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Some senators dismiss Duque's hopes of making COVID vax mandatory

By CNN Philippines Staff (/cnn-website/search/?queryStr=CNN Philippines Staff) Published Apr 6, 2022 3:52:45 PM



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Metro Manila (CNN Philippines, April 6) — A number of senators turned down Health Secretary Francisco Duque III's idea of making COVID-19 vaccination mandatory to increase the inoculation rate in the country, with one lawmaker calling it the health chief's "face-saving" way.

"Nagpe-face saving dahil ang dami nilang sinabit mula noong March 2020 hanggang ngayon (He's trying to save face because they have so many failures since March 2020 until now). It's his way to pass on his problems to us," Senate President Vicente Sotto III said, reacting to Duque's statement that he would "welcome" if Congress could "muster that political will" to make vaccination and booster shots mandatory.

Duque's remarks came amid the potential wastage of over 27 million vaccine doses in July. During a taped Cabinet meeting aired Tuesday, Duque acknowledged that COVID booster uptake remains low.

READ: Concepcion, Drilon concerned over P13B worth of expiring COVID-19 vaccines (https://www.cnnphilippines.com/news/2022/4/4/Expiring-COVID-19-vaccines-booster-shot.html)

"We have six days left. We are converting into the National Board of Canvassers not to mention the human rights aspect," Sotto added.

Senator Ping Lacson also expressed disapproval, stressing the Department of Health (DOH) should have been "proactive instead of passing the burden to Congress".

"There is no political will in violating the basic rights and freedoms that belong to any person and forcing Filipinos to get vaccinated is a violation of that human right," Lacson said.

Lacson, who is vying for the presidency, added that house-to-house campaigns should have long been mobilized.

"Allowing 27 million doses or even a portion of it to expire is criminal and the height of incompetence and irresponsibility," the senator said.

Senator Koko Pimentel, in a separate statement, said Duque's statement is "not a valid idea".

"Since COVID-19 vaccines are still experimental, then it is scientifically unsound to make them mandatory. Since the Philippine constitution recognizes our right over our bodies, then it is not legally possible to make experimental vaccine for a disease with an approximated 1.5% mortality rate mandatory. It will be unconstitutional for being unreasonable," Pimentel said.

"And finally since the vaccines are about to expire, then all the more it is unethical and immoral to make vaccination mandatory just because of this reason and the fear that the Commission on Audit will make the expiration of millions of doses an audit finding," he added.

Despite the rejection, Duque said the mandatory vaccination was only a suggestion, since the pandemic response is anchored on the whole government and whole nation approach.



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