



Republic of the Philippines
SENATE
Pasay City

JOURNAL

SESSION NO. 72
MONDAY, 22 MAY 2023



NINETEENTH CONGRESS
FIRST REGULAR SESSION

PREPARED BY THE
LEGISLATIVE JOURNAL SERVICE
SENATE OF THE PHILIPPINES

SESSION NO. 72
Monday, May 22, 2023

CALL TO ORDER

At 3:02 p.m., the Senate President, Hon. Juan Miguel “Migz” F. Zubiri, called the session to order.

PRAYER

Sen. Sonny Angara led the prayer, to wit:

Dear God, as another day dawned upon us, we come to You to say our thanks and our praises. Here is another day of selflessly serving our people in our country, and we thank You for giving us this opportunity. The wisdom You blessed us Lord will never outshine Yours; that is why we have no one else to turn to in times of trials and tribulations. As Your servants for the people, our God, we ask for Your supernatural strength, love, and wisdom as we face another day of tough legislation.

Tulungan po Ninyo kaming magkaunawaan sa bawat talakayan, at iadya ang bulwagan sa anomang sigalot. Tulungan po Ninyo kami na masinsinang pag-aralan ang aming mga panukalang batas upang sa huli ay masiguro naming ang mga ito ay para sa ikabubuti ng sambayanan.

Tulungan po Ninyo kami, Panginoon, na magkaroon ng malawak na pang-unawa upang ang aming pagtupad sa tungkulin ay sumikad nang naaayon sa aming sinumpaang walang anomang magawang paglabag o pagkakamali.

Heavenly Father, we thank You for being here in our midst tirelessly and always there to guide us. We will forever be grateful to You, our Lord, for watching over us and loving us unconditionally.

Amen.

NATIONAL ANTHEM

The MMDA Chorale led the singing of the national anthem and thereafter rendered the song, entitled “*Sana’y Wala Nang Wakas.*”

ROLL CALL

Upon direction of the Senate President, the Secretary of the Senate, Atty. Renato N. Bantug Jr., called the roll, to which the following senators responded:

Angara, S.	Marcos, I. R.
Binay, M. L. N. S.	Padilla, R. C.
Cayetano, A. P. C. S.	Pimentel III, A. K.
Dela Rosa, R. B. M.	Poe, G.
Ejercito, J. V. G.	Revilla Jr. R. B.
Estrada, J. E.	Tolentino, F. T. N.
Gatchalian, W.	Tulfo, R. T.
Go, C. L. T.	Villanueva, J.
Hontiveros, R.	Villar, C. A.
Lapid, M. L. M.	Villar, M. A.
Legarda, L.	Zubiri, J. M. F.

With 21 senators physically present and one senator virtually present, the Chair declared the presence of a quorum.

Senator Cayetano (P) was on official mission abroad.

Senator Escudero was absent.

APPROVAL OF THE JOURNAL

Upon motion of Senator Ejercito, there being no objection, the Body dispensed with the reading of the Journal of Session No. 71 (May 17, 2023) and considered it approved.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF THE PRESENCE OF GUESTS

Senator Ejercito acknowledged the presence in the gallery of the following guests:

- Mayor Al Taculad of Duero, Bohol;
- Mayor Wilson Pajo of Pilar, Bohol;
- Mayor Raymond Hala of Loboc, Bohol;
- Mayor Filadelfo Jess Baja of Garcia Hernandez, Bohol;
- Mayor Albino "Ben" Balo of Guindulman, Bohol;
- Mayor Mercy Grace J. Acain of Initao, Misamis Oriental;
- H.E. Henry Bensusurto, Ambassador to Turkey;
- H.E. Paul Raymond Cortes, Ambassador to the Portuguese Republic;
- H.E. Raul S. Hernandez, Ambassador to the Sultanate of Oman;
- H.E. Josel Francisco, Ambassador to India and Nepal;
- H. E. Maria Angela Ponce, Ambassador to Malaysia;
- H. E. Renato Villa, Ambassador to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia; and
- H.E. Carlos Sorreta, Permanent Representative of the Philippines to the United Nations in Geneva.

Senate President Zubiri welcomed the guests to the Senate.

REFERENCE OF BUSINESS

The Secretary of the Senate read the following matters and the Chair made the corresponding referrals:

BILLS ON FIRST READING

Senate Bill No. 2213, entitled

AN ACT CONVERTING THE EXTENSION OFFICE OF THE LAND TRANSPORTATION OFFICE (LTO) LOCATED IN LAS PIÑAS CITY INTO A REGULAR LTO DISTRICT OFFICE AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR

Introduced by Senator Villar (C)

To the Committee on Rules

Senate Bill No. 2214, entitled

AN ACT AMENDING SECTION 4 OF REPUBLIC ACT NO. 10845 OTHERWISE KNOWN AS THE ANTI-AGRICULTURAL SMUGGLING ACT OF 2016, THEREBY IMPOSING DEATH PENALTY WHEN THE OFFENSE IS COMMITTED BY A PERSONNEL OF THE BUREAU OF CUSTOMS, THE ARMED FORCES OF THE PHILIPPINES, THE PHILIPPINE NATIONAL POLICE, OR ANY OTHER UNIFORMED OR LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCY

Introduced by Senator Padilla

To the Committees on Agriculture, Food and Agrarian Reform; and Justice and Human Rights

Senate Bill No. 2215, entitled

AN ACT AMENDING PRESIDENTIAL DECREE NO. 1083, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS THE "CODE OF MUSLIM PERSONAL LAWS OF THE PHILIPPINES," AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES"

Introduced by Senator Padilla

To the Committees on Justice and Human Rights; and Finance

Senate Bill No. 2216, entitled

AN ACT REDEFINING THE CRIME OF ILLEGAL RECRUITMENT COMMITTED BY A SYNDICATE, AMENDING FOR THE PURPOSE ARTICLE 38 (B) OF PRESIDENTIAL DECREE NO. 442, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS THE "LABOR CODE OF THE PHILIPPINES," AS AMENDED, AND SECTION 6 OF REPUBLIC ACT NO. 8042, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS THE "MIGRANT WORKERS AND OVERSEAS FILIPINOS ACT OF 1995," AS AMENDED

Introduced by Senator Padilla

To the Committee on Migrant Workers

Senate Bill No. 2217, entitled

AN ACT AMENDING SECTIONS 27 AND 28 OF REPUBLIC ACT NO. 9165 OTHERWISE KNOWN AS THE COMPREHENSIVE DANGEROUS DRUGS ACT OF 2002, AS AMENDED, THEREBY IMPOSING THE DEATH PENALTY WHEN THE OFFENSE IS COMMITTED BY AN OFFICER OR MEMBER OF THE ARMED FORCES OF THE PHILIPPINES, THE PHILIPPINE NATIONAL POLICE, OR ANY OTHER UNIFORMED OR LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCY, OR AN ELECTIVE OFFICIAL, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

Introduced by Senator Padilla

To the Committee on Public Order and Dangerous Drugs; and Justice and Human Rights

RESOLUTIONS

Proposed Senate Resolution No. 616, entitled

A RESOLUTION DIRECTING THE APPROPRIATE SENATE COMMITTEE TO CONDUCT AN INQUIRY, IN AID OF LEGISLATION, ON THE DELAYED DEVELOPMENT OF ELECTRIC TRANSMISSION FACILITIES AND PROVISION OF ELECTRIC TRANSMISSION SERVICES WITH THE END IN VIEW OF INCREASING AND ENSURING RELIABLE AND CONTINUOUS ELECTRIC POWER SUPPLY IN THE COUNTRY

Introduced by Senator Gatchalian

To the Committee on Energy

Proposed Senate Resolution No. 617, entitled

RESOLUTION COMMENDING AND CONGRATULATING THE SAMAHANG KICKBOXING NG PILIPINAS (SKP) FOR WINNING THREE (3) GOLD, FOUR (4) SILVER, AND EIGHT (8) BRONZE MEDALS IN THE KICKBOXING EVENT; ONE (1) SILVER, AND FIVE (5) BRONZE MEDALS IN THE KUN KHMER EVENT; AND TWO (2) SILVER, AND FOUR (4) BRONZE MEDALS IN THE VOVINAM EVENT AT THE 2023 SOUTHEAST ASIAN GAMES HELD IN PHNOM PENH, CAMBODIA

Introduced by Senator Tolentino

To the Committee on Rules

Proposed Senate Resolution No. 618, entitled

RESOLUTION COMMENDING AND CONGRATULATING THE PHILIPPINE NATIONAL MEN'S BASKETBALL TEAM GILAS PILIPINAS FOR WINNING THE GOLD MEDAL IN THE 2023 SOUTHEAST ASIAN GAMES MEN'S BASKETBALL CHAMPIONSHIP

Introduced by Senator Tolentino

To the Committee on Rules



Proposed Senate Resolution No. 619, entitled

RESOLUTION CONGRATULATING AND COMMENDING THE MEMBERS OF THE PHILIPPINE TEAM WHO HAVE WON IN THEIR RESPECTIVE SPORTS CATEGORIES, THUS BRINGING THE COUNTRY'S MEDAL HAUL TO A TOTAL OF TWO HUNDRED SIXTY (260) MEDALS, DURING THE 32ND SOUTHEAST ASIAN GAMES (SEA GAMES) HELD ON MAY 5 TO 17, 2023 AT PHNOM PENH, CAMBODIA

Introduced by Senator Villar (C)

To the Committee on Rules

Proposed Senate Resolution No. 620, entitled

RESOLUTION URGING THE APPROPRIATE SENATE COMMITTEE TO LOOK INTO THE CURRENT DIGITAL PIRACY REGULATIONS IN THE PHILIPPINES AND THE POTENTIAL OF ADOPTING A "ROLLING SITEBLOCKING" MECHANISM TO COMBAT DIGITAL PIRACY IN THE COUNTRY

Introduced by Senator Poe

To the Committees on Public Information and Mass Media; and Trade, Commerce and Entrepreneurship

Proposed Senate Resolution No. 621, entitled

RESOLUTION COMMENDING AND CONGRATULATING ALL THE FILIPINO MEDALISTS OF THE 32ND SOUTHEAST ASIAN GAMES FOR BRINGING PRIDE AND HONOR TO THE COUNTRY

Introduced by Senator Angara

To the Committee on Rules

Proposed Senate Resolution No. 622, entitled

RESOLUTION CONGRATULATING AND COMMENDING THE PHILIPPINE SPORTS COMMISSION, ATHLETES, AND THE REST OF TEAM PHILIPPINES FOR THEIR OUTSTANDING EFFORT AND PERFORMANCE DURING THE RECENTLY CONCLUDED 32ND SOUTHEAST ASIAN GAMES (SEA GAMES) HELD IN PHNOM PENH, CAMBODIA FROM MAY 5 TO 17, 2023

Introduced by Senator Lapid

To the Committee on Rules

Proposed Senate Resolution No. 623, entitled

RESOLUTION RECOGNIZING AND COMMENDING THE ENTIRE PHILIPPINE DELEGATION FOR THEIR EXEMPLARY PERFORMANCE DURING THE 32ND SOUTHEAST ASIAN GAMES HELD ON MAY 5 - 17, 2023 IN PHNOM PENH, CAMBODIA

Introduced by Senator Revilla Jr.

To the Committee on Rules

Proposed Senate Resolution No. 624, entitled

RESOLUTION CONGRATULATING AND COMMENDING BIANCA BUSTAMANTE
FOR HER EXCEPTIONAL ACHIEVEMENT AS THE FIRST FILIPINO TO WIN
THE FORMULA ONE (F1) ACADEMY

Introduced by Senator Marcos

To the Committee on Rules

APPROVAL OF SENATE BILL NO. 2021 ON THIRD READING

Upon motion of Senator Ejercito, there being no objection, the Body considered, on Third Reading, Senate Bill No. 2021, printed copies of which were electronically distributed to the senators on May 17, 2023.

Pursuant to Section 67, Rule XXIII of the *Rules of the Senate*, upon motion of Senator Ejercito, there being no objection, Secretary Bantug read only the title of the bill, to wit:

AN ACT TO INSTITUTIONALIZE THE SHARED SERVICE FACILITIES (SSF) PROJECT FOR MICRO, SMALL, AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES (MSMES) BY AMENDING REPUBLIC ACT NO. 6977 OTHERWISE KNOWN AS THE MAGNA CARTA FOR SMALL ENTERPRISES AS AMENDED BY REPUBLIC ACT NO. 9501 OTHERWISE KNOWN AS THE MAGNA CARTA FOR MICRO, SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES.

Secretary Bantug called the roll for nominal voting.

RESULT OF THE VOTING

The result of the voting was as follows:

In favor

Angara	Marcos
Binay	Padilla
Cayetano (A)	Pimentel
Dela Rosa	Poe
Ejercito	Revilla
Estrada	Tolentino
Gatchalian	Tulfo
Go	Villanueva
Hontiveros	Villar (C)
Lapid	Villar (M)
Legarda	Zubiri

Against

None

Abstention

None

With 22 senators voting in favor, none against, and no abstention, the Chair declared Senate Bill No. 2021 approved on Third Reading.

APPROVAL OF SENATE BILL NO. 1964 ON THIRD READING

Upon motion of Senator Ejercito, there being no objection, the Body considered, on Third Reading, Senate Bill No. 1964, printed copies of which were electronically distributed to the senators on May 17, 2023.

Pursuant to Section 67, Rule XXIII of the *Rules of the Senate*, upon motion of Senator Ejercito, there being no objection, Secretary Bantug read only the title of the bill, to wit:

AN ACT INSTITUTIONALIZING THE GRANT OF A TEACHING SUPPLIES ALLOWANCE FOR PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR.

Secretary Bantug called the roll for nominal voting.

RESULT OF THE VOTING

The result of the voting was as follows:

In favor

Angara	Marcos
Binay	Padilla
Cayetano (A)	Pimentel
Dela Rosa	Poe
Ejercito	Revilla
Estrada	Tolentino
Gatchalian	Tulfo
Go	Villanueva
Hontiveros	Villar (C)
Lapid	Villar (M)
Legarda	Zubiri

Against

None

Abstention

None

With 22 senators voting in favor, none against, and no abstention, the Chair declared Senate Bill No. 1964 approved on Third Reading.

EXPLANATION OF VOTE OF SENATOR REVILLA

Senator Revilla delivered the following statements on the passage on Third Reading of Senate Bill No. 1964:

I rise today to thank this august Chamber for once again standing behind our heroic teachers who have constantly given their all to nurture the youth of our nation. *Binigyang-silip natin sa bulwagang ito at binigyang-tugon ang mga pangangailangan ng ating mga bayaning guro na katuwang ng estado at mga magulang sa pagtataguyod ng kabataang Pinoy na siya pa rin nating itinuturing na pag-asa ng ating bayan.*

With the passage on Third Reading of Senate Bill No. 1964 or the "Kabalikat Sa Pagtuturo Act," we are giving our dear teachers an assurance that they will always have the Senate as their

ally in advocating, pushing, and fighting for their welfare. *Isang hakbang pa lamang ito sa marami pa nating mga ipapasang panukala upang bigyang sandata ang ating mga guro, lalo na at sa kanilang papel na ginagampanan sa buhay ng ating mga kabataan na hindi matatawaran.*

It has been said that theirs is a thankless profession. *Maraming sakripisyo para sa maliit na sahod. Pagod na at kadalasan ay abonado pa. At ito nga pong pagsasabatas ng teaching allowance ay isang seguridad sa kanila, upang higit pa nilang magampanan ang kanilang mga responsibilidad nang hindi naman naisasantabi ang sariling pangangailangan.*

With this great honor, we shepherd this meaningful legislation that will be our loudest declaration of our commitment to our teachers, that they will never be alone in this journey.

Muli, salamat sa ating mga kasamahan dito sa Senado, sa inyong buong suporta sa panukalang ito. Hindi ko na po iisa-isahin pa dahil lahat po tayo ay nagsikap na bigyang katuparan ito. Kaya, maraming maraming salamat sa iyon, mga kasama. Ito ay isang patunay na saludo tayo na ito ay agaran na matamasa ng ating mga guro dahil sa kanilang kabayanihan.

EXPLANATION OF VOTE OF SENATOR DELA ROSA

Senator Dela Rosa explained his affirmative vote on Senate Bill No. 1964, to wit:

I wish to take this opportunity to explain my affirmative vote for the approval on Third Reading of Senate Bill No. 1964, otherwise known as the “Kabalikat sa Pagtuturo Act.”

In my cosponsorship of this measure, I talked at length about how the “*napagkakasya naman*” mentality, which is something we Filipinos are known for, should not be applied to the treatment of our teachers. *Sila na kabalikat natin sa pagpapalaki ng ating mga anak ay nararapat lamang na tulungan.* These teachers who support and help us in forming our children intellectually and emotionally, also need and deserve our support and help. This is why I give this measure my loudest affirmative vote.

Arne Duncan once said, “Wherever you find something extraordinary, you’ll find the fingerprints of a great teacher.” Today, it is my fervent hope that Filipino teachers will be even more inspired to scale greater heights to conquer more extraordinary feats, knowing that their Senate has got their backs.

If great teachers are those who can bring out the best in their students, then let it be known that a great Senate is also that which, through inspired leadership and legislation, can bring out the best in their educators.

With the able chairmanship of the Committee on Civil Service, Government Reorganization and Professional Regulation, my good friend Sen. Ramon “Bong” Revilla, allow me to express my full support for the immediate passage of this happy bill into law.

APPROVAL OF SENATE BILL NO. 1410 ON THIRD READING

Upon motion of Senator Ejercito, there being no objection, the Body considered, on Third Reading, Senate Bill No. 1410, printed copies of which were electronically distributed to the senators on May 17, 2023.

Pursuant to Section 67, Rule XXIII of the *Rules of the Senate*, upon motion of Senator Ejercito, there being no objection, Secretary Bantug read only the title of the bill, to wit:

AN ACT DECLARING THE FIRST DAY OF FEBRUARY OF EVERY YEAR AS THE NATIONAL DAY FOR AWARENESS ON THE HIJAB AND OTHER TRADITIONAL GARMENTS AND ATTIRE.

Secretary Bantug called the roll for nominal voting.



RESULT OF THE VOTING

The result of the voting was as follows:

In favor

Angara	Padilla
Binay	Pimentel
Dela Rosa	Poe
Ejercito	Revilla
Estrada	Tolentino
Gatchalian	Tulfo
Go	Villanueva
Hontiveros	Villar (C)
Lapid	Villar (M)
Legarda	Zubiri
Marcos	

Against

None

Abstention

None

With 21 senators voting in favor, none against, and no abstention, the Chair declared Senate Bill No. 1410 approved on Third Reading.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR PADILLA

Senator Padilla made the following statements on the approval on Third Reading of Senate Bill No. 1410:

Sa Banal na Pangalan, sa 99 names of God, Assalamualaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh.

Sa mga kapwa ko miyembro ng lupon na ito, ako po ay nagpapasalamat sa ating mga kasamahan dito sa Senado sa pamumuno at patuloy na patnubay ng ating minamahal na Senate President Juan Miguel "Migz" F. Zubiri upang maipasa ang Senate Bill No. 1410.

Napaka-espesyal po ng araw na ito hindi lamang po para sa ating mga kapatid na Muslim, kung hindi para sa lahat ng mga Pilipinong naghahangad ng mas malalim na pag-unawa sa pagkakaiba ng kultura, tradisyon, at pananampalaya.

Sa ating paghahangad ng isang lipunang walang diskriminasyon, napakahalagang kilalanin at harapin, hindi takasan at iwasan, ang mga partikular na hamon na kinakaharap ng isang komunidad.

Tulad na lamang po ng aking sinasambit, ang pangkalahatang layunin ng pagkakapantay-pantay ay hindi makakamit sa pamamagitan lamang ng pagpapahayag nito kung hindi natin kinikilala ang mga umiiral na katotohanan.

Madalas ay inihahalintulad ko ito sa isang masikip at siksikang silid—na kung ang lahat ay magsimulang magsalita nang sabay-sabay, hindi maiiwasang malunod na lamang at hindi mabigyan ng pansin ang mga boses ng mga nangangailangan ng agarang atensiyon.

Ang pagkilala sa mga pakikibaka ng isang grupo ay hindi nangangahulugan na bina-bawasan natin ang kahalagan ng iba. Sa halip, malinaw ang ating mithiin: ang pagpapalakas ng boses ng mga nangangailangan para isulong ang tunay na pagkakapantay-pantay.

Walang hanggang pasasalamat sa mga kasamahan nating tumayo kasama ang inyong lingkod upang makamit, sa anumang anyo, ang ating inaasam na layunin para sa ating mga kababayan.

COMMITTEE REPORT NO. 63 ON SENATE BILL NO. 2035

(Continuation)

Upon motion of Senator Ejercito, there being no objection, the Body resumed consideration, on Second Reading, of Senate Bill No. 2035 (Committee Report No. 63), entitled

AN ACT ESTABLISHING THE NATIONAL EMPLOYMENT MASTERPLAN, TO BE KNOWN AS THE "TRABAHO PARA SA BAYAN PLAN," APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.

Senator Ejercito stated that the parliamentary status was the period of committee amendments.

Thereupon, the Chair recognized Senator Villanueva, sponsor of the measure.

TERMINATION OF THE PERIOD OF COMMITTEE AMENDMENTS

There being no committee amendment, upon motion of Senator Ejercito, there being no objection, the Body closed the period of committee amendments and proceeded to the period of individual amendments.

VILLANUEVA AMENDMENTS

As proposed by Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body approved the following amendments, one after the other:

1. On page 3, line 5, after the word "start-ups," insert the phrase AND COOPERATIVES.

Senator Villanueva stated that the importance and potential of cooperatives in employment and income generation should be emphasized and monitored by the Trabaho Para sa Bayan Inter-Agency Council (TPB-IAC).

2. On page 4, line 8, at the instance of Senator Legarda, insert a new subparagraph (i), to read as follows:

(I) PROVIDING STANDARDS FOR TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT OF APPRENTICES, AND FORMULATING GUIDELINES FOR THE CREATION OF APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAMS AND OTHER ENTERPRISE-BASED EDUCATION AND TRAINING MODALITIES TO IMPROVE PRODUCTIVITY AND EFFICIENCY IN THE WORK FORCE.

Senator Villanueva agreed that in building the country's labor force, apprenticeship programs are necessary to provide an opportunity for career growth through critical and technical training and experience.

3. On page 4, line 11, insert a new subparagraph (j) to read as follows:

(J) ESTABLISHING EFFECTIVE AND INCLUSIVE GRIEVANCE REDRESS MECHANISMS TO PROVIDE AN ACCESSIBLE AND CREDIBLE CHANNEL FOR COMPLAINTS AND EXACT ACCOUNTABILITY TO THOSE LIABLE FOR OBLIGATIONS AND COMMITMENTS.

PIMENTEL AMENDMENTS

As proposed by Senator Pimentel and accepted by the sponsor, there being no objection, the Body approved the following amendments, one after the other:

4. On page 7, line 5, after the word "submit," delete the phrase "an annual report," and in lieu thereof, insert the phrase REPORTS TWICE A YEAR, IN JANUARY AND JULY;
5. On the same page, lines 18 and 19, after the word "Act," delete the acronyms and words "NEDA, DTI, and DOLE, in coordination with all the members of"; and
6. On the same page, line 19, after the comma (,) after the acronym "TBP-IAC," insert the words TOGETHER WITH.

As to the proposal of Senator Pimentel on page 7, line 24 to replace "department/agencies concerned" with "NEDA," Senator Villanueva expressed concern that the provision, if amended, may be misconstrued that it only refers to the budget for the operation of the board excluding the other agencies. It being the case, Senator Pimentel withdrew his proposed amendment.

TERMINATION OF THE PERIOD OF INDIVIDUAL AMENDMENTS

There being no other individual amendment, upon motion of Senator Ejercito, there being no objection, the Body closed the period of individual amendments.

APPROVAL OF SENATE BILL NO. 2035 ON SECOND READING

Submitted to a vote, there being no objection, Senate Bill No. 2035 was approved on Second Reading.

SUSPENSION OF CONSIDERATION OF SENATE BILL NO. 2035

Upon motion of Senator Ejercito, there being no objection, the Body suspended consideration of the bill.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF THE PRESENCE OF GUEST

At this juncture, Senate President Zubiri acknowledged the presence in the gallery of Aimee Marcos-Bernedo, the youngest sister of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. and welcomed her to the Senate.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR EJERCITO

Senator Ejercito and the Senate President then congratulated Senator Tolentino, who just came back from his graduation for his third master's degree.

SUSPENSION OF SESSION

Upon motion of Senator Ejercito, the session was suspended.

It was 3:45 p.m.

RESUMPTION OF SESSION

At 4:40 p.m., the session was resumed.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATE PRESIDENT ZUBIRI

Acting on the request of Senator Estrada, Senate President Zubiri reiterated the agreement reached by the Members during the break, which was to allow the senator to deliver his privilege speech that day; and that its interpellation be done the following day, instead.

PRIVILEGE SPEECH OF SENATOR ESTRADA

Availing himself of the privilege hour, Senator Estrada delivered the following speech on the plight of Filipinos living in Pag-asa Island:

I rise today on a matter of personal and collective privilege.

I rise before you with a heavy heart, encumbered by the plight of our *kababayans* in the remote and isolated Pag-asa Island—the largest landform of the Kalayaan Island Group, which includes Ayungin Reef and Rizal Shoal; and the islands of Lawak, Patag, Likas, Kota, Panata, Parola, and Pag-asa.

Kalayaan, a fifth-class municipality, is the least populated town in the Philippines. As of May this year, a total of 350 civilians, or 65 households, are currently living on Pag-asa Island; 73 of them are children.

To these 65 households, Pag-asa—its name pertains to a concept deeply rooted in the Filipino culture, and reflects the resilience and unwavering spirit of the Filipino people—is their home.

Last Thursday, May 18, I took a short visit to the Pag-asa Island, along with Armed Forces of the Philippines Chief of Staff Gen. Andres Centino; Naval Forces West Commanding General, Alan Javier; Philippine Air Force Commanding General, Lt. Gen. Stephen Parreño; several other military officers; and some members of the Senate media, to look into its current situation.

To this day, the backdrops of what I saw continue to play in my mind. And as I stand here, I cannot help but think of our *kababayans*, who face countless challenges on a daily basis. For far too long, our brothers and sisters in Pag-asa Island have lived in constant uncertainty. They have endured the harsh realities of a life cut off from essential services and opportunities that many of us take for granted.

Their access to healthcare, education, and even the basic necessities of life is hampered by their geographic isolation. Their hopes and dreams often seem distant, obscured by the vastness of the sea that surrounds them.

Imagine being separated from your loved ones for months due to lack of transportation options. *Sa mga pagkakataon ng pagkakarataw sa banig ng karamdaman, wala kang ospital na mapupuntahan o kahit man lamang health center na maasahan. Paano pa kaya sa mga kaso ng panganganak ng mga kababaihan? Kailangan pa silang i-airlift ilang buwan bago ang inaasahang petsa ng kanilang panganganak. Walang doktor, nurse, o kahit na kumadrona na sasaklolo para masiguro ang ligtas na pagluwal ng sanggol.*

Ang mga kabataang nasa elementary—na nasa 73 ang kasalukuyang bilang—ay umaasa sa gabay at hinuhubog ng dalawang guro lamang; tatlo paminsan-minsan, kapag may sundalong nagboboluntaryong magturo sa kanila. At sa araw-araw na pagpasok nila sa eskwela ngayon sa nag-iisa na silid-aralan, hindi alintana ng mag-aaral na mula Grades 1 to 6 ang sira-sira nilang kapaligiran na winasak ng super typhoon Odette noong Disyembre, isa't kalahating taon na ang nakakaraan.

Halos magdadalawang taon na ang nangyaring delubyo, ngunit ang mga bakas ng matinding pinsalang iniwan ng bagyong Odette ay nandoon pa rin.

This is the reality faced by our *kababayans* in Pag-asa Island. Imagine dear colleagues the life when the power supply from the generator sets is cut off by 10 in the evening. Imagine having no local radio stations. Imagine having cash in your pockets, but seeing no need to use it as a medium of exchange simply because there are no economic transactions and financial activities in the area.

Two decades after opening the once strictly-military installation to civilian settlement, the island has remained fallow. This, despite the construction of the beaching ramp, which would allow shallow-draft vessels, or those with roll-on/roll-off (roro) capability to bring in essential landing engineering equipment and other construction materials for the development of the island.

The repair of the Rancudo Airfield, which sustained erosion damage, is still ongoing. The 1.2-kilometer airfield that was constructed during the 1970s can accommodate only medium-sized military aircraft. We still have a long, long way to go if we are really keen on developing Pag-asa Island into a tourism and fishing destination, or even a marine research hub.

Currently, missionary telecommunications service is being provided by Smart communications, which covers Pag-asa Island only. Though the signal is unstable, it has been very beneficial to the community and to the municipality's operation. *Kaya naman noong paglapag namin sa Pag-asa Island gamit namin ang sasakyang panghimpapawid ng Philippine Air Force, tumunog kaagad ang aming cellphone sa Globe o sa Smart—"Welcome to China," or "Welcome to Vietnam."*

The other options for communicating are by the use of a single-side band (SSB) radio and of the military-operated very high frequency (VHF) radio band on the island. The military, however, has a very small aperture terminal (VSAT). It is a two-way satellite ground station, or a stabilized maritime VSAT antenna that uses broadband data for the provision of satellite internet access even in remote areas like Kalayaan.

As a Member of this august Body that represents the interests of the people of this Republic, it is my duty to bring to the fore their daily struggles; and advocate for the attention and assistance they desperately need. Pag-asa is a real island that can sustain human life and community.

I implore each and every one of you to lend your unwavering support to the cause of our brothers and sisters in Pag-asa Island. *Sa aking pakikipag-usap at maging sa panayam ng mga reporters na kasama ko sa mga residente doon, handa silang manatili doon kahit na kapos sila sa maraming bagay.* They are more than willing to contribute to the island's defense, survival, and development.

As public servants, it is our moral duty to uplift the lives of our citizens. We must rise above our differences and collaborate to bring meaningful change; and not let our fellow Filipinos in Pag-asa Island be forgotten or left behind.

It is our moral obligation as public servants to ensure that they too will have access to basic necessities such as education, healthcare, and livelihood. We should invest in infrastructure projects that will enhance connectivity, healthcare facilities, and educational resources to nurture the development of the next generation.

Let us also not forget the sacrifices made by our brave men and women in uniform who guard Pag-asa Island with unwavering dedication. They, who face the brunt of the challenges and dangers posed by external forces, put their lives on the line to protect and defend our sovereignty. We owe it to them to support their mission by providing the necessary logistical support to carry out their duties effectively.

Sa aking pagbisita, napag-alaman ko na ang isang 78-year-old World War II-era Philippine Navy auxiliary ship, BRP Mangyan, ay isa sa mga ginagamit sa pagpapatrolya sa nasasakupan nating karagatan sa West Philippine Sea.

Ito rin ang nagdadala ng supplies sa pitong Philippine outposts sa West Philippine Sea. Mula sa kinalalagyan ng BRP Mangyan, tanaw namin ang nasa walo hanggang siyam na Chinese militia ships; na dalawa hanggang tatlong nautical miles lamang ang layo mula sa shoreline ng Pag-asa Island.

Let us not allow the remoteness of Pag-asa Island to be an excuse for neglect. Let us embody the spirit of solidarity and compassion that defines us as a nation.

Pag-asa Island may be a tiny dot on the map, but its significance is immeasurable. It is not just a piece of land. It is a testament to our sovereignty; the indomitable spirit of our people; and a symbol of our determination of what is rightfully ours. And behind all of these, there are human lives—children, families, and individuals who are willing to live there in exchange for a peaceful life.

Bigyan natin ng pag-asa ang mga taga-Pag-asa.

Thank you, and may we continue to serve our people with passion and empathy.



REMARK OF SENATE PRESIDENT ZUBIRI

Senate President Zubiri thanked Senator Estrada for his report on the state of infrastructure in Pag-asa Island. He stated that the residents of the island deserve better as they, too, are Filipinos. He then expressed hope that during the budget hearing, the Body could propose amendments to the measure, prioritizing the needed infrastructure to make their lives better.

COMMITTEE REPORT NO. 58 ON SENATE BILL NO. 2020

(Continuation)

Upon motion of Senator Ejercito, there being no objection, the Body resumed consideration, on Second Reading, of Senate Bill No. 2020 (Committee Report No. 58), entitled

AN ACT ESTABLISHING THE MAHARLIKA INVESTMENT FUND, PROVIDING FOR THE MANAGEMENT, INVESTMENT, AND USE OF THE PROCEEDS OF THE FUND, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.

Senator Ejercito stated that the parliamentary status was still the period of interpellations.

Thereupon, the Chair recognized Senator Villar (M), sponsor of the measure, and Senator Gatchalian for his interpellation.

INTERPELLATION OF SENATOR GATCHALIAN

Preliminarily, Senator Gatchalian thanked Senator Villar (M) for accepting four out of the five recommendations that his office sent to the sponsor to improve the bill. Relative thereto, he enumerated the following proposals that had been accepted by Senator Villar (M): 1) the guarantee to the capital contributions of the Founding Government Financial Institutions; 2) the grant of tax exemption to the Maharlika Investment Corporation (MIC) and the Maharlika Investment Fund (MIF); 3) the grant of regulatory reliefs to the Founding GFIs and, 4) privatization as one of the main sources of the MIF. He added that although the fourth item was not completely accepted, he noted that privatization became one of the sources of capitalization of the MIF. He then informed the Body that the item that was not accepted was his recommendation to remove the BSP as a source of capitalization. In response, Senator Villar (M) thanked Senator Gatchalian, adding that the senator's suggestions were invaluable inputs in improving the measure.

Senator Gatchalian noted that some of the previous issues raised by his fellow senators pointed to the sovereign wealth funds of other nations, particularly to that of Malaysia's 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB). He opined that the same should not be emulated by the Philippine government, as a number of analyses dubbed the 1MDB controversy as the mother of all scandals, insofar as sovereign wealth funds were concerned.

Asked whether the committee had studied the 1MDB case, as well as its subsequent findings on the subject, Senator Villar (M) mentioned that a certain Jho Low, through his firm, misrepresented and utilized the guarantee of the Malaysian government in order to borrow money. He also said that scant government control made the scam possible. In contrast, he stated that the Maharlika bill have numerous layers of protection, to wit: 1) the composition of the Board, 2) the oversight of Congress; 3) the advisory body composed of the NEDA, the Bureau of Treasury, and the DBM; and 4) the presence of internal and external auditors. Furthermore, he said that none of the aforementioned were present in the 1MDB fiasco.

Still on the subject, Senator Villar (M) said that although Mr. Low was not a government official, he was able to deceive investors by namedropping the Government of Malaysia; giving

the impression that the entity he represented had sovereign backing. Senator Villar (M) then emphasized that with the numerous controls present in the measure, a similar incident could be avoided.

Asked on the safeguards that have been embedded in the proposed law that would prevent a scandal similar to that of the 1MDB from happening in the Philippines, Senator Villar (M) stated that the following measures would be in place:

- internal/external auditors;
- an investment advisory council that will assist the board of directors, from the LBP, the DBP and members from the private sectors, in formulating policies related to investment and risk management;
- a Joint Congressional Oversight Committee;
- the Governance Commission for GOCCs (GCG) would oversee if the transactions are governed by applicable laws and regulations; and
- the Commission on Audit (COA) would scrutinize its funds and check whether its procurement functions follow the guidelines of RA 984.

Senator Gatchalian thanked Senator Villar (M) for clarifying the safeguards and for accepting some of his recommendations, especially on procurement, and on the coverage of the MIF under GCG which he believed are part of the controls that would eliminate possible fraud and embezzlement of the funds.

He also agreed with the observation that the 1MDB scandal was a simple case of fraud and embezzlement perpetrated by Malaysian businessman Jho Low who misrepresented himself. He said that although it was a simple case of corruption, there were loopholes in the process that enabled Mr. Low to act with impunity.

He noted that the 1MDB had been set up to fund developmental projects in Malaysia by attracting investors, raising capital from the private sector and entering into joint ventures in several critical projects. However, he noted that 1MDB concentrated on floating bonds to raise capital, a scheme which is also provided in Section 10 of Senate Bill No. 2020. He then asked if the bonds would be guaranteed by the MIC.

Senator Villar (M) explained that several parties were involved in 1MDB, including the investment banks, which raised the money for Jho Low, but were held accountable and prosecuted for it. He gave assurance that there are stronger controls for the MIF because investment banks are implementing stricter measures to prevent such illicit fund raising. In addition, he said that the bonds would not be guaranteed by the Philippine government.

Senator Gatchalian surmised that bonds issued by 1MDB became sovereign bonds because even though they were initially guaranteed by 1MDB and the Abu Dhabi Sovereign Wealth Fund, the Malaysian government eventually had to step in as an indirect guarantor when everything went haywire. Senator Villar (M) clarified that 1MDB denied that the bonds were backed by a sovereign guarantee, as had been misrepresented by Jho Low.

Asked whether the Maharlika fund would be guaranteed by the Philippine government, Senator Villar (M) pointed out that any international borrowing done by the MIC would have to go through the Monetary Board, therefore, it cannot decide unilaterally to borrow from foreign sources. He also added that bonds issued by the MIC would not be guaranteed by the Philippine government.

He then read Section 10, line 24 of the bill which states that "Such obligations shall be secured by the assets under the management of the MIC, including the stocks, bonds, debentures, and other securities purchased or held by it under the provisions of this Act. These bonds and debentures may be long-term, medium-, or short-terms, with fixed interest rate or floating interest rate." He said that it clearly states that there is no government guarantees but it would be secured by the assets of the MIC.

On whether a foreign guarantee is possible, Senator Villar (M) replied in the negative, saying that only the MIC can guarantee its own bonds, adding that the proposed law explicitly states that the bonds would be secured by the assets of the corporation.

Asked on the process behind the issuance of bonds by the MIC, Senator Villar (M) responded that aside from complying with other minor administrative requirements, the MIC would have to get the approval from the monetary board, and then from the Department of Finance (DOF) in order to borrow from foreign sources as it is also a government owned and controlled corporation (GOCC).

On whether the bonds take the character of a treasury bill (T-Bill), Senator Villar (M) replied in the negative. He pointed out that while higher rates would be offered for the Maharlika bonds compared to T-Bills it would have a risk premium since it is not a sovereign guaranty.

As regards the deletion of the preferential tax rates from the bill, which means that any issuance will also compete with those offered by private corporations, Senator Villar (M) replied that it was one of the improvements, and modifications of the bill that they have taken into account in order to level the playing field.

Senator Gatchalian expressed hope that the MIF would succeed as he saw the wisdom of creating the funds that would multiply the capital that the Philippine government could raise and which could be used for infrastructure projects. However, in a worst-case scenario, he asked who would guarantee the funds if something happens to MIF and the bonds become problematic.

Senator Villar (M) answered that it would still be backed by the assets of the fund, but that it would also depend on the investment strategy of the board of directors, and the kind of yield that the MIC would seek to generate. He explained that going for a higher yield would mean taking a higher stake in equities while a more conservative position would mean investing in a larger pool of government securities. He said that investments normally involve diversification and risks, adding that much would depend on the investment strategy of the MIC and its board of directors.

Adverting to paragraph 3 of Section 10, Senator Gatchalian sought clarification on whether the MIC could issue bonds or debentures that are worth more than its assets or if it is limited to the size of its assets. Senator Villar (M) replied that the amount of bonds it issues would depend on the borrowing capacity of the corporation and that it would also have to go through several levels of approval. He opined that such conditions would help limit the downside in terms of what could happen to the fund.

SUSPENSION OF CONSIDERATION OF SENATE BILL NO. 2020

Upon motion of Senator Ejercito, there being no objection, the Body suspended consideration of the bill.

ADDITIONAL REFERENCE OF BUSINESS

The Secretary of the Senate read the following matters and the Chair made the corresponding referrals:

BILLS ON FIRST READING

Senate Bill No. 2218, entitled

AN ACT MANDATING THE FORMULATION, FINANCING, IMPLEMENTATION, MONITORING, AND EVALUATION OF A COMPREHENSIVE AND MULTI-YEAR "TATAK PINOY" (PROUDLY FILIPINO) STRATEGY, ESTABLISHING A TATAK PINOY COUNCIL, APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

Introduced by Senator Angara

To the Committees on Economic Affairs; Trade, Commerce and Entrepreneurship; and Finance

Senate Bill No. 2220, entitled

AN ACT PROVIDING FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF A BRIDGE CONNECTING BARANGAY MABINI AND BARANGAY MOSANGOT LOCATED IN THE MUNICIPALITY OF BINUANGAN, PROVINCE OF MISAMIS ORIENTAL, TO BE KNOWN AS THE MABINI-MOSANGOT BRIDGE AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR

Introduced by Senator Marcos

To the Committee on Rules

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Committee Report No. 68, prepared and submitted by the Committee on Ways and Means, on Senate Bill No. 2219, with Senators Revilla Jr., Zubiri, Legarda, Villanueva, Binay, and Gatchalian as authors thereof, entitled

AN ACT FURTHER AMENDING REPUBLIC ACT NO. 11213, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS THE "TAX AMNESTY ACT," AS AMENDED BY REPUBLIC ACT NO. 11569, BY EXTENDING THE PERIOD OF AVAILMENT OF ESTATE TAX AMNESTY UNTIL JUNE 14, 2025, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES,

recommending its approval in substitution of Senate Bill Nos. 2159, 2170, 2174, and 2197, taking into consideration House Bill No. 7909.

Sponsor: Senator Gatchalian

To the Calendar for Ordinary Business

The Deputy Secretary for Legislation, Atty. Edwin B. Bellen, read the following committee report and the Chair made the corresponding referral:

Committee Report No. 69, prepared and submitted jointly by the Committees on Migrant Workers; Foreign Relations; and Finance, on Senate Bill No. 2221, with Senators Estrada, Zubiri, Villanueva, Tulfo, Hontiveros, Angara, Poe, Gatchalian, Revilla Jr., Go, Legarda, Dela Rosa, Villar (M), Padilla, and Villar (C) as authors thereof, entitled

AN ACT PROVIDING FOR A MAGNA CARTA OF FILIPINO SEAFARERS,

recommending its approval in substitution of Senate Bill Nos. 46, 86, 137, 216, 586, 640, 720, 822, 1104, 1191, 1248, 1312, and 1671, taking into consideration House Bill No. 7325.

Sponsor: Senator Tulfo

To the Calendar for Ordinary Business

SPECIAL ORDER

Upon motion of Senator Ejercito, there being no objection, the Body approved the transfer of Committee Report No. 69 on Senate Bill No. 2221 from the Calendar for Ordinary Business to the Calendar for Special Orders.

COMMITTEE REPORT NO. 69 ON SENATE BILL NO. 2221

Upon motion of Senator Ejercito, there being no objection, the Body considered, on Second Reading, Senate Bill No. 2221 (Committee Report No. 69), entitled

AN ACT PROVIDING FOR THE MAGNA CARTA OF FILIPINO SEAFARERS.

Pursuant to Section 67, Rule XXIII of the *Rules of the Senate*, with the permission of the Body, upon motion of Senator Ejercito, only the title of the bill was read without prejudice to the insertion of its full text into the *Record of the Senate*.

The Chair recognized Senator Tulfo for the sponsorship.

SPONSORSHIP SPEECH OF SENATOR TULFO

In presenting Senate Bill No. 2221 for plenary consideration of the Body, Senator Tulfo delivered the following speech:

I am honored to sponsor today the Magna Carta of Filipino Seafarers.

Magna Carta in layman's language is the "Great Charter." It is a very appropriate title for this piece of legislation—the great charter for our Filipino seafarers.

I Introduction: The Filipino Seafarer

In the shipping industry, when we say seafarers, we almost always equate it to Filipino seafarers. The country's dominance in this tough and challenging industry on cargo ships began in the 1980s when an organized campaign began to train Filipinos for careers at sea.

Employment agencies marketed Filipino seafarers to international shipping companies. An industry of marine colleges emerged to serve the class of strivers seeking the jobs. And government agencies stepped in to manage their deployment. Since then, we have dominated this industry in such a way that Filipino culture could be felt in many international ocean-going vessels.

In a *New York Times* article featuring the life of Filipino seafarers, it showed how both the ship's food and free time remind the sailors of life back home in the Philippines.

At this juncture, Senate President Zubiri relinquished the Chair to Senator Ejercito.

One night, the men roasted a whole lechon on a spit and feasted on fresh coconuts. On the aft deck, there was a basketball hoop—basketball, after all, is the unofficial national sport of the Philippines. And during Saturday nights, karaoke in the mess hall could be heard.

But life on the vessel is not all beautiful sunsets and serene ocean views. The *New York Times* article also told the heartbreaking stories of our seafarers.

On his first ocean voyage seven years ago, Jun Russel Reunir was sent deep into the bowels of a cargo ship, where he shoveled iron ore until his muscles ached—then continued shoveling for a dozen hours more. “I cried in my cabin three times that month,” Mr. Reunir said.

Jayson Guanio, 29, the ship’s cook, recalled that once, on a two-month voyage from Montenegro to China, he ran up to the bridge to peer through binoculars at the flat rise of a distant island, just for the chance to look at something other than the sea.

A. *Their Role in the Global Shipping Industry*

Filipinos, like Mr. Reunir and Mr. Guanio, have for decades powered the global shipping industry, helping to move 90% of global trade. And throughout the pandemic, the world’s 1.9 million seafarers have played a vital role in keeping ships moving and ensuring critical goods such as food, medical equipment, and vaccines are delivered. In 2022, 489,852 Filipino seafarers were deployed. That makes 25% of the world’s seafarers are Filipinos.

B. *Their Role in Philippine Economy*

And with this number comes the incidental benefit that the Philippine economy has obtained from the remittances of our seafarers. In 2019 alone, it was estimated that 519,031 deployed seafarers remitted \$6.5 billion to the Philippines. This is practically 1.7% of the country’s GDP that year.

II. *Why We Need the Magna Carta*

Given that we have been deploying seafarers for more than four decades already and they have been dominating the industry, why is there still a need to enact this Magna Carta of Seafarers?

There are five main reasons why we must pass this legislation:

- A. It is a highly-regulated international industry;
- B. It provides a well-compensated work for a high skill set worker;
- C. We must protect the viability of the Filipino seafarer in the global shipping industry;
- D. It will empower government agencies to help our seafarers; and
- E. It will inform our seafarers of their rights and duties.

Let me explain each one.

- A. Highly-regulated industries by the International Labour Organization – Maritime Labor Convention (ILO-MLC) and the Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers (STCW).

First, seafarers are governed by various international conventions, laws, and practices that are particular to sea-based Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) and not to the land-based OFWs. The Philippines’ distinction as the seafaring capital of the world was sustained through its strict compliance to the requirements imposed by the ILO’s Maritime Labor Convention, or MLC-2006, an international convention, and the Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers, or STCW.

Labor standards under the MLC-2006 created a single coherent instrument embodying, as far as possible, all up-to-date standards of existing international maritime labor conventions and recommendations as well as the fundamental principles to be found in other international labor conventions.

Further, the convention was designed to secure the widest acceptability among government, shipowners, and seafarers committed to the principles of decent work that it should be readily updateable and that it should lend itself to effective implementation and enforcement.

Meanwhile, the STCW was created to clarify the standards of competence required, introduce qualification requirements for trainers and assessors, provide effective mechanism for enforcement of its provisions, and allow greater flexibility in the assignment of functions onboard ship.

The international nature of shipping requires uniform treatment and international standards that are transposed to national law and regulation so that regardless of where the ship and her seafarers may be found, the ship and her seafarers are always subject to the same set of standards with which they must comply.

B. Well-compensated work for a high skillset worker.

Second, seafaring has become a sought-after profession of choice for most Filipinos, especially those who cannot afford to pursue expensive professional courses. The seafarers pursue a maritime degree mainly to work onboard a ship. The profession's uniqueness and peculiarity differ from the land-based OFWs who are educated and trained for land-based jobs but are unable to find opportunities at home, forcing them to seek for greener pasture abroad.

The salary of the messman, the lowest rank crew, range between P78,400.00 to P140,000.00. That is about 10 times our current minimum wage. Imagine this. A few weeks ago, we were discussing *kung paano itataas ang minimum wage para sa mga manggagawa natin na ngayon ay nasa P8,866.00 hanggang sa P14,820.00 monthly. Nililimos natin ang taas na P150.00 sa mga employers. Ang hirap pong itawid dahil hindi naman din po kaya ng ibang industriya. Kaya isang malaking oportunidad talaga para sa ating mga kababayan ang maging seafarer.*

For this reason, seafarers need closer attention from government to promote the continuous employment on board foreign-owned vessels.

C. The Viability of the Filipino Seafarer in the Global Shipping Industry.

The Philippines, the Russian Federation, Indonesia, China, and India are the largest suppliers of ratings and officers working on merchant ships. But in recent years, ships have been hiring more seamen from Vietnam, Myanmar, Africa, and China.

This is an ongoing concern at this time when the demand for Filipino seafarers is decreasing because of the depressed shipping market, which has resulted in vessel sale, scrapping or layoff, coupled with cost-cutting measures of shipowners on crewing cost. Measures must be formulated to address key manpower issues to promotion of careers at sea, enhancement of maritime education and training worldwide, and addressing the retention of seafarers.

D. Empower government agencies to help our seafarers.

Fourth, this bill will be a compass of our government agencies, primarily the very young Department of Migrant Workers. They are still trying to adjust to their new jurisdiction. And now, this legislative measure will outline the primary concerns of our seafarers to aid them in helping our seafarers as well as the manning agencies.

E. Inform our seafarers of their rights.

Fifth, as the great charter for our seafarers, this Magna Carta should serve as their map in their journey as seafarers. It will inform them on how to go about with their concerns, how to enforce their rights, and where to go to avail of them. *Importante po sa lahat, dapat alam nila ito kasi, kung hindi, bale wala ang lahat ng ginagawa natin dito.*

III. Important Points and Key Features

Now, to address all these, let me go over the important points and key features of the law:

The law will cover both domestic and OFW seafarers. While the standards are based on international standards, we provided for a separate section to govern seafarers of domestic shipping, which is found in Chapters 14 and 15.

Chapter 3 codifies the basic rights and duties of seafarers based on international laws, standards and practices, and conventions.

Chapter 7 lays down the terms and conditions of employment.

Chapter 8 provides for the accommodation, recreational, and sanitation facilities, food, and catering in ships.

Chapter 9 states the Medical Care and Maritime Occupational Safety and Health Standards. The ocean is a dangerous place to work in. In the last 10 years, 1,036 ships have been lost at sea.

A mooring rope could snap with enough force to rip off a man's head, or a falling grate could sheer off fingers. A large swell breaking over the side could slam a man against rock pipes or wash him into the sea. There are electrocutions, burns, and appendicitis. The nearest hospital could be hours or even days away by rescue helicopter. This chapter will address these concerns.

Chapter 4 cements the protection for women seafarers, and promotes and upholds gender equality. This chapter will protect our seafarers against discrimination on the basis of race, sex, gender identity, or expression of religion or political opinion.

Of course, the seafarers must also be informed of their corresponding duties. Such is outlined in Chapter 5.

Chapter 6 identifies the role and responsibilities of manning agencies, employers, and shipowners.

Chapters 10 and 11 provide for the standards and set the regulations for termination of employment, extension of employment, and disputes resolution.

Chapters 12 and 13 outline the crucial situation of repatriation and reintegration. After our seafarers have served their contract, we must assist them when they must return to their families. And when they are unable to finish their contract, a proper repatriation procedure will protect them from being abandoned overseas.

Chapter 16 is crucial as it sets forth the rights of cadets being already part of the seafaring industry, and addresses the concerns regarding the development of marine education.

To elevate the industry further, Chapter 17 provides for incentives and awards granted to players in the maritime industry.

The government's role is outlined in Chapter 18.

And, finally, to lend teeth to this law, Chapter 19 imposes penalties for violations of this act.

This is the general map of the Magna Carta.

But the Magna Carta of Seafarers is not a novel idea. The Senate has always been an advocate for our seafarers. The first Magna Carta Bill was filed during the Thirteenth Congress by Sen. Edgardo J. Angara, the father of our esteemed colleague, Sen. Sonny Angara.

After that, there was a continuous effort throughout the years to push this crucial legislation.

In fact, the majority of us here now have, at one point, espoused this piece of legislation.

First, Sen. Loren Legarda filed her first version of the Magna Carta during the Fourteenth, Fifteenth, Sixteenth, and Seventeenth Congresses. The chairperson of the Committee on Labor, Employment and Human Resources Development, Sen. Jinggoy Estrada, filed his version during the Sixteenth Congress. Sen. Ramon Revilla Jr. also filed during the Sixteenth and Eighteenth Congresses. "The Good One," Sen. JV Ejercito, had several versions during Sixteenth and Seventeenth Congresses.

Sen. Sonny Angara followed his father's advocacy and filed his version during the Sixteenth, Seventeenth, and Eighteenth Congresses. Sen. Joel Villanueva did not lose time and filed his version during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Congresses. Sen. Nancy Binay also saw the importance of the bill during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Congresses. Sen. Risa Hontiveros filed her version during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Congresses. And, of course, our dear Senate President Juan Miguel Zubiri filed his version during the Eighteenth Congress.

Sen. Win Gatchalian, Sen. Christopher Lawrence Go, and Sen. Cynthia Villar joined in the filing of Senate Bill No. 2369 during the Eighteenth Congress.

And now, for the Nineteenth Congress, no less than 14 of us here filed versions of the Magna Carta of Filipino Seafarers—Senate President Juan Miguel Zubiri, Majority Leader Joel Villanueva, President Pro Tempore Loren Legarda, Senators Jinggoy Estrada, Robinhood Padilla, Cynthia Villar, Risa Hontiveros, Sonny Angara, Grace Poe, Win Gatchalian, Ramon Revilla Jr., Christopher Lawrence Go, Ronald "Bato" Dela Rosa, Mark Villar, and yours truly.

That is a total of 17 senators who, at one point and up to the present, see the need to provide for the institutionalization of the rights that would protect our seafarers.



I am honored to be surrounded by legislators of like mind who see the value of this legislation. Our seafarers deserve our support and protection. This Magna Carta is a message to our seafarers that we are behind them, a guarantee to the international community that we will comply with the standards set by the relevant conventions, and a command to our government officials to hit the ground running and ensure that we keep our obligations to these conventions.

COSPONSORSHIP SPEECHES

In cosponsoring Senate Bill No. 2221, the following Members likewise delivered their individual speeches:

By Senator Estrada

Ten years after the Maritime Labor Convention of 2006 entered into force on August 20, 2013, with the Philippines as the 30th Member-State to ratify the same, we still fail to pass an enabling law to protect the rights and welfare of our seafarers.

This Representation filed the bill on Magna Carta of Filipino Seafarers way back in the Sixteenth Congress and was then the chairperson of the Committee on Labor. We conducted hearings on the measures and reported them out for plenary debates. Unfortunately, its timely passage was overtaken by events, and so we are here once more to push for the enactment of the same.

Noong Sixteenth Congress, ako po ang unang naghain ng panukalang batas na ito. Ngayong Nineteenth Congress, ako pong muli ang unang naghain nito bilang Senate Bill No. 46 at kasama ito sa Top 10 priority bills ng inyong lingkod.

With this Representation's unwavering commitment to the passage of the Magna Carta of Filipino Seafarers, it will be an honor to be a cosponsor of Senate Bill No. 2221, under Committee Report No. 69, reported out by the Committee on Migrant Workers under the able leadership of its chairperson, Sen. Raffy Tulfo.

According to the estimates of the Department of Migrant Workers (DMW), "about 30% to 40% of seafarers and cruise personnel in ships are Filipinos." In fact, the Philippines is recognized by the European Commission as "one of the world's largest maritime labor supply countries."

This is confirmed by the Seafarers Workforce report of the International Chamber of Shipping (ICS) and the Baltic and International Maritime Council (BIMCO) for the year 2021, which revealed that the Philippines "provided the largest number of seafarers for the world's merchant fleet, despite the ongoing global COVID-19 pandemic, having 252,392 Filipino seafarers working onboard ships, out of a total 1,892,120 seafarer workforce."

In the year 2022, the Philippines maintained its stature as the largest maritime labor supplier in the world when it deployed 345,000 seafarers during the said year, who contributed around US\$6.7 billion, or around P341 billion, in remittances.

Ang malaking bilang ng mga Pilipinong marino ay patunay na kailangan talaga nating isabatas ang Magna Carta of Filipino Seafarers sa lalong madaling panahon upang siguruhin ang proteksiyon ng kanilang karapatan at kapakanan.

Hindi kaila sa atin ang mga isyu na kinakakaharap ng ating mga marino. Nitong mga nakaraang taon ay nanganib ang humigit-kumulang na limampung libong Pilipinong marino na nagtatrabaho sa European Union-Flagged Ships dahil sa findings ng European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA) ng European Commission (EC) na hindi nagagampanan ng ating mga awtoridad ang requirements sa ilalim ng International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers (STCW).

Fortunately, this year, the European Commission announced its decision to "continue recognizing the safety certifications issued by the Maritime Industry Authority (MARINA)."

Sa pamamagitan ng panukalang batas na ito, inaasahan nating maiiwasan ang ganitong mga problema, at sa halip ay lalo pang maiangat ang kalidad ng serbisyo ng ating mga marino na siyang batayan ng respeto, paghanga para sa kanila, at pati na rin ng mataas na demand para sa kanila sa international maritime industry.



Among others, the One-Stop-Shop Center for Seafarers (OSSCS) that will be established in major crew-change ports will be very helpful to our seafarers for the convenient and speedy processing of their documentary requirements. This will allow them to spend more time with their families and friends during their vacation from work, and find respite in their care, comfort, and company before returning to work.

The proposed measure also ensures the clear and coordinated fulfillment of mandates of the concerned government agencies. This will improve the services given by the government to our seafarers and facilitate the proper implementation of this law.

In the 16th Congress, the Committee on Labor shepherded the enactment of Republic Act No. 10706, otherwise known as the “Seafarers Protection Act,” which prohibited ambulance chasing and imposed penalties to the violators. *Ang batas na ito ay isang mahalagang instrumento upang bigyan ng proteksiyon ang ating mga kababayang marino. Inaasahan natin na maipapasa din ng Kongreso ngayon ang mas komprehensibong panukalang batas para sa kanilang kapakanan.*

The passage of the Magna Carta for Filipino Seafarers is long overdue. Once enacted into law, it will be another landmark legislation that will benefit our *kababayans*—the seafarers and their families, and our economy as a whole. *Ang inyong lingkod ay masugid na nagbibigay ng suporta para sa pagsasabatas nito.*

By Senate President Zubiri

I am pleased to stand here today to cosponsor our proposed Magna Carta of Filipino Seafarers under Committee Report No. 69.

For better or for worse, our Overseas Filipino Workers have consistently been among the largest contributors to our economy, with their remittances accounting for around 9% of our GDP. Of that number, about 22% is from our sea-based overseas workers, who sent home US\$6.7 billion last year—up from US\$6.5 billion in 2021, and US\$6.3 billion in 2020.

Sa madaling salita, napakalaki po ng ambag ng ating mga seafarers sa ating ekonomiya. And while we of course are working toward a future where Filipinos are not having to make the difficult choice of leaving their families to find better pay abroad, the fact remains that we have hundreds of thousands of hardworking seafarers toiling away in foreign waters at the moment—and we have a responsibility to protect them as best as we can.

Kaya naman isinusulong natin itong Magna Carta of Filipino Seafarers, which will address the unique needs of all of our sea-based OFWs—not just during deployment, but right from their pre-onboarding as well.

Kaya nagpapasalamat po ako sa chairperson ng Committee on Migrant Workers, Senator Tulfo, Boss Idol, together with all the authors, sponsors, and cosponsors of this measure.

With this Magna Carta, we will spell out all the rights and duties of our seafarers, and ensure the provision of proper wages and benefits, accommodation and recreational facilities, safe and gender-sensitive workspaces, and medical care, as well as services regarding repatriation, dispute resolution, and reintegration.

We will also articulate the duties and responsibilities of manning agencies to protect our seafarers—and aspiring seafarers—from shady recruitment processes and practices that take advantage of vulnerable individuals.

In all, this Magna Carta will be a comprehensive document that will work in tandem with the Migrant Workers and Overseas Filipinos Act, but with protections specific to the situation of our sea-based OFWs, who typically do not have as immediate an access to our government agencies and services as land-based OFWs do.

Sa Magna Carta na ito, sisiguruhin natin na kahit malayong-malayo po ang ating mga seafarers mula sa atin ay protektado pa rin natin sila, at mapapangalagaan natin ang kanilang kapakanan, anumang distansiya nila sa atin.

As such, I am hopeful for the full support of our colleagues in the passage of this bill.



By Senator Dela Rosa

It is with deep pride that I rise to cosponsor Senate Bill No. 2221, under Committee Report No. 69, of the Committee on Migrant Workers, jointly with the Committees on Foreign Relations, and Finance. Along with my coauthors and colleagues in this esteemed Congress, I warmly commend the chairperson of the Committee on Migrant Workers, Sen. Raffy Tulfo. *Lubos akong nagpapasalamat kay Senator Tulfo dahil sa kanyang walang sawang pagsuporta sa ating mga mandaragat.*

At this juncture, Senator Ejercito relinquished the Chair to Senate President Zubiri.

A month from now, we are set to celebrate the Annual Day of the Seafarer, which will be on June 25. According to its stated purpose, this Day of the Seafarers was established “to recognize the unique contribution made by seafarers from all over the world to international seaborne trade, the world economy, and civil society as a whole.”

Ang ganda po ng pagkakasabi, “to recognize the unique contribution of seafarers all over the world.” And yet according to a 2023 report of the Mission to Seafarers, there was a reported decline in the happiness levels of seafarers. From 7.69 *noong* last quarter *ng* 2022, *bumaba ito sa* 7.1 *para sa* first quarter *ng* 2023.

Seafarers across the globe are showing a sense of dissatisfaction with inadequate food, bureaucratic demands and endless paperwork, connectivity problems, lack of health and wellness programs, and, of course, the sense of social isolation.

This is why I believe that the sponsorship and shepherding of this important measure today is proof of two things: 1) This Senate’s commitment to the well-being of our seafarers; and 2) The Senate’s sense of good timing. A month ahead of the annual Day of the Seafarer, here we are, pushing for the passage of a bill that institutionalizes the Magna Carta of Filipino Seafarers.

With the passage of this measure, we will be safeguarding our seafarers’ basic rights and their welfare. We shall be protecting them in their employment, in their repatriation, and in their reintegration. We shall also ensure proper coordination of the DMW, DFA, OWWA, and other relevant government agencies for the full implementation of this measure.

Alam ninyo po, marami po sa aking mga kababata ay mga marino. May iba sa kanila na tuluyan nang naging kapitan ng barko. We started out as young boys who grew up to be men, carving out our own paths. They chose to chart the path of the sea.

Alam ko po ang hirap ng buhay marino. Matagal kang mahihwalay sa iyong pamilya, nasa gitna ka ng karagatan; minsan iyong mga alon ay mas malalaki pa kesa sa sinasakyang ninyong barko. Tapos dito sa Pilipinas, ang bayan na iyong pinagsisilbihan, hindi man lang nakasaad kung ano ang iyong mga karapatan?

This is precisely why there is a need for this measure. It is high time for us to recognize the contribution of our seafarers, above and beyond merely assigning a day of every year to remember them. For an industry that accounts for 80% of international trade, our marine industry, along with the hundreds of thousands of Filipino seafarers, certainly deserves institutional and legislative attention.

Let us not wait for them to drown in the ocean of our inaction. Let us provide them with the rights and protection that they need, so that even when they are at sea, they may rest, knowing they shall be confidently coming back to a country they can truly call home. *Ipasa na natin itong Magna Carta para sa kanila.*

By Senator Angara

Isa pong karangalan para sa atin na tumayo sa harap ninyo para suportahan si Senator “Idol” Raffy , ang ating chairperson ng Committee on Migrant Workers, at ang ating Senate President na author din po nitong Magna Carta of Filipino Seafarers.

We are heartened that under the stewardship of Senator Tulfo, the Committee on Migrant Workers has continued the efforts of past Congresses to craft, file, and, hopefully, to eventually pass a measure that institutionalizes the rights of Filipino seafarers, which includes mechanisms

to enforce and protect the same, the granting of their compulsory benefits, and the implementation of standards set by the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006 (or 'MLC 2006') and the International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification, and Watchkeeping for Seafarers (STCW).

Sa katunayan po, noong tayo po ay kongresista pa lamang noong taong 2007, during the 14th Congress at noon rin pong 15th Congress, ay naghain na rin po tayo ng kahalintulad na panukalang batas dito sa Magna Carta of Filipino Seafarers—this was during my second and third terms as a congressman—at layon po nating isulong at pangalagaan ang karapatan ng ating mga manlalayag.

In the 16th Congress in July 2015, I was privileged to have been the vice chairperson of the Committee on Labor, Employment and Human Resources Development under then chairperson Senator Estrada. This Representation sponsored, authored, and defended Republic Act No. 10706. This is the Seafarers Protection Act that prohibits and penalizes ambulance chasing, or the practice of charging exorbitant fees with the promise of a huge monetary award. This is to protect and ensure that the seafarer gets any award given to him through litigation and it will not go to attorney's fees and cut the amount of attorney's fees that could be claimed in such cases, given that many of the cases were just routine and many of the amounts for monetary awards were already set forth in conventions and laws.

I am grateful to Sen. Jinggoy Estrada for making me his vice chairperson, and by force of circumstance, I became the acting chairperson back in the 16th Congress.

Palagay ko panahon na upang maisabatas itong Magna Carta of Seafarers na pina-file as early as 2007 and perhaps even earlier, because our Filipino seafarers have already endured so much. Nariyan po ang nabanggit na pagtatrabaho nila under dire working conditions, pagsisilbi sa mga opportunistic employers at pagdanas ng racial discrimination habang nakasampa sila sa barko. Lahat po ng hirap tiniis nila kasabay ng matinding pangungulila sa pamilya para sa pangarap na makapagbigay ng mas magandang buhay para sa kanilang mga minamahal.

Noong nagkaroon po tayo ng lockdown dahil sa pandemya, mahigit-kumulang sa 150,000 Filipino seafarers ang nawalan ng trabaho dahil sa paghinto ng operasyon ng mga major cruise and cargo ship companies.

More recently, another issue affecting our Filipino seafarers' employment became widespread. The International Maritime Employers Council and the International Chamber of Shipping (ICS) point to ambulance chasing as the reason why a number of their members, who are maritime employers, have decided to shift their manpower source away from the Philippines and towards less qualified manpower sources. *Dahil din po rito*, according to ICS, there was a decrease in Filipino seafarers, from around 20% of the world's seafarers to just about 14.4%.

We all know that Filipinos have a very rich seafaring tradition that has been passed down from generation to generation. Historical records have taken note of how our ancestors were already engaged in fishing and diving for maritime riches. *Nasa dugo na po natin ang paglalayag kaya hindi po nakapagtatataka na madalas piliin ng mga foreign shipowners ang mga Pilipino.*

Katuwang na sa pagiging Pilipinong manlalayag ang mataas na ekspektasyon. Employers, shipowners, expect competence, resilience, patience and skill which they know Filipinos can deliver on. And this resiliency is not a leeway to be passive in fighting for our seafarers' rights. Passing this bill is the best way to show them how much we appreciate and value their contribution to our economy and to our country.

Narapat lamang po na palawigin natin ang kanilang mga karapatan, at paigtingin ang mga proteksiyon na ibinibigay sa kanila sa ilalim ng ating mga batas.

This bill will complement the Migrant Workers Act of 1996. It is also in line with the Philippines' obligations as a signatory to the MLC 2006, or Maritime Labor Convention. This measure reported out by the Committee on Migrant Workers—again, we thank chairperson Senator Tulfo—grants our seafarers the right to a safe and secure workplace compliant with decent working standards.

Itong nakaraang 2021, di pa man tayo nakabangaon mula sa dagok ng pandemya, the European Commission (EC) Directorate General for Mobility and Transport, or DG MOVE, informed

the Philippines that recognition of Philippine seafarer certificates would be withdrawn unless serious measures were taken in complying with the International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping (STCW).

Nangangahulugan po ito na there are around 50,000 Filipino seafarers in EU-flagged vessels around the world who are at risk of losing their jobs. Kaya, under the direction of the Senate President, tayo po ay lumipad papuntang Brussels kasama po sina Senators Gatchalian, Marcos, Villar sa Belgium kasama ang ating mga kasamahan sa House of Representatives, also headed by our former colleague, Sen. Ralph Recto, upang makipagpulong sa ating EU counterparts noong nakaraang Oktubre para matugunan at masolusyonan ang issue ng STCW compliance ng ating industriyang pang-seafarers or maritime.

At nakakatuwang mabalitaan na itong huling March 31, it was announced by the EC Director General that they will continue to recognize certificates of seafarers issued by our country. Bagamat ito pong issue ng STCW compliance at certification ay nasolusyonan sa pagsasabatas po ng panukalang ito, tayo ay mas mapapalagay at hindi na mangangamba ukol sa compliance ng ating bansa sa mga International Labor Conventions na ating napirmahan.

This bill could not have come at a more urgent time. Given na nandito po iyong pagbukas ng ekonomiya ng ating bansa at pagtaas ng demand sa maritime industry and maritime industry workers, dumarami na naman po ang mga seafarer natin sa open seas. Kailangan po natin na lalong paigtingin ang pagsusulong upang maisabatas ang panukalang ito.

Kamakailan lamang, nitong nakaraang Marso, inanunsiyo ng ating Pangulo, President Marcos, during the Philippine Maritime Industry Summit 2023 na, "Given that the Philippines is a maritime nation, I believe that it is time for us to make the maritime industry once again a top priority." With President Marcos' support, lubos po akong umaasa na tuluyan nang maisasabatas ang Magna Carta of Filipino Seafarers, which has been pending in the legislative mill for almost two decades.

By Senator Hontiveros

I would, respectfully, like to sponsor the bill on the Magna Carta of Filipino Seafarers, Senate Bill No. 2221. This bill is very close to my heart because every Filipino seafarer deserves greater protection from abuses and violations of his or her rights and welfare. This bill is for all overseas Filipino workers/seafarers who have been called "modern-day heroes" because of their economic contributions through remittances and, most importantly, because of their sacrifices in being homesick to give a comfortable life for their loved ones.

Naririnig po namin kayo, mga kababayan. Hindi sapat na manatili lamang silang mga buhay na bayani habang sila ay nakikipagsapalaran at nagbabanat ng buto sa karagatan nang walang sapat na batas na magtataguyod ng kanilang mga karapatan at proteksyon. Panahon na para ito ay madinig at maisabatas, ang Magna Carta of Seafarers!

Noong nakaraang taon lamang ay muntik nang mawalan ng trabaho ang libo-libong mga marino nating mga kababayan dahil sa hindi pag-comply sa itinakda ng International Conventions on Standards on Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers o ang STCW Convention. I immediately filed a resolution to investigate and I am glad and grateful that our colleague, Senator Tulfo, also filed and conducted a hearing on this issue.

Napakaraming problema ang kinakaharap ng ating mga Filipino seafarers habang walang batas na nagtataguyod sa kanila—ang restrictive provisions of the seafarers' employment contract, claims for disability and death compensation becoming a legal battle ground—at lalo na kung ito ay hahantong na sila ay tuluyang mawalan ng pag-asa para makapagtrabaho pang muli. Kaugnay nito ang paglalagay ng "escrow account" na posibleng maging hadlang para sa interes ng mga Filipino seafarers. Ang batas na ito ay dapat na maging daan para sa mas madaling paraan ng mga proseso sa kanilang mga claims at para hindi pahirapan pa lalo ng mga ilang manning agencies na inaabuso sila. Nandyang din ang korapsyon sa maritime industry, excessive fees for the trainings and development of seafarers, at marami pang mga isyu.

The Magna Carta should be the anchor of every Filipino. No one should be left behind, including cadets and fisherfolk. Every Filipino seafarers' rights should be protected in accordance with the International Labor Organization's Maritime Labor Convention of 2006 and, most especially, with the Philippine Constitution.

Mabuhay ang bawat overseas Filipino worker! Mabuhay ang bawat marinong Filipino! Saludo ako sa inyong pagsisikap. Patuloy kaming lahat na susuporta para sa inyong kapakanan at seguridad.

By Senator Go

As one of the authors of this bill, I would like to cosponsor this measure seeking to institutionalize the Magna Carta of Filipino Seafarers.

I stand before this august Body as I firmly believe that by passing this measure, we could convey our unwavering support and respect to our Filipino seafarers. This piece of legislation is a concrete measure to safeguard the rights and welfare of our unsung heroes—the Filipino seafarers.

Ang ating mga seafarers ang isa sa pinakamalaking numero na bumubuo sa industriya ng mga marino. Of the 1.5 million seafarers worldwide, 25% are Filipino sea-based workers, making them the single biggest nationality bloc in the maritime industry. Nararapat lamang po na pangalagaan natin ang ating mga Pilipinong manggagawa na handang magsakripisyo para sa kanilang pamilya.

Isa po sa mga nakababahalang realidad na meron ang ating mga manggagawang marino ay ang kanilang mahabang oras sa trabaho at limitadong pahinga sa barko. One of the key provisions of this law is the implementation of clear guidelines on maximum working hours, ensuring adequate rest periods of the Filipino seafarers. With this, we can address the issue of fatigue and enhance the safety and well-being of our seafarers.

Aside from this, this measure also gives importance to seafarers' medical care and access to healthcare services including mental health services. As the chairperson of the Committee on Health, *importante sa akin na mabigyan ng maayos na health services ang ating mga marino, sa gitna ng paglalayag at pati na rin sa kanilang pagdaong sa mga pier.*

The proposed Magna Carta also emphasizes the importance of training and skills development for our seafarers. It promotes quality training programs which enables our seafarers to acquire the vital expertise and skills to excel in this profession. This will not only benefit individual seafarers but also elevate the global competence and effectiveness of our maritime workforce.

Our seafarers have long been in need of comprehensive protection and support. It is high time that we passed this bill to establish a framework that guarantees their rights, improves their working conditions, and upholds their dignity.

The passage of the Magna Carta of Filipino Seafarers is a testament of our relentless devotion in pursuing the interests and welfare of our Filipino seafarers. *Nauna na po nating ipinasa last Congress ang Department of Migrant Workers sa pangunguna ng ating Majority Floor Leader Sen. Joel Villanueva. Meron na pong isang departamentong nakatutok po sa ating tinatawag na mga heroes, itong mga OFWs.*

With the enactment of this law, we will be able to convey a strong and substantial message to the men and women of the maritime industry—a message of gratitude, appreciation, and firm validation of their contribution in this country. Let us stand together united in guaranteeing that our seafarers are protected, their sacrifices are recognized, and that their rights are upheld.

By Senator Revilla

It is our honor to cosponsor this meaningful legislation that seeks to provide for the Magna Carta of Filipino Seafarers.

It has always been my commitment to support measures that immensely contribute in promoting the rights, safety, protection and welfare of our dear migrant workers.

Ito po ang aking dahilan sa paghahain ng Senate Bill No. 1104, o ang Magna Carta of Filipino Seafarers na naglalayong maprotektahan ang mga karapatan ng ating mga seafarers at kanilang pamilya.

Dahil sa hindi maikakailang kontribusyon ng ating mga marino sa ekonomiya ng bansa, nararapat lamang na gumawa tayo ng mga hakbang upang siguraduhin na walang malalabag



na karapatan nila, mula sa makatarungang mga kontrata hanggang sa disenteng lugar ng trabaho at katanggap-tanggap na kapaligiran sa paghahanapbuhay.

Ang lahat po ng ito ay nakapaloob sa isinusulong nating Magna Carta of Filipino Seafarers, na walang ibang mithiin kundi ang ibigay kung ano ang nararapat na proteksyon para sa ating mga seafarers bilang pagtanaw natin hindi lang sa kanilang mga sakripisyo alang-alang sa kinabukasan ng pamilya, kundi upang kilalanin din ang malaking kontribusyon ng mga kababayan nating marino sa ekonomiya at pagpapaunlad ng ating bansa.

Nawa sa pamamagitan ng panukalang ito ay masuklian natin ang sipag at tiyaga ng ating mga kababayang marino na hindi alintana ang panganib ng karagatan, maging ang distansya mula sa kanilang pamilya at mga mahal sa buhay.

Malinaw sa pagkakaisa natin sa panukalang ito na hindi lingid sa ating kaalaman ang kwento ng kanilang pakikipagsapalaran sa dagat. At sama-sama nating itatawid ang kanilang kapakanan anumang lakas ng alon o hampas ng daluyong.

By Senator Gatchalian

I stand before you today to proudly cosponsor Senate Bill No. 2221, otherwise known as the Magna Carta of Filipino Seafarers—a crucial piece of legislation that acts as a lifeline for those who brave the treacherous waves of the maritime industry.

Filipino seafarers have earned a global reputation for their unparalleled skills, work ethic, and professionalism. They proudly wave the flag of our nation, embodying the very essence of Filipino skills and dedication on the international stage.

Despite the unprecedented challenges brought about by the global pandemic, the Philippines has remained steadfast as a major supplier of maritime labor worldwide. It is truly remarkable to note that even in these trying times, there continues to be an extraordinary ratio of one Filipino seafarer for every four to five crewmembers on board a vessel at any given time.

Sa bawat paglusong sa malalaking alon ng karagatan, bitbit nila ang kanilang pangarap at sakripisyo na hindi lamang para sa kanilang sarili, kundi maging para sa mga mahal nila sa buhay. Kaya naman napapanahon nang makapagsulong tayo ng batas na layong itaguyod ang kanilang mga karapatan, protektahan ang kanilang kapakanan, at iangat ang kalidad ng kanilang pagsasanay.

The Magna Carta of Seafarers is our beacon of hope. It codifies the basic rights and duties of our seafarers, ensuring that they are not adrift in a sea of exploitation and neglect. This Act draws from international laws, standards, and practices, providing a solid foundation upon which their rights can be built and protected.

Further, this proposed measure will promote quality maritime education and training that respond to the needs of the industry and in accordance with minimum international maritime standards of competency. This will ensure that our seafarers are globally competitive given their critical role and contribution to the economic growth of the country.

Moreover, this bill goes beyond simply recognizing the basic rights of seafarers. It takes a step further by solidifying protection for women seafarers and promoting gender equality. In a traditionally male-dominated industry, it is crucial that we break barriers and provide equal opportunities to all. This Act ensures that no seafarer will be subjected to discrimination on the basis of race, sex, gender identity or expression, religion, or political opinion.

Let us not forget that behind the clauses and provisions of this Act, there is a solemn promise—a promise that their sacrifices will be remembered, their rights will be upheld with unwavering commitment, and their invaluable contributions to our nation will be duly recognized and celebrated.

To end, let me express my gratitude to the sponsor of this bill, Senator Raffy Tulfo, and to my fellow coauthors, for their collective insights in drafting this important measure.

Together, let us rise above the tides of indifference and make a difference in the lives of our seafarers. Together, let us sail toward a future where the rights and well-being of our seafarers are secured and protected.

Mabuhay ang mga Pilipinong mandaragat!



COSPONSORSHIP SPEECH OF SENATOR VILLANUEVA

Senator Ejercito manifested that Senator Villanueva submitted his cosponsorship speech on Senate Bill No. 2221 for insertion in the *Journal and Record of the Senate*:

We commend our dear colleague, Senator Raffy Tulfo, for sponsoring this measure. It is my honor and privilege to cosponsor Senate Bill No. 2221 under Committee Report No. 69, entitled "An Act Providing for the Magna Carta of Filipino Seafarers", which took into consideration our bill, Senate Bill No. 137.

The passage of the Magna Carta of Filipino Seafarers is a long time coming. Mula sa House of Representatives hanggang dito sa Senado ay tinatrabaho na natin ito. The work that went into developing this measure has been long and arduous, which started after the Philippines became the 30th country to ratify the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006, in 2012 and set in motion a global milestone for decent work for seafarers.

We take pride in the fact that the Senate version, at the very start of our legislative work for this bill, did not stop at legislating the bill of rights of seafarers. Rather, we have incorporated the lessons from the travails of our seafarers during the pandemic and we were able to craft a Chapter on ensuring protection to Women in the Maritime Industry and the mainstreaming of gender and development into in a male-dominated occupation or profession.

This Representation would like to thank the good sponsor for enhancing the Chapter on reintegration, by reflecting the full-cycle and comprehensive national reintegration provision of Republic Act No. 11641 or the Department of Migrant Workers Act. The importance of ensuring the smooth reintegration of our returning seafarers in the labor market is worth repeating in this landmark measure.

This measure, is the Senate's concrete recognition of the Filipino seafarers' contribution in keeping the Philippine economy afloat, which cannot be discounted. The Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas reported that sea-based OFWs remitted USD 6.715 Billion in 2022 and a total of USD 1.668 Billion for the first three months of 2023. Their significant contribution is reason enough to pass this urgent measure.

This measure is our protection to our seafarers. Our country is the largest supplier of seafarers based on the Seafarer Workforce Report 2021 cited by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. Prepandemic, we were able to deploy 480,000 to 500,000 seafarers. This year, almost 150,000 seafarers were deployed according to the latest data from the Department of Migrant Workers.

This Representation is all for the protection of rights and promotion of welfare of our seafarers. We urge the members of this august chamber to rally together for the swift passage of this landmark measure.

COAUTHORS

Upon motion of Senator Ejercito, there being no objection, Senators Marcos and Tolentino were made coauthor of Senate Bill No. 2221.

SUSPENSION OF CONSIDERATION OF SENATE BILL NO. 2221

Upon motion of Senator Ejercito, there being no objection, the Body suspended consideration of the bill.

SPECIAL ORDER

Upon motion of Senator Ejercito, there being no objection, the Body approved the transfer of Committee Report No. 68 on Senate Bill No. 2219 from the Calendar for Ordinary Business to the Calendar for Special Orders.

COMMITTEE REPORT NO. 68 ON SENATE BILL NO. 2219

Upon motion of Senator Ejercito, there being no objection, the Body considered, on Second Reading, Senate Bill No. 2219 (Committee Report No. 68), entitled

AN ACT FURTHER AMENDING REPUBLIC ACT NO. 11213, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS THE "TAX AMNESTY ACT", AS AMENDED BY REPUBLIC ACT NO. 11569, BY EXTENDING THE PERIOD OF AVAILMENT OF THE ESTATE TAX AMNESTY UNTIL JUNE 14, 2025, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.

Pursuant to Section 67, Rule XXIII of the *Rules of the Senate*, with the permission of the Body, upon motion of Senator Ejercito, only the title of the bill was read without prejudice to the insertion of its full text into the *Record of the Senate*.

The Chair recognized Senator Gatchalian for the sponsorship.

SPONSORSHIP SPEECH OF SENATOR GATCHALIAN

Senator Gatchalian, on behalf of the Committee on Ways and Means, submitted for plenary consideration Senate Bill No. 2219, entitled under Committee Report No. 68.

Following is the full text of Senator Gatchalian's sponsorship speech:

I rise today to sponsor Senate Bill No. 2219, under Committee Report No. 68, which aims to amend Republic Act or R.A. No. 11213, otherwise known as the "Tax Amnesty Act," as previously amended by R.A. No. 11569.

The Tax Amnesty Act was enacted on February 14, 2019, with the intention of offering taxpayers a one-time opportunity to settle their estate tax obligations. The objective was to provide reasonable tax relief to estates struggling under the weight of tax liabilities. During the legislative deliberations leading to the Tax Amnesty Act, it was estimated that the Estate Tax Amnesty program would generate a substantial P6.28 billion.

Just a few months after the law's implementation, the world was engulfed by the devastation of the COVID-19 pandemic. The relentless grip of the pandemic created a barrier, separating the availers from the vital relief they desperately needed. Many of them were confronted with an arduous journey in obtaining their "Certificate of Availment of the Estate Tax Amnesty," amplifying the already daunting challenges they faced during the lockdowns.

Noong panahon ng krisis ng pandemya, maraming pangarap ang biglang gumuho. Marami sa ating mga kababayan ang nawalan ng trabaho. Maraming negosyo ang napilitang magsara, at higit sa lahat, marami ang nawalan ng mga mahal sa buhay. Sa gitna ng mga mabibigat na hamong pinagdaanan nila, ang tanong nila, paano pa nila uunahin ang pag-asikaso sa mga dokumentong tulad nito?

As a result, the revenue generated from the amnesty fell woefully short of our hopeful expectations. In fact, from 2019 to June 14, 2021, the Bureau of Internal Revenue collected P4.88 billion which was 22.29% lower than the initial targeted revenue. This figure painted a poignant picture of the challenges faced by our *kababayan* during unprecedented times.

In response, Congress acted swiftly on the passage of RA 11569 on June 30, 2021. This vital legislation extended the period for availing the estate tax amnesty for two more years recognizing the immense toll cost by the two-year long lockdowns imposed upon us by the COVID-19 pandemic. Not only did this extension grant the taxpayers the invaluable opportunity to avail themselves of estate tax amnesty until June 14, 2023 for deaths occurring on or before December 31, 2017 as prescribed in RA 11213 but it also removed the requirement outlined in RA 11213 for the submission of proof of settlement. This has been a great relief for availers, as factors such as family sensitivities and internal conflicts often impede the execution of settlement agreements. With the extension, the BIR had yielded P2.67 billion from June 15, 2021 to April 30, 2023.

Sa puntong ito, nalalapit na naman ang nakatakdang palugit sa paggamit ng estate tax amnesty. Sa paparating na June 14, huling pagkakataon na ng ating mga kababayan upang mapakinabangan ang amnestiyang ipinagkaloob natin dalawang taon na ang nakalipas. Sa kabuuan, mula noong 2019, noong ipinatupad ang Tax Amnesty Act hanggang April 2023, itinatayang mahigit 130,000 sa ating mga kababayan ang nakinabang sa amnestiya.

Ngunit sa kabilang banda, nangangahulugan din sa loob ng 23 araw mula sa araw na ito, mawawalan na rin ng pag-asa ang mga kababayan nating wala pang sapat na pera upang makapagbayad ng kanilang estate tax.

Although we have successfully reached the target revenue of P6.3 billion through the previous extension of the amnesty, it is crucial to acknowledge that the potential ahead of us remains boundless. Based on the projection of the National Economic and Development Authority or NEDA, on average, a peso increase in government spending on specific productive sectors, such as public education, public health, and agriculture could lead to a P1.38-peso increase in GDP. Given the Department of Finance estimate that the two-year extension is expected to yield P6.15 billion and NEDA's estimate on the fiscal multiplier based on our office projections, the program will yield an additional gross value added of P8.49 billion.

The passage of this bill encompasses a profound commitment more than just a mere extension of estate tax amnesty availment. This proposed extension delves into the depths of compassion and empathy reflecting our unwavering dedication to those individuals who, due to a myriad of circumstances, were unable to fulfill their estate tax obligations during the previous extension. It is high time to recognize the struggles of our less-privileged *kababayan* and provide them with the necessary support and relief they desperately seek.

Specifically, this proposed measure seeks to amend RA 11213 widely known as the Tax Amnesty Act as previously amended by RA 111569 with the aim of reinforcing the following crucial provisions:

First and foremost, this measure aims to expand the coverage of the estate tax amnesty program to include the estates of decedents who passed away on or before December 31, 2021. Whether their estate taxes have remained unpaid or accrued as of the said date, this extension will provide much-needed relief to our taxpayers, particularly those who have suffered the loss of their loved ones amidst the circumstances brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Furthermore, this amendment will ensure that our taxpayers are safeguarded from the burdensome requirements that surpass the provisions outlined in Republic Act No. 11569. In particular, this measure specifically enumerates the specific list of documentary requirements that should be required by the BIR from the availers of the estate tax amnesty and explicitly excluding the submission of proof of settlement of the estate, whether judicial or extrajudicial. This aims to establish a standardized practice across all BIR offices regarding the required set of documents. With this, we can eliminate discrepancies and inconsistencies in the document requirements requested by each RDO.

Aligned with the government's vision of digitalization, this proposed measure also take a significant step towards the institutionalization of electronic filing and payment of estate tax. It introduces a pivotal change that allows the amnesty availers for the electronic and manual filing of estate tax amnesty returns and payment of taxes with any authorized agent bank, revenue district office, through revenue collection officer, or authorized tax software provider. With this development, we can extend the benefits of electronic filing and payment to those Filipinos living abroad and alien citizens with properties here in the Philippines. Now, they, too, can fulfill their estate tax obligation efficiently, regardless of their location.

Moreover, under this bill, provisions will be made to allow installment payments over a two-year period from the statutory due date of estate tax. This opportunity will be provided without civil penalties and interest, ensuring that taxpayers with limited available cash in the estate can fulfill their obligations in a more manageable and financially sustainable manner.

Lastly, this proposed measure seeks to extend the period of availment for estate tax amnesty program for an additional two years, or until June 14, 2025. This extension is vital in ensuring that those who have encountered challenges in meeting the requirements, particularly our low-income

constituents, will finally have the opportunity to avail themselves of the estate tax amnesty they deserve.

By enacting these amendments, we demonstrate our unwavering commitment to alleviate the burden on our taxpayers, and foster a more equitable and exclusive system. Through this measure, we strive to provide much-needed relief especially to those who have been disproportionately affected by circumstances beyond their control.

As we extend this amnesty program, we are not just providing relief from the burden of estate taxes, but also offering a pathway for our estate taxpayers to realize the full potential of their assets. As NEDA affirmed, this program provides an opportunity for taxpayers to formalize their ownership of land, thus, securing property rights. By facilitating the legal transfer of properties, we empower them to maximize the value of their assets through various economic activities. Hence, they can contribute to the growth of our economy, create employment opportunities, and foster prosperity within their communities.

At this juncture, allow me to thank the coauthors of this bill: our very own Senate President Juan Miguel Zubiri, Senate President Pro Tempore Loren Legarda, Majority Leader Sen. Joel Villanueva, Sen. Nancy Binay, and Sen. Ramon "Bong" Revilla, for their insights in crafting this much needed piece of legislation.

This will not have been established as well without the active participation of numerous public and private stakeholders during our public hearing. As chairman of the committee, I would like to take this opportunity to thank them for their invaluable contributions.

From the government sector: the Department of Finance, Department of Local Government Finance, Bureau of Internal Revenue, Land Registration Authority, National Economic and Development Authority, and the National Tax Research Center. From the private sector, the Tax Management Association of the Philippines.

We must recognize that the success of this extension lies not only in its ability to generate revenue, but also in its capacity to instill confidence and trust in our taxpayers. By streamlining the requirements, removing unnecessary hurdles, and ensuring a more accessible and inclusive process, we can inspire individuals to come forward and avail themselves of the estate tax amnesty. This, in turn, will result in a more robust revenue stream that can support our nation's development and uplift the lives of our citizens.

Let us, therefore, be driven by our shared empathy, united in our pursuit of justice and financial relief for our citizens. With open hearts and minds, let us embark upon this endeavor to create a more compassionate and effective system — one that uplifts those in need, simplifies compliance with their tax obligations, and allows them to find solace in the arms of a supportive government.

COSPONSORSHIP SPEECHES ON SENATE BILL NO. 2219

Senator Ejercito manifested that Senate President Zubiri and Senators Legarda, Villanueva, Estrada and Revilla would submit their cosponsorship speeches for insertion into the *Journal and Record of the Senate*.

By Senate President Zubiri

I have the honor and pleasure to co-sponsor today Senate Bill No. 2219 under Committee Report No. 68 extending the availment of the Estate Tax Amnesty for two more years until June 14, 2025 to give our taxpayers adequate period to settle their estate tax obligations. This measure proposes to cover the estate of decedents who died on or before December 31, 2021 and expands the grant of immunities and privileges to estates covered to include taxable year 2021 and prior years.

We've all felt how hard it was to move around during the pandemic because of travel restrictions and various safety protocols implemented in government offices and other establishments. It must have been a struggle and a challenge for our taxpayers to secure and complete the complex and tedious legal requirements necessary to avail of the amnesty. To simplify the process and requirements, this bill now allows the electronic or manual filing of estate tax amnesty returns



and payment of taxes with any authorized agent bank, revenue district office, or authorized tax software provider. It streamlines and enumerates the requirements that will be required by the Bureau of Internal Revenue and explicitly excludes the submission of proof of settlement of the estate, whether judicial or extrajudicial.

Finally, to give our taxpayers a much-needed respite, installment payment of the estate tax shall be allowed within two (2) years without civil penalty and interest.

With that, I urge our colleagues to support the immediate passage of this bill.

By Senator Legarda

It is my honor to stand here today to co-sponsor "An Act Further Amending Republic Act No. 11213, Otherwise Known as the "Tax Amnesty Act", as Amended by Republic Act No. 11569, by Extending the Period of Availment of the Estate Tax Amnesty Until June 14, 2025.

Last May 5, 2023, the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a global health emergency. However, millions of Filipinos are still experiencing the effects of COVID-19. As we transition our lives back to "normal", it is the job of the national government to ensure that Filipinos have all the support they need.

According to the Philippine Statistics Authority, the preliminary number of registered deaths from January to December 2022 reached 622,509.

One way to help ease the burden of Filipino families is to extend the Estate Tax Amnesty Law. Republic Act No. 11213, as amended by Republic Act No. 11569, provides that those who wish to avail of the Estate Tax Amnesty have a period of June 15, 2021 to June 14, 2023 to use such benefit.

However, the 14th of June is just around the corner. In order to help alleviate the problems of Filipinos and to grant Filipinos more time to maximize the benefits of the program, an extension of two years from 14 June 2023 is sought.

This tax amnesty will not just benefit the individual Filipino people but also the national government as it will encourage more people to pay their taxes.

As of March 2023, the Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR) reported that 133,860 taxpayers availed of the estate tax amnesty program. With this, the BIR was able to collect Php7.4 billion which was way above the collection target of Php 6.2 billion.

The proposed measure seeks to:

- a. Expand the coverage of the availment of the estate tax amnesty from the estate of decedents who died on or before December 31, 2017 to December 31, 2021;
- b. Extend the period of the availment of the estate tax amnesty by two (2) years, by postponing the deadline of the availment from June 14, 2023 to June 14, 2025;
- c. Allows for the electronic or manual filing of estate tax amnesty returns and payment of taxes;
- d. Enumerates the requirements of the estate tax amnesty;
- e. Expands the grant of immunities and privileges to estates to include the taxable year 2021; and
- f. Allows the payment by installment within two (2) years from the statutory date for its payment without civil penalty and interest.

This measure does not simply extend the period of availment of the estate tax amnesty.

Instead, it expanded the tax base to include estates of decedents who died on or before December 31, 2021 and it made it easier for taxpayers to file and pay for their taxes.

With this, I express my full support in the immediate passage of this bill.

By Senator Villanueva

It is my honor to cosponsor Senate Bill No. 2219, under Committee Report No. 68. This measure extends the period of availment of the Estate Tax Amnesty until June 14, 2025 for decedents who



died on or before December 31, 2021. We thank our dear colleague, Sen. Gatchalian, for his immediate action in bringing this matter before this august chamber and for taking into consideration Senate Bill No. 2170, the bill which we authored, together with Senate President Migz Zubiri and Senate President Pro Tempore Loren Legarda.

- When we first passed Republic Act No. 11213, or the Tax Amnesty Act, the context was different. Sen. Sonny Angara, the Sponsor of the first Tax Amnesty Act in October 2018, stated that the law will serve as a “fresh start” for all, and “encourage those in the formal and non-formal sectors to legitimize, properly declare, and pay the correct taxes without fear of civil, criminal, or administrative penalties.”
- At present, COVID-19 has permanently imprinted its mark on each of our lives. It plunged all individuals into hardships and challenges that will forever be with us. While the original intent behind the law remains true, the tax amnesty needs to be attuned to our collective experiences as a nation during the pandemic. It is thus to further extend a helping hand and make the estate tax amnesty accessible to more Filipinos.
- The Philippine Statistics Authority noted that we had 2.7 million registered deaths from 2018-2021. Meanwhile, as of May 21, 2023, there have been 66,466 recorded deaths due to COVID-19. This measure, once passed into law, will benefit and grant reprieve to the loved ones of these deceased.
- From a tax collection perspective, the proposed tax amnesty would also be beneficial to our country. Indeed, BIR data show that foregone revenues will be higher if it were not for the 2018 amnesty. As of April 2023, the estate tax amnesty program encouraged taxpayers to settle their estate tax dues, leading to a collection of P7.555 billion from 137,691 availers. These are much needed additional resources as the country continues to recover from the pandemic and battles the evergrowing threat of global recession.
- Granting an extension of the estate tax amnesty program will also have an effect of releasing unsettled estates, allowing the heirs, transferees, and beneficiaries to sell, convey, or transfer their properties more freely, or utilize them for productive means.
- We note that other countries have also included tax amnesties as part of their key policy responses to COVID-19. Based on the International Monetary Fund’s Policy Tracker, examples of countries include:
 - o Ethiopia, which approved a measure to forgive all tax debt prior to 2014 / 2015, and a tax amnesty on interest and penalties for tax debt pertaining to 2015 / 2016 – 2018 / 2019, among others.
 - o Panama, which passed a tax amnesty law that will benefit 35,000 taxpayers.
- Indeed, this measure provides a much-needed boost and a fresh start for all. *Para na rin po itong taos-pusong pakikiramay ng estado sa pamilya ng mga yumao sa panahon ng pandemya at sa pagsisimula ng ating kolektibong paghilom.* Thus, we urge our colleagues to support the immediate of this measure.
- Maraming salamat, Mr. President. May God bless us all.

By Senator Estrada

With the indulgence of the good gentleman from Valenzuela, Senator Sherwin Gatchalian, I would like to be made co-sponsor of Senate Bill No. 2219 under Committee Report No. 68, entitled Further Amending Republic Act No. 11213, Otherwise Known As The “Tax Amnesty Act”, as amended by Republic Act No. 11569, by extending the period of availment of the estate tax amnesty until June 14, 2025, and for other purposes.

Under the guidance of the good sponsor, this measure does not simply extend the period of availment of estate tax amnesty for another two years, this bill also simplifies the process and requirements for availment. Furthermore, the bill allows for the manual and electronic filing of estate tax amnesty returns and payment of taxes with any authorized agent bank, revenue district office through revenue collection officer, or authorized tax software provider.



In this way, we will ensure the increase in the tax collection of the government, which will help fund priority projects and fund our investment in human capital and allow the better provision of services for our citizens.

Under the bill, the coverage has also been expanded to include the estate of decedents who have passed away on or before december 31, 2021.

With the deadline of the estate tax amensty less than a month away, it is important that we extend the period of availment especially for those who want to avail of the amnesty but are still reeling from financial woes brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. In line with this, the bill also allows payment by installment within two years.

We laud the sponsor for the speedy, yet thorough action on this very important measure.

By Senator Revilla

I join our esteemed colleagues in pushing for the extension of the availment of the Estate Tax Amnesty. It is with a great sense of urgency that we act on this measure that will ultimately unburden our kababayans in settling their estate tax.

Tunay na ramdam pa din natin ang epekto ng pandemya kaya napakahalaga na mabigyan natin ng mas mahaba at sapat na panahon ang ating mga kababayan para sa estate tax amnesty. Sa pamamagitan ng panukalang ito, mabibigyan ang ating mga kababayang nalugmok sa dagok ng pandemya, ng pagkakataong makabangon. Marami pa din ang kulang sa pambayad kaya gahol ang oras na makabayad. Itong itinutulak natin ngayon ay instrumento upang maibsan ang hirap at matamasa na ang pangakong ginhawa.

Ayon sa mga pag-aaral, ang amnestiya sa estate tax ay magbibigay-daan sa paggamit ng mga "locked assets" para makalikha ng puhunan, trabaho at mga transakyon para sa pagpapaunlad ng ekonomiya.

We make these assets more productive. *Sa makatuwid, mas may pakinabang.*

Hinihikayat din natin ang ating mga kasamahan sa Bureau of Internal Revenue na maging masigasig sa kanilang trabaho para magarantisado ang maayos na implementasyon kapag ito ay naging ganap na batas na.

Let us maximize the revenue collection. *Dagdag na pondo ito para sa ating pampublikong serbisyo.*

We may be on the road to recovery already, but the current conditions we have still justifies the passage of this measure. *Isang munting handog ito para sa ating patuloy na pagtungo sa better normal.*

COAUTHOR

Senator Ejercito manifested that Senator Dela Rosa was a coauthor of Senate Bill No. 2219.

SUSPENSION OF CONSIDERATION OF SENATE BILL NO. 2219

Upon motion of Senator Ejercito, there being no objection, the Body suspended consideration of the bill.

SPECIAL ORDER

Upon motion of Senator Ejercito, there being no objection, the Body approved the transfer of Committee Report No. 65 on House Bill No. 7185 from the Calendar for Ordinary Business to the Calendar for Special Orders.

COMMITTEE REPORT NO. 65 ON HOUSE BILL NO. 7185

Upon motion of Senator Ejercito, there being no objection, the Body considered, on Second Reading, House Bill No. 7185 (Committee Report No. 65), entitled

AN ACT GRANTING PHILIPPINE CITIZENSHIP TO KYLE DOUGLAS JENNERMANN.

Pursuant to Section 67, Rule XXIII of the *Rules of the Senate*, with the permission of the Body, upon motion of Senator Ejercito, only the title of the bill was read without prejudice to the insertion of its full text into the *Record of the Senate*.

The Chair recognized Senator Tolentino for his sponsorship speech.

SPONSORSHIP SPEECH OF SENATOR TOLENTINO

Senator Tolentino manifested that upon instruction of the Senate Committee on Justice and Human Rights, his sponsorship speech on House Bill No. 7185 would just be inserted into the record in deference to the cosponsorship speech of Senate President Zubiri, the main proponent of the measure.

The full text of Senator Tolentino's speech follows:

A few months ago, this Representation sponsored the citizenship of Mr. Justin Brownlee, who as we all know led the GILAS Pilipinas team in winning the championship in the recent 2023 Southeast Asian Games men's basketball event. His passion and dedication as a Filipino has been truly shown in his stellar performance throughout the 2023 Southeast Asian Games. Mr. Brownlee has indeed exemplified the Filipino values of perseverance, determination, and dedication to his craft. This just shows that being a Filipino does not always mean that you are born a citizen of the Philippines. Sometimes, embodying Filipino culture and values is enough to make you a Filipino.

This has also been shown by Mr. Kyle Douglas Jennerman in his years of living in the country.

On behalf of the Committee on Justice and Human Rights, it is with great pride and honor that I stand before this august Chamber to sponsor House Bill No. 7185 under Committee Report No. 65, the application for Philippine citizenship of Mr. Kyle Douglas Jennerman.

Pursuant to Congress' constitutional power, it has the legislative authority under Article VI, Section 1 of the 1987 Constitution, to grant Filipino citizenship to certain foreign nationals for their significant contribution or notable service to the country and to the Filipino people.

Mr. Jennerman, known to many as "Kulas," has dedicated his Youtube channel "Becoming Filipino" in the promotion of the Philippines and its culture to the world. His Youtube channel where he has over a million followers has constantly featured the natural beauty of the county and the Filipino culture and identity.

Kulas has been living in the Philippines since 2013 where he spent the last three years living as a permanent resident of Barangay San Antonio, Cateel, Davao Oriental. He has traveled through the Philippines by scooter and has seen a total of 80 out of its 81 provinces. He has documented his travels, experiences, and interactions in his Youtube channel which in turn has shown the world the natural beauty of our country with its beautiful beaches, lakes, rivers, and mountains.

Apart from such efforts to promote the country, Kulas has also helped Filipinos in great times of need. He has joined different outreach programs and government disaster response operations. Kulas quit his job in Hong Kong and flew to Cagayan de Oro to pack relief goods at a Red Cross station after Super Typhoon Yolanda struck last 2013. He assisted in setting up One Tacloban, which was able to raise donations that were used in providing relief to the people of Tacloban. He also started documenting the damage in the area and uploading his videos on Youtube for his family and friends to know the real situation on the ground and how badly help was needed. He also led relief operations for Dinagat Island to help out our *kababayan* who have been badly affected by Typhoon Odette. He has continued to use his platform to bring attention to areas in need of help. Recently, Kulas visited the town of Upi in Maguindanao, an area badly affected by Typhoon Paeng.

Kulas has truly imbibed our culture that he even speaks broken Tagalog. He is also quite fluent in Bisaya. Although during the committee hearing for this bill, he spoke using the English language in order to properly convey his feeling and gratitude for having the chance to be granted Filipino citizenship which he thought was almost impossible. He has clearly assimilated and imbibed Filipino culture and endeared himself to Filipinos of all ages.

Despite being born as a Canadian citizen, the 10 years he has spent in the Philippines has truly made him Filipino. Hence, in view of Kulas' contributions to the promotion of Filipino culture and identity to the rest of the world, the approval of this bill is earnestly sought.

COSPONSORSHIP SPEECH OF SENATE PRESIDENT ZUBIRI

In sponsoring House Bill No. 7185 on the Philippine citizenship of Kyle Douglas Jennerman, Senate President Zubiri delivered the following speech:

It brings me great honor to speak before you today to cosponsor House Bill No. 7185, under Committee Report No. 65, which seeks to grant Philippine citizenship to Mr. Kyle Douglas Jennermann in recognition of his contributions to the promotion of the Philippines and its culture. Mr. Jennermann is known to many as "Kulas." He is a 35-year-old Canadian citizen, who has dedicated his YouTube channel, *Becoming Filipino*, to feature the Philippines' natural beauty and promoting the country's culture and identity to the world.

With more than one million followers, Kulas has travelled by scooter to a total of 80 provinces, actually, more provinces that I have visited myself, and I have been a senator for many years, while documenting his experiences and interactions, and sharing them through his vlogs. He has showcased the country's beautiful beaches, mountains, waterfalls, rivers, and has come to love Filipino culture, immersing himself to the Filipino way of life, and even learning the Filipino and Bisaya languages. *Mas magaling pang mag-Bisaya sa akin iyan*, and he has been living in the Philippines since 2013. And as written, he has created thousands of posts, actively promoting this country through social media. He is actually living in Davao Oriental in Cateel. He used to live in Cagayan De Oro. So, *silingan namo siya sa Cagayan De Oro* then he moved to Davao in Cateel municipality.

Aside from this, he has also dedicated his life and his time into bringing much-needed attention to calamity-stricken areas in the country, and has actively taken part in relief operations for victims of various typhoons. *Kada pasok ng bagyo* and after *ng pag-alis ng bagyo*, *nandoon na iyan si Kulas*—he was already helping, first of all, in the collection of needed equipment, materials, and relief goods and then *pumupunta sa area at nagbibigay ng tulong*.

Kulas was born and raised in Vancouver, Canada but in almost 10 years that he has spent in the Philippines, he has truly become Filipino. He loves our people, respects our culture, promotes our country's natural beauty in every chance he gets. As matter fact, his girlfriend is from Cavite where our sponsor is from, a Caviteña.

He is a good friend of mine and in all my conversations with him, he is looking to live a long life and retire in our country, the Philippines. He has loved the Philippines so much. He is a better marketing man or a better promoter of the Philippines than many of the people I know who do that for a living.

I recall that in one of his trips to Thailand, he was invited to Thailand in a tourism conference, *ang bukam-bibig niya* from beginning to end was the Philippines, that they should visit the Philippines. As a matter of fact, and I do not know if we should put this on record, his last complaint to me was that the Canadian embassy, and I know the ambassador very well, as a matter of fact, he is going to pay us a visit very soon and with that visit I will mention this to him, red marked Mindanao, particularly Cagayan De Oro and Camiguin as a "no fly zone" for Canadians and the Davao area is a "go with caution." *Sabi niya, napaka-safe ng mga lugar na ito. At mas mabuti rin daw iyong Siargao. Kaya sabi ko nga*, I will take it up with the Canadian officials.

With that said, here is a man who really wants to promote our country because of his love for our country and he is a man pushing for positive vibes. Whenever I talk about negative issues *sabi niya*, "Let us look at the good of things SP and let us see how we can make it even better."

He recently came from a trip to Patikul, Sulu, against my vehement objections. But he said, "No, I really believe that I will be safe. I would be going with some families from Sulu." And he just came from a very successful trip there. It was his first time to see the place and to promote it in his vlog. If we look at his vlog now, really, the most beautiful beaches that I have seen in my life are actually found in Sulu, Tawi-tawi, and Basilan.

So, hopefully, with the political solution that we did in passing the Bangsamoro Organic Law during the leadership of Sen. Aquilino "Koko" Pimentel, and the leadership of then President Duterte, *siguro naman po baka* in the near future *maging* top tourist destination *na po iyong mga area na iyan* specially with our Muslim brothers and sisters in the region.

That is why it is my great honor and pride that I cosponsor this bill which seeks to grant Mr. Jennermann Philippine citizenship. We admire his positive energy and look forward to his future contributions to the country and our society.

COSPONSORSHIP SPEECH OF SENATOR DELA ROSA

Senator Dela Rosa delivered his cosponsorship speech, as follows:

It is my honor and privilege to cosponsor House Bill No. 7185 under Committee Report No. 65, granting Philippine citizenship to Kyle Douglas Jennerman, popularly known as "Kulas."

As a well-known travel vlogger and influencer with more than one million YouTube subscribers, Mr. Jennerman has been creating content showing the rich culture of the Philippines and the Filipino people through his YouTube channel, "Becoming Filipino."

Through his contents, Kulas has promoted Philippine tourism in the international arena despite not having been obligated to do so, a quality which we should emulate as Filipino citizens.

In fact, last May 14, 2021, Kulas was recognized as a brand ambassador of the Department of Science and Technology Region XI's Grassroots Innovation for Inclusive Development (GRIND) Program which provides opportunities to stimulate overall growth of the country by utilizing community-led solutions geared towards sustainable growth.

Noong nakaraang buwan, marami ang nag-post sa kanilang mga social media profile kung ilang probinsya na ng Pilipinas ang narating nila. Ang kulay ay nakadepende kung ikaw ay namalagi nang matagal sa lugar, kung huminto ka lang para kumain, o kung dinaanan mo lang. Marami sa atin, iilang probinsya pa lamang ang napuntahan.

Four days ago, Kulas was able to complete all 82 provinces. *Pumunta siya sa Sulu at ngayon ay binabahagi na niya sa kanyang mga post sa social media kung gaano kaganda ang Sulu. Hindi kailanman naging hadlang para sa kanya ang layo. Tila wala nang malayo para sa kanya.*

So, *ibig sabihin, marami tayong mga colleague dito na senador na tatalunin, including you and me— tatalunin tayo ni Kulas pagdating ng eleksyon dahil mas napuntahan niya lahat ng probinsya; ako, hindi ko pa nakumpleto lahat ng probinsya ng Pilipinas.*

Indeed, Mr. Jennerman has shown the entire world what it truly means to become a Filipino not only in paper nor by birth, but by choice. He is revolutionizing the meaning of nationalism in this day and age; one social media post, one powerful message at a time.

I urge my colleagues to support this measure as Mr. Jennerman's love for the Philippines truly makes him qualified beyond doubt to be granted Philippine citizenship. In the words of Kulas: "Power on!"

COSPONSORSHIP SPEECHES

At the instance of Senators Villanueva and Angara, upon motion of Senator Ejercito, there being no objection, the Body approved the insertion of their cosponsorship speeches on House Bill No. 7185 into the *Journal and Record of the Senate*.

By Senator Villanueva

It is my honor and privilege to cosponsor House Bill No. 7185, under Committee Report No. 65, granting Philippine citizenship to Kyle Douglas Jennermann. We would like to thank the sponsor, Sen. Francis Tolentino, for the Committee on Justice's swift action on this measure.

This Representation also filed Senate Bill No. 1509, one of the bills considered in the committee report. This bill is one of the few citizenship bills that we pushed since our days as a young congressman representing CIBAC. During the Eighteenth Congress, we also filed Senate Bill No. 2499 for a similar purpose, to grant Filipino citizenship to Mr. Jennermann.

Kyle has travelled to 80 out of 81 provinces of our country, more than most of us, to showcase the natural beauty of our country, its culture, and its people through his vlogs. This in turn has immensely boosted our tourism industry to his almost three million combined subscribers across his social media pages such as Facebook, YouTube and Instagram. He even partnered with the Tourism Promotions Board (TPB) to help promote the country as a Philippine Tourism Ambassador.

When calamities hit the country, he used his YouTube channel called "Becoming Filipino" to rally people around the world to extend assistance to the Philippines. He also actively participated in relief operations during these times.

Indeed, Kyle has shown that he deserves to be a Filipino citizen. He has immersed himself in the Filipino way of life since 2013 and even learned how to speak Filipino. For his love of the Philippines, he was christened a local nickname "Kulas." It is also in this country where Kulas met his girlfriend, Therine.

Kulas firmly believes that the world would be a better place to live if people around the world make the Philippines a part of their lives. While born and raised in Vancouver, Canada, he considers Philippines his home.

Soon, "Becoming Filipino" is not just a YouTube channel, but also a reality.

By Senator Angara

I rise to cosponsor House Bill No. 7185 under Committee Report No. 65, or An Act Granting Philippine Citizenship to Kyle Douglas Jennerman. *Nagpapasalamat po tayo sa principal sponsor at Chairman ng Senate Committee on Justice and Human Rights na si Sen. Francis "Tol" Tolentino sa agarang paghain ng panukalang ito sa plenaryo.*

"I'm just in love with their culture, and these people right now." Yan po ang sinabi ng Canadian vlogger na si Kyle Douglas Jennerman o mas kilala sa palayaw na "Kulas" sa isang panayam tungkol sa Pilipinas. Si Kulas, na siyang may-ari ng popular na YouTube page na "Becoming Filipino," ay sampung taon nang naninirahan sa Pilipinas. At sa panahong iyon, masasabi natin na ang naging karanasan niya sa pag-iikot sa ating bansa at sa pakikipagsalamuha sa ating mga kababayan ang naghubog sa kanyang kagustuhan na maging ganap na Pilipino.

Sa katunayan, si Kyle Jennerman na iniwanan ang kanyang trabaho sa Hong Kong, ang isa sa daan-daang mga dayuhan na nagpa-abot ng tulong sa mga Pilipinong nasalanta ng Typhoon Yolanda noong 2013. Dito nagsimula ang kanyang pagkahumaling sa Pilipinas na ginamit niyang konsepto para sa kanyang mga vlogs para ipakita hindi lang ang ganda ng ating bansa kundi pati na rin ang pagwasto sa ilang mga maling paniniwala o perception ng mga dayuhan sa atin lalung-lalo na sa Mindanao.

Looking at Kyle Jennerman's YouTube page, one can surmise that he has experienced many things that we claim to be "uniquely Filipino" such as participating in boodle fights, climbing coconut trees, riding jeepneys, attending fiestas and eating Filipino delicacies, and travelling to all corners of the country. However, what separates Kulas from the rest of the foreigners who have decided to settle down in the Philippines is his approach to all these Filipino experiences—his open-mindedness to try new and authentic things however alien or unusual it may be to him; his understanding of its deeply-rooted foundations; and his strong commitment to share these experiences to the rest of the world.

Dahil dito, hindi lang dumami ang mga dayuhang nagnanais na bumisita sa Pilipinas, naging daan din si Kyle Jennerman para sa mga Pinoy na lumaki sa ibang bansa upang mas



kilalanin ang kanilang pinanggalingan. Ang kanyang natatanging kontribusyon sa turismo at pagkakakilanlan ng Pilipinas ang naging basehan para mapabilis ang pag-apruba ng mga Komite sa House of Representatives at sa Senado ng panukala na magbibigay sa kanya ng Philippine citizenship.

I am sure that I am but one of those who wholeheartedly support this measure. My only request, as one of the coauthors of the Senate bill, is that Mr. Jennerman remembers that the privilege of being a Filipino comes with the heavy responsibility of ensuring that his words and actions will contribute towards a stronger Philippines. With that, I once again reiterate my support for this measure.

SUSPENSION OF SESSION

Upon motion of Senator Ejercito, the session was suspended.

It was 6:40 p.m.

RESUMPTION OF SESSION

At 6:41 p.m., the session was resumed with Senate President Zubiri presiding.

REMARKS OF THE CHAIR

Senate President Zubiri mused why getting Philippine citizenship has to be difficult. He noted that a person seeking Philippine citizenship has only two choices: judicially or through legislation which are both next to impossible unless one is rich, influential or famous. He added that the law for the acquisition of Philippine citizenship by naturalization, imposes a restriction of not leaving the country for two years.

He surmised that the law then wanted to protect the Philippines from foreigners who wanted to take advantage of the beautiful life in the country, the Pearl of the Orient with manicured roads, bridges, parks, and buildings masterfully designed parks like the Burnham Park in Baguio City. But he pointed out that the present situation is different where the Philippines as a globalized community should attract good willed individuals who should be given the chance to become Filipinos, like Mr. Francois Patrick Renucci who put up a rice revolution program to help and support the rice farmers in Leyte. He then hoped that the law on granting Philippine citizenship to foreign nationals would be amended to make the system faster and more efficient.

SUSPENSION OF CONSIDERATION OF HOUSE BILL NO. 7185

Upon motion of Senator Ejercito, there being no objection, the Body suspended consideration of the bill.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR EJERCITO

Adverting to the recently concluded SEA Games in Cambodia, Senator Ejercito congratulated the Gilas Pilipinas basketball team for pitting against seven naturalized players of Cambodia, regaining the basketball gold, and showing the world what the heart and spirit of a true Filipino is all about.

Senate President Zubiri likewise commended the Arnis Team for being the top performing team in the SEA Games with six golds, two silvers, and four bronzes, followed by the Taekwondo Team with six golds, one silver, and several bronzes. He hoped that the game of arnis would become a



permanent sport in the forthcoming SEA Games which would be held in Thailand and he would request Senator Dela Rosa to make the necessary representation on this matter with his friends in Thailand.

Senator Dela Rosa stated that the recent election in Thailand brought in a new leadership.

OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

Upon nomination by Senator Ejercito, there being no objection, the Senate President designated the following senators to represent the Senate in the Joint Congressional Oversight Committee on Public Expenditures on Republic Act No. 11936 (*General Appropriations Act of 2023*):

Chairperson: Angara

Members:

<i>Majority:</i>	Villanueva	Binay
	Legarda	Gatchalian
	Cayetano (P)	Tulfo

Minority: Pimentel

CHANGE OF REFERRAL

Upon motion of Senator Ejercito, there being no objection, the Body approved the change of referral of Senate Bill No. 2218, the Tatak Pinoy (Proudly Filipino) Act, from the Committees on Economic Affairs, Trade, Commerce and Entrepreneurship to the Committee on Finance, with no secondary committee.

ADJOURNMENT OF SESSION

Upon motion of Senator Ejercito, there being no objection, the Chair declared the session adjourned until three o'clock in the afternoon of the following day.

It was 6:53 p.m.

I hereby certify to the correctness of the foregoing.

Approved on May 23, 2023

Atty. RENATO N. BANTUG Jr.

Secretary of the Senate

