

## Common sense prevails over proposed new gag law

Written by T. Rob Brown (aka Roberto Chocolate)

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President Martinelli recently proposed a new gag law that would carry two - four year prison sentences for anyone convicted of "offending, insulting or vilifying" the President or any other elected official. The law was proposed to deal with persons making unproven accusations against elected officials without any proof.

The proposed bill has been widely criticized, and President Martinelli is now saying that even if the law is passed, he will now veto it.

Common sense prevails, if enough people speak out, it seems. Roberto

From The Panama News

Update on the proposed new gag law

At a Cambio Democratico event on January 10, President Martinelli changed his tune and announced that if the National Assembly passes the proposed new gag law, he will veto it.

At the time it was announced most of Panama's news media and all of its journalist groups expressed strong opposition.

Going into and throughout the long holiday weekend civil society groups and opposition politicians declared their opposition to the measure. By Monday international organizations were joining in the criticism, but most decisively Martinelli's coalition partners balked at supporting the measure.

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Vice President Varela, while complaining about some of the news coverage of politicians that he said accuses people of crimes without having any proof, said that there would have to be "widespread discussion" of any law that could infringe freedom of expression.

Without Varela's Panameñista Party or any opposition support, Martinelli's Cambio Democratico party would not have the votes to pass the law.

Moreover, the President's insistence would have added to the disenchantment with the ruling coalition among rank-and-file Panameñistas.

The proposed law would provide two- to four-year prison terms for "offending, insulting or vilifying" the President or any other elected official.