission may appear administratively neutral, but its socio-political implications are profound. By marginalizing ethical discourse, the reform risks producing not only compliant students but disengaged citizens—subjects trained for employment, but dislocated from the demands of justice and public life.

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<sup>6</sup> John Weckert and Roger Bayod, “The Ethics of Technology: How Can Indigenous Thought Contribute?” *Nanoethics* Volume 17, Number 6 (2023): 6.

<sup>7</sup> Henry A. Giroux, *Neoliberalism's War on Higher Education* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2014).

A curriculum does more than transmit knowledge—it shapes subjects. The proposed removal of Ethics from Philippine tertiary education is not a neutral technical adjustment; it is a political intervention into the very architecture of subjectivity. What is at stake is the kind of person the educational system is designed to produce. In this biopolitical regime, students are not treated as agents of ethical reasoning but as future labor inputs to be streamlined for economic utility. Institutions such as the House of Representatives' EDCOM II, Committee on Education and Culture, and the Department of Education present their reforms as technical adjustments. But these actors operate within a discourse that elevates economic performance over democratic and ethical deliberation.

It can be said, in this way, that “the state is no longer simply that which imposes the law. It becomes a manager of life, a regulator of conduct, a producer of norms.”<sup>8</sup> In this sense, curricular changes are not neutral—they are exercises in norm production and subject formation. In the work of Renato Constantino, “The Miseducation of the Filipino,” he says that the education of the Filipino has had the wrong priorities because, instead of knowing his identity, the Filipino is more enthusiastic about the language of his colonial master. Intelligence is judged based on the fluency of a student in speaking English, instead of understanding the problems of the Filipino. Congressman Romulo challenged ethics professors to teach better, for instance. But in a Supplemental Statement, the *Social Ethics Society* said:

The problem is not the teaching of ethics. The real culprit is an unjust system that favors the interests of a hegemonic global order that focuses on using the human person and reducing the same into a mere means to an end. This is apparent in an economic system that values profit over human freedom. The mistake lies in the desire to serve the ends of business and industry instead of humanity. Society is corrupt, not because of the way Ethics is taught. The reason has something to do with unjust structures. The poor

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<sup>8</sup> Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977–1978*, ed. Michel Senellart, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 108.

teacher has been reduced into a tool, now begging not to be removed from his job. There is no greater way of demeaning the human person, whose rational nature or intrinsic value is supposed to be celebrated, and not to be subjected to threats of losing their means of living.<sup>9</sup>

The Congressional Commission (EDCOM II) seems to reduce the human individual into a docile body. This transformation is clearest in how disciplinary mechanisms shape students. Individuals are “subjected, used, transformed, and improved” through systems of surveillance, organization, and measurement.<sup>10</sup> The exam, for instance, functions as a “normalizing gaze,” a form of surveillance that qualifies, classifies, and punishes deviation.<sup>11</sup> Ethics, as a field that invites interrogation of norms, is incompatible with this disciplinary apparatus. Its removal is strategic—it ensures that education remains a space for training rather than reflection. In this way, the purpose of education is simply the making of productive citizens.

How does it happen? Indeed, the student is reduced from being a reflective moral agent into a mere “cog in the machine”: efficient, compliant, and stripped of critical capacities. “What was formed was a policy of coercions that act upon the body, a calculated manipulation of its elements, its gestures, its behavior.”<sup>12</sup> Ethics, as the discourse that enables resistance, is excluded in favor of a curriculum that

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<sup>9</sup> Social Ethics Society, “Supplemental Statement: How to Teach Ethics in not the Problem.” The document is signed by the following: Dr. Godiva Eviota-Rivera (Mindanao State University-Main), Dr. Rogelio Bayod (North Valley College), Menelito Mansueto (MSU-IIT), Dr. Christopher Ryan Maboloc (Ateneo de Davao University), Dr. Ian Clark Parcon (Ateneo de Davao University), Dr. Gleemoore Makie (Benguet State University-Bokod), Mr. Evan Larona (Ateneo de Davao University), Mr. Ruben Balotol (Barauen Community College), Francis Jeus Ibañez (Bohol Island State University), Diane Auza (Central Mindanao University), Zandee Jaquias (University of Science and Technology), Prof. Bonifacio Solsoloy (University of Southern Mindanao), USM Cogitatores Moderni Societatis, Weldon Sacro Jr. (La Salle - Ozamiz), Giovanni Udtohan (University of Mindanao-Main), Karl Christianne Exala (Ateneo de Davao University), Oliver Perater (MSU-IIT), Peter Albert Columba (Silliman University), Rey Atacador (University of Mindanao - Main), and Spencer Reyes (Cebu Normal University). <https://social-ethics-society.blogspot.com/2025/06/the-problem-of-teaching-ethics.html>.

<sup>10</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 136.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 184.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

supports normalization, discipline, and productivity. According to Arthur Abulencia, “the modern school system in countries such as the Philippines provides millions of laborers for the global market.”<sup>13</sup> This is a result of the elitist nature of education in the Philippines, which excludes the poor and powerless. Christopher Ryan Maboloc explains that “the desire to achieve more or become successful has replaced the focus on human values. This standard of privilege has its roots in the colonial system.”<sup>14</sup>

While policymakers certainly have the authority to make decisions, experts familiar with teaching the subject to Filipino college students possess the most competence in terms of grounded input, having been at the grassroots of the problem that policymakers can only hope to address. Herein lies the injustice, in the grave of structures beneath the self-interest of the elite policymakers. In fact, the people being consulted only come from the capital, from among the country’s top schools, but no one from provincial schools is given any significant role. There are consultations, but these are mostly formalities. No meaningful dialogue has taken place, except after several philosophical associations in the Philippines expressed their opposition.

### **The Voices that Must Be Included, Prioritized, and Amplified**

In the Philippines, engraved with Luzon-based centrality and cultural bias, the removal of ethics is an epistemic oppression that disproportionately impacts those who are already pushed and coercively put in the margins and far-flung areas where their voices are at a muted level compared to the bellow voices in Luzon where most decisions and discourse about the academics are done. Most of all, the voices of those who are immediately affected, like the teachers in Humanities and Ethics, are not even included, prioritized, and amplified in the discourse of the exclusion. The lay-off of the faculty and teachers from the School of Arts and Humanities will be

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<sup>13</sup> Arthur Abulencia, “The Unraveling of the K-12 Program as an Education Reform in the Philippines.” In

South-East Asian Journal for Youth, Sports and Health Education. Volume 1:2 (2015): 232.

<sup>14</sup> Christopher Ryan Maboloc, “Deep Thinking or Resistance: On Finding a Middle Ground between Paolo Freire’s Critical Pedagogy and John Dewey’s Pragmatism.” *Philosophia: A Global Journal of Philosophy*, Volume 49:1 (2021): 1103.

inevitable. This is an aspect of the problem that is often ignored, but it has a great impact on the lives and well-being of thousands of young professionals who are teaching in tertiary education in the country.

One of the arguments for the exclusion of ethics is that it is a duplication of values education in the Basic Education Curriculum, and including it in the Higher Education Curriculum makes it “a remedial course and a replay of high school.”<sup>15</sup> This was a statement from Representative Jonathan Keith Flores during an interview. Though VE and GMRC already teach students in high school, having Ethics in higher education is still essential for it moves them from and beyond the passive obedience and social conformity to critical reasoning and deliberative skills. Indigenous communities can be formed through the ethical theories and frameworks on how to deliberate and contend against coercive and oppressive decisions and shifts by the capitalists about their ancestral land. In simplest terms, Ethics is not a remedial course or a replay of VE, but a moral and deliberative maturation of what was taught in the basic education curriculum.

The exclusion of ethics is a direct and oppressive act of not developing the necessary and moral capacities of the students to have a sense of justice and a conception of the good as fully matured epistemic agents, turning them into labor-slaves and money-hungry individuals. In the Philippines, there is a need to expand indigenous governance frameworks, empower local languages and histories, and institutionalize sectoral representation at all levels of government, including academic matters and reforms. Now, the reform of the exclusion of ethics mostly happens in centralized and Manila-based policymaking, with no contextualized perception and notion of the grassroots of Mindanao being excluded and silenced, as this reform affects all national academic institutions.

The government and academic institutions should not only inculcate diversity in every academia, but also actively ensure and seek the inclusion of the historically excluded and silenced in participating in academic discourses of reforms and law-making. Ethics is an avenue for the inclusion of these marginalized communities, and its exclusion in higher education will only worsen the cultural imperialism of hegemonic, centralized, and Manila-based

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<sup>15</sup> Delon Porcalla, “Remove GE Subjects to solve K-12 woes,” *The Philippine Star*. <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2025/06/09/2449139/remove-ge-subjects-solve-k-12-woes>

narratives, degrading and excluding the voices of the indigenous in Mindanao. In Davao City, the Dabawenyo DCPlinado Curriculum Integration Program seeks to strengthen the teaching of VE and GMRC, introducing the learners from Grade 1 to SHS on topics that make them morally competent – climate change, digital ethics, and responsible citizenship, among others.<sup>16</sup>

Engaging in public discourse and important societal issues requires moral reasoning and deliberative skills, which can be formed in ethics. Public discourse is done through “shared moral language.”<sup>17</sup> while recognizing that true justice cannot be separated from the shared *telos* that gives life meaning through collective endeavors, Governmental reforms like the exclusion of ethics in academia must be willing to include citizens who are immediately affected to deliberate not only about policies and interests, but also about virtues, the common good, and the kind of society being built under its governance. Politics and academia are not neutral domains of justice and fairness, but a shared moral responsibility rooted in the relational and historically situated nature of each community, urban or rural.

### **The Anti-Poor Character of the Removal of Ethics**

The removal of Ethics in the GE curriculum for the HEIs is not a neutral governmental and administrative reform, but a political frontage to create a façade to make certain people who support it appear more pro-poor, but they are not. Senator Sherwin Gatchalian is mistaken to think of “trimming the duration of college education,” while also “pointing out that many general education subjects taught in college are repeated from Senior High School (SHS), wasting students’ time and resources.”<sup>18</sup> One may agree that more GE units may be a waste of resources, but studying ethics is a critical investment in empowering people, especially the disadvantaged and

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<sup>16</sup> Rec Eguia and Christopher Ryan Maboloc, “Integrating Discipline in the Basic Education Curriculum.” *Social Ethics Society Journal of Applied Philosophy Special Edition* Volume 2 (2025): 214.

<sup>17</sup> Michael J. Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 204-208.

<sup>18</sup> Delon Porcalla, “Remove GE Subjects to solve K-12 woes,” *The Philippine Star*, (Accessed on June 21, 2025) <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2025/06/09/2449139/remove-ge-subjects-solve-k-12-woes>

poor students. Ethics teaches integrity, social responsibility, and justice as important aspects and traits to address systematic inefficiencies, moral deficiencies, and socio-economic injustices that disproportionately affect and hurt people experiencing poverty.

## **Conclusion**

The proposed removal of ethics from the General Education curriculum will prevent college students in the Philippines from understanding important ethical theories, principles, and moral frameworks. The ability to discern and think about human values requires a type of maturity. Ethics empowers human freedom and effective citizen participation in democratic discussions. Students need to possess a perspective when they criticize injustices and oppression, mobilize alternatives and solutions, and act responsibly in society. Ethics is a democratic necessity because everyone must be seen and treated as a human being. Taking ethics in college, even from a general vantage point, gives a strong voice to those who are excluded and continually silenced.

A course in ethics delivers and equips the college student with important deliberative tools and competencies to interpret social reality and to find the way to respond to moral problems such as climate change, global poverty, and political violence. The removal of ethics in college is an oppressive act on the part of EDCOM II and the people in academia who are in favor of this unfair act. The neoliberal approach of the government will take away the real opportunity for millions of college students to learn the critical skills for moral deliberation and public discourse in politics and socio-political reform. In simple terms, removing Ethics from Higher Education is a disservice to students. It is a form of epistemic, social, and political injustice. To defend the inclusion of Ethics in HEIs is to uphold social justice and democracy against all types of oppression. To remove it is to risk the future of the next generation and the common good of the Filipino people.

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