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SESSION NO. 77
Wednesday, May 31, 2023

CALL TO ORDER

At 4:38 p.m., the Senate President, Hon. Juan Miguel “Migz” F. Zubiri, called the session to order.

PRAYER

The Senate President led the prayer, to wit:

Dear Lord, as we come to the close of the First Regular Session, we humbly come to You in gratitude for graciously granting us the strength, courage, and guidance that have fueled us throughout these past years.

As public servants entrusted with the sacred responsibility of uplifting our people, we are blessed to be able to follow in Your footsteps of selflessness and compassion—in every law that we pass, every question that we ask, and every decision that we make.

Thank you, Lord, for helping us become a solid and united Senate, brought together by our shared dream of creating a better future for every Filipino.

Thank you for empowering us to toil diligently and tirelessly throughout the past year, and for helping us produce a fruitful output of legislation for our people.

The work ahead of us looms large, but we know that with Your mercy, nothing is insurmountable, and so we pray for Your continued guidance in the coming Regular Session, as we strive to become even more productive in our output, and responsive to the needs of our people.

At sa huli Panginoon, minsan ay may mga pagkakataon ng aming hindi pagkakaunawaan, sapagkat kami ay tao lamang. Sa mga oras na iyan, hinihiling namin na pumagitna po Kayo sa amin upang pagpapatawad, pagkakaunawaan, pagkakaisa at pagmamahalan ang mamayani sa amin.

Gabayan Ninyo po kami, Panginoon, at pagpalain Ninyo palagi ang sambayanang Pilipino.

Amen.



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

With 24 senators present, the Chair declared the presence of a quorum.

APPROVAL OF THE JOURNAL

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body dispensed with the reading of the *Journal* of Session No. 75 (May 29, 2023) and considered it approved.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF THE PRESENCE OF GUESTS

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

- Mayor Ruth R. Padilla, the widow of former Governor and Congressman Carlos “Caloy” Padilla, and their children, Carlos Padilla II and Ruthie May Padilla;
- Mayor Isis Dominique T. Uy of Burgos, Isabela;
- Mayor Joseph Christian G. Uy of Aurora, Isabela;
- Former Mayor Kervin Francis G. Uy of Burgos, Isabela;
- Vice Mayor Carla Angela S. Valderrama of Siniloan, Laguna;
- Vice Governor Nathaniel S. Midtimbang and Mayor Mary Joy U. Midtimbang of Maguindanao del Sur;
- Mayor Leo F. De Vera and Coun. Sean Alexis D. Cardozo of San Jacinto, Pangasinan;
- Mayor Karl Bugao P. Baac together with the Sangguniang Bayan members and barangay captains of Rizal, Kalinga;
- Members of The Fraternal Order of Eagles led by its national president, Nelson A. Sarapuddin;
- Members and coaches of the Philippine National Arnis Team; and
- Members and coaches of the Philippine National Soft Tennis Team.

Senate President Zubiri welcomed the guests to the Senate.

**CONFERENCE COMMITTEE REPORT ON SENATE BILL NO. 1480
AND HOUSE BILL NO. 7939**

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body considered the Conference Committee Report on the disagreeing provisions of Senate Bill No. 1480, entitled

AN ACT RATIONALIZING THE DISABILITY PENSION OF VETERANS,
AMENDING FOR THE PURPOSE REPUBLIC ACT NO. 6948, ENTITLED, "AN
ACT STANDARDIZING AND UPGRADING THE BENEFITS FOR MILITARY
VETERANS AND THEIR BENEFICIARIES," AS AMENDED,

and House Bill No. 7939, entitled

AN ACT RATIONALIZING THE DISABILITY PENSION OF VETERANS,
AMENDING FOR THE PURPOSE REPUBLIC ACT NO. 6948, ENTITLED, "AN
ACT STANDARDIZING AND UPGRADING THE BENEFITS FOR MILITARY
VETERANS AND THEIR DEPENDENTS," AS AMENDED.

Thereupon, the Chair recognized Senator Estrada to sponsor the report.

SUSPENSION OF SESSION

With the permission of the Body, the session was suspended.

It was 4:46 p.m.

RESUMPTION OF SESSION

At 4:48 p.m., the session was resumed.

REPORT OF SENATOR ESTRADA

Senator Estrada submitted to the Body the Conference Committee Report on the disagreeing provisions of Senate Bill No. 1480 and House Bill No. 7939.

The full text of Senator Estrada's sponsorship speech follows:

As your chairperson of the Senate Committee on National Defense and Security, Peace, Unification and Reconciliation, I have the honor to present the Bicameral Conference Committee Report on the disagreeing provisions of Senate Bill No. 1480 and House Bill No. 7939. This is the bill rationalizing the disability pension of our veterans, further amending for the purpose Republic Act No. 6948, "An Act Standardizing and Upgrading the Benefits for Military Veterans and Other Dependents."

I would like to thank our fellow conferees from the House of Representatives led by Cong. Jorge "Patrol" Bustos, Chairperson of House Committee on Veterans Affairs and Welfare, for agreeing to use the Senate version as the working draft. The two short bills, may I emphasize, have very minor differences and actually propose similar rates of increase for the monthly disability pension for our veterans.

Section 1 of the Senate version was adopted, which simplified and clarified the provision on who will be entitled to the Total Administrative Disability pension of P1,700.

Sections 2, 3, and 4 of the Senate version on "Appropriations," "Separability Clause," and "Repealing Clause" were also adopted.



Section 5 of the Senate version was amended to commence the effectivity of the measure after its complete publication in the Official Gazette or in a newspaper of general circulation.

Finally, the panels adopted the title of the House version to accurately reflect the long title of the original law which is Republic Act No. 6948.

I would like to express my sincerest gratitude to our esteemed colleagues and members of the Senate panel, Sen. Grace Poe and our Minority Floor Leader Sen. Aquilino "Koko" Pimentel III, for their invaluable support to this long overdue measure; and the members of the House panel, Cong. Bustos, House Committee vice chairpersons Cong. Marlyn Primicias-Agabas and Cong. Milagros Aquino-Magsaysay, as well as Cong. Geraldine Roman and Cong. Sergio Dagooc, who are all authors of this bill.

I respectfully move that we adopt and ratify the bicameral conference committee report on the disagreeing provisions of Senate Bill No. 1480 and House Bill No. 7939.

JOINT EXPLANATION OF THE CONFERENCE COMMITTEE

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Joint Explanation of the Conference Committee on the disagreeing provisions of Senate Bill No. 1480 and House Bill No. 7939 was deemed read and inserted into the *Journal and Record of the Senate*. (See Annex A)

APPROVAL OF THE CONFERENCE COMMITTEE REPORT

Submitted to a vote, there being no objection, the Conference Committee Report on the disagreeing provisions of Senate Bill No. 1480 and House Bill No. 7939 was approved by the Body.

CONFERENCE COMMITTEE REPORT ON SENATE BILL NO. 2212 AND HOUSE BILL NO. 7751

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body considered the Conference Committee Report on the disagreeing provisions of Senate Bill No. 2212 and House Bill No. 7751, both entitled

AN ACT ESTABLISHING SPECIALTY CENTERS IN HOSPITALS UNDER THE DIRECT SUPERVISION AND CONTROL OF THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR.

Thereupon, the Chair recognized Senator Go to sponsor the report.

SPONSORSHIP REMARKS OF SENATOR GO

Senator Go submitted to the Body the Conference Committee Report on the disagreeing provisions of Senate Bill No. 2212 and House Bill No. 7751.

The full text of Senator Go's remarks follows:

As a result of the bicameral conference on the Regional Specialty Centers Act, I have the honor to submit the conference committee report on the disagreeing provisions of Senate Bill No. 2212 and House Bill No. 7751. Included in the report submitted is the joint explanatory statement on the disagreeing provisions of the two versions of the bill which shall form part of my sponsorship speech.

With the consent of the Body, I would like that the Joint Explanatory Statement be considered as read *in toto* into our *Record*.



Just to report, the Bicam agreed to include a provision reflecting the establishment of specialty centers in existing GOCC or specialty hospitals. This is to reflect what was brought out during plenary discussions in the Senate. We also agreed to include in the bill the level of service capabilities of the specialty centers that the Department of Health will be establishing in hospitals with subnational and regional catchment populations. The *Bicam* also included an enumeration of the specialties that shall be prioritized by the Department of Health.

I thank our fellow conferees on the part of the Senate, Sen. Loren Legarda and Sen. Risa Hontiveros. I also congratulate the conferees on the part of the House of Representatives, Cong. Ciriaco Gato, Cong. Anthony Golez and Cong. France Castro.

With this, we could improve access to specialized medical care. *Mailalapit natin ang serbisyong medikal sa ating mga kababayan na may malulubhang sakit ngunit walang kakayahan na pumunta dito sa Maynila para magpagamot sa Philippine Heart Center, Lung Center, NKTI o iba pang mga specialty hospitals.*

Kapag na-ratify na ito at napirmahan na ng ating mahal na Pangulo para maging batas, magkakaroon na tayo ng specialty heart center, lung center at iba pang specialty centers sa iba't ibang DOH hospitals sa bansa tulad ng Baguio General Hospital and Medical Center, Mariano Marcos Memorial Hospital and Medical Center, Cagayan Valley Medical Center, Batangas Medical Center, at Bicol Regional Hospital and Medical Center based sa timeline ng Department of Health.

Magkakaroon na rin ng iba't ibang specialty centers sa Visayas tulad sa Western Visayas Medical Center sa Iloilo, Corazon Locsin Montelibano Memorial Regional Hospital sa Bacolod, Eastern Visayas Medical Center sa Tacloban, at iba pang DOH hospitals sa Visayas. Hindi na kailangang pumunta sa Maynila ang mga kababayan natin na nasa Visayas kung kailangang magpagamot sa puso, kidney, at iba pang karamdaman. Doon na lamang po sila pupunta sa mga specialty centers na itatayo sa mga DOH regional hospitals.

Sa Mindanao, maglalagay ng specialty centers sa Zamboanga City Medical Center, Northern Mindanao Medical Center sa Region X, Davao Regional Medical Center, Cotabato Regional and Medical Center, Caraga Regional Hospital at iba pang DOH hospitals sa Mindanao. Malaking tulong po ito sa mga kababayan natin sa Mindanao upang hindi na po sila muling pumunta pa sa Maynila para magpagamot sa puso.

In view of this, it is my humble submission that this Bicameral Conference Committee Report on the disagreeing provisions of Senate Bill No. 2212 and House Bill No. 7751 be ratified by the Senate.

JOINT EXPLANATION OF THE CONFERENCE COMMITTEE

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Joint Explanation of the Conference Committee on the disagreeing provisions of Senate Bill No. 2212 and House Bill No. 7751 was deemed read and inserted into the *Journal and Record of the Senate*. (See Annex B)

REMARKS OF THE CHAIR

Senate President Zubiri thanked Senator Go for expeditiously acting on the measure, as the former recalled that the Uniteam with Senators Padilla, Estrada, Villar (M), and Legarda as well as the Seatmates Campaign Team of Senators Villanueva, Ejercito, and Gatchalian, have endeavored to pass the measure so there would be heart, kidney, and lung centers in the country's three major islands, which would be a game changer because citizens from every region would surely benefit from it.

APPROVAL OF THE CONFERENCE COMMITTEE REPORT

Submitted to a vote, there being no objection, the Conference Committee Report on the disagreeing provisions of Senate Bill No. 2212 and House Bill No. 7751 was approved by the Body.

PROPOSED SENATE RESOLUTION NO. 610

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body considered Proposed Senate Resolution No. 610, entitled

RESOLUTION EXPRESSING THE PROFOUND SYMPATHY AND SINCERE CONDOLENCES OF THE SENATE OF THE PHILIPPINES ON THE DEATH OF HON. CARLOS M. PADILLA, THE GOVERNOR OF THE PROVINCE OF NUEVA VIZCAYA, ON 5 MAY 2023,

taking into consideration Proposed Senate Resolution Nos. 615 and 646.

With the permission of the Body, only the title of the resolution was read without prejudice to the insertion of its text into the *Journal* and *Record of the Senate*.

Thereupon, the Chair recognized Senator Villar (C), sponsor of the resolution.

SPONSORSHIP SPEECH OF SENATOR VILLAR (C)

Senator Villar (C) presented for plenary consideration Proposed Senate Resolution No. 610, taking into consideration Proposed Senate Resolution Nos. 615 and 646.

The full text of Senator Villar (C)'s speech follows:

I stand before you today with a heavy heart to sponsor a resolution expressing our deepest sympathy and sincere condolences on the passing of Gov. Carlos "Caloy" M. Padilla of Nueva Vizcaya.

He was a stalwart of the Nacionalista Party and held in high regard by his colleagues and constituents for his warm, quiet dignity, and genuine dedication to public service.

I had the privilege of first working with Governor Padilla during my term as a congresswoman when he served as the minority leader of the House of Representatives. He graciously shared his wisdom and exemplified learned insight, diplomacy, and unwavering integrity in fulfilling his responsibilities.

Governor Padilla demonstrated strong leadership, and was a true statesman, embodying the very essence of the Nacionalista Party's motto, "*Ang bayan higit sa lahat.*" He wholeheartedly worked towards the progress and improvement of our country, always prioritizing the well-being of the people.

Governor Padilla's remarkable political career encompassed various positions. He began his journey in public service as the mayor of the Municipality of Dupax and, later, of Dupax del Norte. However, it was in the legislative department that he showed his mettle, becoming a seasoned veteran.

He dedicated a total of 29 years to faithfully fulfilling his duties and responsibilities as a legislator representing the lone district of Nueva Vizcaya. This included serving six years as an assemblyman and 23 years as a member of the House of Representatives.

He held notable roles, such as Deputy Speaker during the Eleventh Congress and Minority Leader during the Twelfth Congress. Additionally, he chaired the Committees on Education and Indigenous People and served as a member of the Commission on Appointments and the House of Representatives Electoral Tribunal. His authorship of significant laws, including the Free Public Secondary Education Act, the Philippine Librarianship Act, and the Government Assistance to Students and Teachers in Private Education Act, earned him the well-deserved title of the "Father of Free Public Secondary Education." He has always been a strong advocate for the accessibility of quality education. In his province, he played a pivotal role in the establishment of the Nueva Vizcaya State University and the Philippine Science High School-Cagayan Valley Campus.

After his illustrious career in the legislature, Carlos Padilla was elected as the governor of the Province of Nueva Vizcaya for three terms until his untimely demise. As governor, his affinity for the Nueva Vizcayanos was unparalleled as he consistently demonstrated his deep connection and genuine care for the welfare of the people. He spearheaded numerous programs focusing on education, infrastructure, sustainable livelihood, agri-fishery development, and clean energy, among others. His relentless efforts to improve the lives of the people of Nueva Vizcaya have left an indelible mark on the province, solidifying his legacy of service and dedication.

Governor Padilla, known as the “Legend of the North,” received several prestigious awards for his exceptional leadership and significant contribution. He was recognized as the “Most Outstanding Congressman” in multiple Congresses; honored as an outstanding alumnus of his alma mater, the Polytechnic University of the Philippines; and received the esteemed “Dangal ng Wika Award” for promoting the Filipino language, among other accolades.

To my family, Manny and I, he will forever be Caloy or “Tito Caloy” to my children—a dear friend whose warmth and kindness will always be cherished, and whose departure has left a void that we deeply feel. Let us honor his memory and pay tribute to his remarkable achievements.

To his beloved wife and my friend Ruth, and their children, Carlos “Jojo” II, Ruthie Maye, and Carlo Paolo, I share in your grief. My colleagues in this esteemed Body and I extend our deepest sympathy and sincere condolences to all of you and to the people of Nueva Vizcaya as well.

May Caloy Padilla’s legacy continue to inspire us to live an inspiring and meaningful life, as he exemplified throughout his remarkable journey.

COSPONSORSHIP SPEECHES

As cosponsors of Proposed Senate Resolution No. 610, the following senators delivered their cosponsorship speeches, as follows:

By Senator Escudero

Before I proceed, I would like to personally convey my condolences and deepest sympathy to the family of my fraternity brother and mentor, former colleague, and friend, the late Nueva Vizcaya Governor Carlos “Caloy” Padilla, who passed away last May 5, 2023, at the age of 78.

Until his timely passing, Manong Caloy was doing what he loved most and performing the job that he was best at—public service. Manong Caloy was a true leader and a public servant, as exemplified by his actions throughout his five decades in government service, as a mayor, legislator, and as a local chief executive of his beloved province of Nueva Vizcaya.

His historic career began in the early 1970s when at the age of 30 he became the first mayor of Dupax del Norte. He then represented the province of Nueva Vizcaya serving in Congress for three decades as an assemblyman, and later on as a congressman.

Perhaps one of the late governors’ lasting legacy to the nation was the landmark legislation “Free High School Act of 1988” or what is now known as Republic Act No. 6655 that guaranteed free high school education for every Filipino. Because of this major law, he changed the landscape of Philippine education which is why Manong Caloy was widely regarded as the Father of Free Public Secondary Education.

A year later, he again authored at the House of Representatives what is now RA No. 6728 or the Government Assistance to Students and Teachers in Private Education Act of 1989, that provides various forms of government assistance to both students and teachers alike in private schools.

Because of the indelible mark he left as a leader in public servant, he was given an honorary doctorate degree in public administration by his alma mater, the Polytechnic University of the Philippines. He likewise received the same honorary degree in Education and Humanities from the Philippine Normal University and the Nueva Vizcaya State Institute of Technology, as well as the Nueva Vizcaya State Polytechnic College now the Nueva Vizcaya State University, respectively.



In 2022, he was awarded the “Dangal ng Wika” by the Komisyon ng Wikang Filipino in recognition of his contributions and achievement in the furtherance of the use of the Filipino language.

Manong Caloy was also a staunch advocate of the environment and sustainable development. As governor of Nueva Vizcaya, he was recognized for his utmost care of the environment, in agriculture, community development, as well as initiatives on good governance and welfare of indigenous peoples, among others. In fact, the National Roundtable Against Metals Mining in El Salvador and international allies at the roundtable described Manong Caloy as a visionary environmental leader. They extended their gratitude to the Philippines for sharing “Governor Padilla with us.” For those who may not be aware, Manong Caloy was crucial in the historic vote of the El Salvador legislature banning metals mining to protect rivers. The decision was made in 2017 following his testimony before El Salvadorian legislators about the ill effects of mining.

In his own province, the late governor was vocal against the presence of the Australian mining company Oceana Gold Philippines Incorporated and questioned the sustainability and the benefits of mining in behalf of his constituents.

Together with Senators Lito Lapid, Robinhood Padilla and other cosponsors, I am honored to sponsor Proposed Senate Resolution No. 615, expressing the profound sympathy and sincere condolences of the Senate on the death of a revered statesman from Nueva Vizcaya, a good friend of mine, Gov. Carlos M. Padilla.

With his passing, we look back with gratitude and honor to his service to the country and the Filipino people. We may have lost a great leader and public servant, but his contributions both to the country and to his native province of Nueva Vizcaya will never be forgotten, for his legacy will continue to live on.

By Senator Villanueva

In the Bible, it says “If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. So whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.” Romans 14:8.

I would like to extend my sincerest condolences to the family left behind by Governor Carlos, my Tito Caloy. My thoughts and prayers are with former governor, Tita Ruth, their children—Jojo, Ruthie, May and Carlo Paulo—their grandchildren and to all our *kababayan* in Nueva Vizcaya.

Governor Padilla dedicated his life to public service and to the improvement of the lives of the Filipino people, especially his fellow Novo Vizcayanos.

He began his storied career in public service in 1975 as the youngest mayor of the then undivided municipality of Dupax, Nueva Vizcaya. He subsequently spent 29 years serving in Congress as the representative of the lone district of the province, including six years as an assemblyman in the Batasang Pambansa.

Governor Padilla was a staunch advocate of accessible education. Among the landmark laws he authored include Free Public Secondary Education Act, the Government Assistance to Students and Teachers in Private Education Act, the creation of the National Commission for Culture and the Arts, and the Commission on the Filipino Language. He also pushed for reforms to ensure that education is brought closer to the remote and upland communities. For Nueva Vizcaya alone, he authored the creation of at least 45 schools, including the Philippine Science High School-Cagayan Valley Campus, and the conversion of the Nueva Vizcaya State University.

Bata pa lamang ako, kilalang-kilala ko na si Tito Caloy sapagkat siya ay isa sa pinakamatalik na kaibigan ng aking tatay na si Brother Eddie. Kilalang-kilala ko po siya bilang isang mahusay na public servant, ang isang Caloy Padilla. Bahagi ng kasaysayan ang kaniyang kontribusyon sa pagreporma ng sistema ng edukasyon sa bansa noong 1990s bilang co-chairperson ng Education Commission. Makalipas po ang mahigit tatlong dekada at ngayon, nabigyan din po tayo ng pagkakataong maging bahagi ng Education Commission II kasama sina Sen. Win Gatchalian, Sen. Pia Cayetano at Sen. Sonny Angara. Mas nakita ko po lalo kung gaano kabigat ang naging trabaho at sigasig ni Tito Caloy noon para bigyan ng mas malawak na oportunidad ang mga Pilipino at tatag sa pagharap sa bagong siglo.

Tito Caloy and I became colleagues in the House of Representatives together with Senate President Juan Miguel “Migz” Zubiri in 2002. I was then the youngest member or the Benjamin of the House. *At sa aking murang edad, nakita ko po up close and personal kung papaano magtrabaho si Tito Caloy. Napahanga po niya ako sa kaniyang galing, talino, at kababang-loob. Siguro ito po, iyon ang nag-udyok sa amin sapagkat pagkatapos o paglipas ng ilang taon,* this Representation, together with then Rep. Alan Peter S. Cayetano and then Rep. Francis Joseph “Chiz” G. Escudero, became part of the minority.

In the last election, Tito Caloy did not hold back in supporting our candidacy. *Magiliw niyang hinarap ang ating mga supporter sa Nueva Vizcaya at kasama nila tumayo siya at nagpahayag ng tiwala sa atin. Hinding-hindi ko po ito makakalimutan. At sa harap ni Tita Ruth at kaniyang mga anak, habang buhay ko po itong tatanawing utang na loob.* Governor Padilla will always be fondly remembered not just by his fellow Novo Vizcayanos and Filipinos, but also by the people of El Salvador.

In March 2017, his testimony on the destruction brought by a global mining company to his province was instrumental in the history Salvadorian legislature vote that made El Salvador the first nation in the world to ban metals mining to save its waterways. And for this, he has been regarded as a visionary environmental leader by many Salvadoran environmentalists.

Sa huli, Governor Padilla, Tito Caloy, our Legend of the North, *maraming salamat po* for your service and immeasurable contributions to the lives of Filipinos and people across the globe. Your legacy will live forever. May God bless us all.

By Senator Dela Rosa

It is with great grief and sorrow that I rise today to cosponsor Proposed Senate Resolution No. 610, expressing our condolences as one Senate on the recent loss of Honorable Carlos Padilla, governor of Nueva Vizcaya, who passed away on May 5, 2023.

In all of his countless achievements as a public servant, the ones I wish to highlight are those in relation to education. *Noong siya pa ay isang congressman, siya ay author ng Free High School Act of 1988. Naipakita ni Governor Padilla kung ano ang dapat na priority nating mga mambabatas—ang kinabukasan ng ating kabataan. Hindi dapat maging hadlang ang kahirapan para makamit ng isang bata ang kaniyang mga pangarap.* That was the kind of person he was — a man with a huge heart for the poor and needy.

It is my hope that, although, he is no longer with us physically, his noble example will live on, not just in our memory but also in our own actions. I express my condolence to his bereaved family and loved ones. The entire Philippines mourns the loss of a compassionate leader and a good man.

By Senator Padilla

Ako po ay buong pusong nagpapasalamat sa lahat po ng nagbibigay ng pag-aalay sa aking Tiyo Carlos.

Alam po ninyo ay napakaganda ng buhay ng Tiyo Carlos. Ang mga Padilla po napakalaking pamilya. Ang pamilya po namin ay sa politika talaga. Ang kaniya pong ama ay nasa Nueva Ecija, matagal pong naging congressman. Ang akin naman pong lolo ay matagal na naging congressman ng Bulacan. Pareho po silang magkasama.

Ang istorya lang po ng Padilla ay medyo complicated—sabi nga nila—sapagkat alam po naman ninyo mayroong legitimate, may illegitimate. At ang istorya po na iyan ay napakagandang maging halimbawa sa lahat ng mga Pilipino sa oras na ito na huwag maging hadlang ang kahirapan para maabot mo ang mga pangarap mo.

Alam ho ninyo, binata pa lamang si Tito Carlos nang namatay ang kaniyang tatay. Siya ay naging shoeshine boy. Siya po ay nagtiyaga. Siya po ay nag-aral. Siya po ay working student at naging presidente pa ng student council. Siya po ang naging politiko. Siya ay naging public servant. Siya po ay ilang beses naging congressman, naging governor. Hindi po siya tumigil sa pagsisilbi. Katulad po ng sinabi ni Senator Dela Rosa, hindi po siya tumigil na magsilbi sa mahihirap sapagkat tunay pong alam niya kung ano ang nararamdaman, kung ano ang pinagdadaan ng mga mahihirap.



Kaya sana po, mga mahal kong kasama, sa pamamagitan po ng inyong mga pahayag na kaniyang pinalakas ang edukasyon — sapagkat naniniwala po siya na ang edukasyon talaga ang susi para maahon sa kahirapan ang ating mga kababayan — ay sundan po natin ang ang kaniyang mga sinimulan. Huwag po nating bitawan sapagkat ang paglingon sa kaniyang mga itinanim at pagdilig sa kaniyang mga itinanim, at umusbong ito, ibig pong sabihin ay hindi kailanman makakalimutan si Tiyo Carlos Padilla.

Muli po, maraming salamat at muli po akong nakikiramay kay Tita Ruth at sa kaniyang mga anak.

By Senator Revilla

Nakakalungkot po ang pagpanaw kamakailan ng isa na naman sa ating kapwa lingkod-bayan.

Nakikidalamhati po tayo sa pamilya, kaibigan, mahal sa buhay at mga naiwan ni Gov. Carlos M. Padilla ng Nueva Vizcaya. As the longest ever serving political leader in Nueva Vizcaya, he won the hearts of his kababayan whom he served whole-heartedly through his various advocacies and programs.

Bakas sa dagsa ng tao sa kanilang tahanan noong umaga ng kanyang pagpanaw ang hindi matatawarang pagmamahal, respeto at paghanga kay Governor Padilla.

He is fondly called “Caloy” by his supporters who have traversed life’s journey with him and witnessed his growth as a public servant. They remember him in his youth when he began his political career as the youngest Municipal Mayor of then Dupax town. *Natatandaan nila ang pagyabong ng kanyang karera sa politika nang manilbihan din siya sa Kongreso.*

He started his voyage in the political arena, and as the years passed by, he underscored the significance of education as the tool that our nation utilizes to enrich not only the minds but the future of our countrymen as well. Aside from authoring various bills which were enacted into laws on reinforcing the education sector such as the Free Public Secondary Education, his other bills also paved the way for the establishment of 45 elementary and secondary schools which is said to have brought education closer to the indigenous peoples and bridged the gap they have long struggled with. Truly, in his own words, “investing in education is always one of the best initiatives to bring about the general development and progress...”

Ang mga ipinunla niyang inisyatiba ang mismong inaani ng kanyang mga minsang pinagsilbihan.

Now his voyage has come to an end, but the memories of his genuine and dedicated public service will forever be etched in history.

Sa iyong paglalakbay pabalik sa Maylikha, baunin mo ang aming pag-saludo at paghanga sa iyong mga nasimulan at nakamit.

I also ask that I be made coauthor of this measure.

By Senator Hontiveros

In cosponsoring Proposed Senate Resolution No. 610, Senator Hontiveros extended her deepest condolences to Mayor Ruth Padilla and her children on the passing of Governor Padilla.

She recalled that during their stint together in the House of Representatives, “Manong Caloy,” as she fondly called the late Congressman Padilla, along with Congressman Edno Josen, would often say that although they were part of the Majority, they also considered themselves as independent thinkers. She stated that Manong Caloy would often be among the first from the majority bloc to fight for common causes alongside her, who belonged to the Minority bloc. She recalled that together, they had waged long and hard-fought battles.

She stated that one notable aspect of Manong Caloy’s character was his advocacy for the environment even before it gained popularity in the country. She added that he played a crucial role

in leading the efforts to make Nueva Vizcaya a mining-free province, displaying his passionate and sincere advocacy for sustainable environment. She stated that he had lent passion and energy to other peoples in other countries and continents in their own struggles for sustainable development.

In addition, she stated that Manong Caloy possessed a deep understanding of the vulnerability of ecologically sensitive ecosystems to natural disasters. She stated that whenever calamities struck his beloved Nueva Vizcaya, he was always the first to respond, rallying support and expressing gratitude to those who offered assistance from outside the province. Furthermore, she stated that his commitment to his constituents' well-being extended beyond relief efforts and included active involvement in rehabilitation initiatives.

Finally, she stated that Manong Caloy exemplified the rare combination of greatness and goodness, and that he was not only a kind individual but also someone who genuinely made a positive impact on the lives of others.

Although saddened by his passing, she expressed gratitude for the exemplary life Manong Caloy lived.

By Senator Angara

In cosponsoring Proposed Senate Resolution No. 610, Senator Angara stated that the remarks of his fellow senators brought back memories of his time working with the late Governor Padilla in the House of Representatives during the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Congresses. He stated that the late governor was a member of the Fifteenth Congress alongside Representative Ejercito and other colleagues.

He stated that the late Governor Padilla was a very close friend of both his father, the late former Sen. Edgardo J. Angara, and his aunt. He mentioned that the deceased governor was a fellow member of the Laban ng Demokratikong Pilipino (LDP) and that their respective home provinces, Nueva Vizcaya and Aurora, share a border where the municipalities of Alfonso Castañeda and Maria Aurora are located.

He also mentioned that before the passage of the Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act (UAQTEA) in 2016, the late former Congressman Padilla was among the authors of the following laws in education, namely: 1) the Government Assistance To Students and Teachers In Private Education Act (GATSPE), the largest government scholarship program in the history of the country, which benefited tens of millions of Filipinos; and 2) the Free Public Secondary Education Act of 1988. In addition, he stated that Manong Caloy co-chaired the first Congressional Commission on Education (EDCOM I) alongside his father, the late Sen. Edgardo Angara.

He extended his condolences to the Padilla family in remembrance of a gentleman who had only kind eyes and a smile for everyone he met, and no malice toward anyone.

By Senator Ejercito

Senator Ejercito, in cosponsoring Proposed Senate Resolution No. 610, recalled how, as a neophyte legislator in the Fifteenth Congress, the late former Rep. Carlos Padilla encouraged and guided him regarding the legislative process. He then informed the Body that when he was chairperson of the Committee on Health and Demography, he visited the late governor in Nueva Vizcaya as part of a motorcycle trip to remote areas of the country, including Mountain Province, Ifugao, and Nueva Vizcaya. He described how the late governor brought him to the Nueva Vizcaya Provincial Hospital in an effort to secure funds to improve the hospital's facilities and equipment of said hospital.

He conveyed gratitude to the late Governor Padilla for supporting his 2019 election bid. He recalled how the late governor believed in him and sought the support of Nueva Vizcaya's local leaders despite his having slim chances of winning. He then sought to honor the memory of the veteran lawmaker by honoring his commitment to improve the healthcare facilities of the Nueva Vizcaya Provincial Hospital.

By Senator Villar (M)

Senator Villar (M), in cosponsoring Proposed Senate Resolution No. 610, recalled his first term as a congressman, when the late former Congressman Padilla, a well-liked and respected Deputy Speaker of the Nacionalista Party, taught him the ropes of legislation. He stated that since then, he has revered the veteran legislator since then.

He expressed his sincerest condolences to Mrs. Ruth Padilla, the veteran lawmaker's wife. He then mentioned with fondness that he still has the wooden table that the late governor had given him, which remains a very important fixture in his house.

In addition, he recalled that as Secretary of the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH), he witnessed the former governor's devotion to his constituents in Nueva Vizcaya, and how the people loved him back.

He concluded by reiterating his admiration for the late governor, stating that the nation may never see another a public servant as kind, unique, and devoted as the late Carlos M. Padilla.

By Senator Legarda

At the same time, I wish to associate myself with a very heartfelt condolences and thoughtful messages of our colleagues to a public servant. I express my condolences to former governor, Ruth Padilla, and her children, who are here.

I am infused and inspired to know that for a long time, both former Gov. Ruth Padilla and Governor Caloy Padilla had supported indigenous people's workshops in different IP communities in the province of Nueva Vizcaya—at least 12, according to Governor Padilla.

We know her late husband as a firm defender of the environment. I believe it was my second or third term when there was a similar measure that was heard here in the Senate on preventing or prohibiting mining in his province.

A firm defender of the environment and a public servant who fought for that. It is not very often we find someone that way—standing strong against extractive industries that would threaten his province, especially during times when their permits expired. I wish we had more of such valor, courage, passion, and conviction as former Gov. Caloy Padilla.

I am also gladdened to note that he was actually a slow food advocate. As a similar advocate and a member who uses very loosely of a slow food movement where we try to grow our own food and focus on organic farming and the elements of slow food.

I am glad that we have an exemplary local public official, and I hope that those in the province who will inherit his position will continue the good deeds that he did. First, the ban on mining in his province—admirable. Second, giving importance to the culture and heritage of our indigenous peoples, especially in the province—beautiful, and we wish to support that.

I approach former Gov. Ruth Padilla and ask how we could help because she said that it was her husband who supported those programs—at least P3 million, she said, for the 12 workshops. I would like to be able to give my humble support to those workshops and, perhaps, provide us a template of how the two Padillas, Ruth and Caloy, both former governors, so that other provinces with indigenous peoples can replicate the good work that they do.

I was informed—I hope this is accurate—that even in a far-flung country like El Salvador—I hope I am not mistaken—Governor Padilla has inspired a ban on mining by a unanimous vote in El Salvador. Is this accurate, Madam Ruth? So, I am correct in saying that.



We lost a gentle but formidable friend and indeed a governor who bans extractive industries in his province, who heralds and inspires indigenous people and their culture, who walks his talk through environmentalism and slow food. That is a great man indeed.

With that, I associate myself and I would like to express my heartfelt condolences to former Gov. Ruth Padilla and her family.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATE PRESIDENT ZUBIRI

Senate President Zubiri conveyed his deepest condolences to the family of former Gov. Carlos “Caloy” Padilla.

He stated that he was so fond of his Tito Caloy that, upon learning of the latter’s passing, he wanted to fly to Nueva Vizcaya to attend the wake, but was unable to do so because of the lack of flights. He stated that he also was going on a trip to New Zealand that same week.

He stated that the late governor was known to be an unassuming, intelligent, and sought-after individual, particularly regarding issues on education and power reduction.

He recalled that he and Mr. Padilla were invited to speak before cooperatives in Nueva Vizcaya a few years ago. He noted that the cooperatives there adored because he was a simple man and was truly a man of the masses.

He stated that Mr. Padilla was also a dear friend of his father because they served together in the Batasan Pambansa. He admitted that he had not informed his father of his friend’s passing because he knew his father would grieve profoundly.

He stated that Mr. Padilla was truly a legend of the North and prayed that God would continue to bless his soul and his family.

COSPONSORSHIP REMARKS OF SENATOR GO

Upon their request, Senators Go and Estrada submitted their following cosponsorship speeches on Proposed Senate Resolution No. 610 for insertion into the *Journal and Record of the Senate*, as follows:

By Senator Go

I rise today to express my sincere and deepest condolences to the family and friends of the late Governor Carlos Padilla of Nueva Vizcaya.

Governor Padilla is a dear friend in public service who had spent most of his time serving the best interest of the Filipino people, particularly his fellow Novo Vizcayanos. *Hindi po matatawaran ang husay at pusong naipamalas niya sa serbisyo.*

Muli, nakikiisa ako sa Senado sa ating pagkikiramay at pagdadalamhati sa pagpanaw ng isang tunay na public servant.

By Senator Estrada

I am one with the nation in mourning the passing of Nueva Vizcaya Gov. Carlos M. Padilla. Governor Padilla served the country for 29 years as congressman and assemblyman.

Governor Padilla served as an assemblyman for Nueva Vizcaya in the Interim Batasang Pambansa from 1978 to 1984, and as a representative for the lone legislative district of Nueva Vizcaya during the Eighth Congress from 1987 to 1992, Tenth and Twelfth Congress from 1995 to 2004, and Fourteenth to Sixteenth Congress from 2007 to 2016. As governor of Nueva Vizcaya, he served from 2016 until his demise on May 5, 2023.

As a veteran lawmaker, he has been champion of education, authoring the Free Public Secondary Education Act of 1998 (RA 9655) and the Government Assistance To Students And Teachers In Private Education Act (RA 6728).

Ipinapaabot po ng inyong abang lingkod, ang atin pong marubdob na pakikiramay sa kaniyang pamilya at sa mga Novo Vizcayanos.

With that, this Representation would like to be included among the authors and sponsors of Proposed Senate Resolution No. 610, 615, and 646 expressing our profound sympathy and paying tribute to Gov. Carlos M. Padilla.

ADOPTION OF PROPOSED SENATE RESOLUTION NO. 610

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body adopted Proposed Senate Resolution No. 610, taking into consideration Proposed Senate Resolution Nos. 615 and 646, subject to style.

COSPONSORS AND COAUTHORS

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, all the Members were made cosponsors and coauthors of Proposed Senate Resolution No. 610.

SUSPENSION OF SESSION

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, the session was suspended.

It was 5:44 p.m.

RESUMPTION OF SESSION

At 5:55 p.m., the session was resumed.

CONFERENCE COMMITTEE REPORT ON SENATE BILL NO. 1594 AND HOUSE BILL NO. 1171

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body considered the Conference Committee Report on the disagreeing provisions of Senate Bill No. 1594, entitled

**AN ACT INSTITUTIONALIZING THE ONE TOWN, ONE PRODUCT (OTOP)
PHILIPPINES PROGRAM, APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR, AND FOR
OTHER PURPOSES,**

and House Bill No. 1171, entitled

**AN ACT PROMOTING INCLUSIVE AND SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC DEVELOP-
MENT THROUGH THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF "ONE TOWN, ONE
PRODUCT" PHILIPPINES PROGRAM AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS
THEREFOR.**

The Chair recognized Senator Villar (M) to sponsor the report.

REPORT OF SENATOR VILLAR (M)

Senator Villar (M) informed the Body that the bicameral conference committee has successfully reconciled the disagreeing provisions of Senate Bill No. 1594 and House Bill No. 1171, which seek to institutionalize the One Town, One Product Act.

The rest of his report follows:

The vergerence of this legislation passed by the Senate and the House of Representatives, working separately, are in unison to institutionalize the One Town, One Product Program of the Department of Trade and Industry. The reason behind the OTOP Program is to support and empower local industries particularly in rural areas, and create jobs and income opportunities for the people. By developing and promoting local products, the OTOP Program encourages entrepreneurship and helps boost economic growth in the country.

In the bicameral conference committee report, both parties agreed to adopt the Senate version as the working draft, noting that both bills have numerous common provisions and minor differences.

Allow me to discuss them briefly as the lead conferee of the Senate delegation.

First, on the objectives, the conferees agreed to include a new objective which is to formulate a National OTOP Strategic Development Plan. Within one year, the DTI, through the OTOP Program Management Office, shall develop a six-year National OTOP Strategic Development Plan, hereinafter referred to as the Plan, in consultation with concerned stakeholders, which shall be validated and updated annually.

The Plan, which shall be approved by the President of the Philippines, shall define the OTOP Program's annual and medium-term targets, as well as develop and implement programs and strategies to support the OTOP Program's thrusts. The Plan shall also identify priority OTOP products and services which shall be characterized by high value-added and have a high potential for attaining the objectives of this Act.

Second, on the setting of qualifications for products to be included in the OTOP Program, the conferees agreed to set qualification criteria for OTOP products to be established by the DTI and be consistent with the following elements: culture, community resources, connection, creativity, and competitive advantage. Preference shall be given to goods or services that form part of the supply chain of OTOP products.

Third, on OTOP Program components, the conferees agreed to include new additional program components, namely:

Provision of market access and product promotion where beneficiaries shall receive support in market access and promotion of products across different platforms. These platforms may include multimedia advocacy campaigns, trade fairs, and OTOP Philippine Hubs. The DTI, PIA, DOT, and PITC shall, therefore, implement a promotional campaign in local and international markets for OTOP Philippine products; and

Eligibility for Government assistance, which includes a minimal set of rules and simplification of procedures and requirements for government agencies dealing with OTOP beneficiaries and as provided under Section 4 of RA 9501.

Fourth, on the creation and formalization of the OTOP Program office, both panels agreed to authorize the DTI to create an OTOP Program Management Office, which shall oversee and direct the OTOP Program on the national level.

The OTOP-PMO shall be headed by a director and its organizational structure and staffing complement shall be determined by the DTI Secretary in consultation with the Department of Budget and Management and in accordance with civil service rules and regulations. Notably, on the title of the bill, the conferees agreed to adopt the Senate version to read as follows: An Act Institutionalizing the One Town One Product Philippines Program, Appropriating Funds thereof and for other Purposes.

Please allow me to thank you once more for your formidable support, for the ratification of the disagreeing provisions of Senate Bill No. 1594 and House Bill No. 1171, pertaining to the One Town One Product Act.

This representation would also like to thank all the senators who stand united in support of this legislation recognizing its transformative potential and the opportunities it holds for our MSMEs.



This representation firmly believes that the impact of this legislation may extend far beyond our shores. The OTOP Philippines Program will put our nation on the international stage showcasing the diverse range of high quality products that our towns and municipalities have to offer. This program will not only boost our local economies but will also serve as a beacon of inspiration for other nations striving to uplift their MSMEs and promote sustainable development.

Ang atin pong layunin ay hindi lamang tungkol sa pag-unlad ng lokal na ekonomiya kung hindi pati na rin sa pagpapalaganap ng kulturang Pilipino sa buong mundo. Ang bawat produktong Pilipino ay tatak ng ating kasipagan at kahusayan. Ito ang simula para matulungan ang mga produkto ng mga Pilipino na mas makilala sa buong mundo.

This proposed measure has nothing but good intentions for our MSMEs and for the Filipino people. Since the OTOP was created in 2002, this measure is long overdue for enactment.

Now, allow me to move for the approval of the bicameral conference committee report on the disagreeing provisions on Senate Bill No. 1594 and House Bill No. 1171.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR PIMENTEL

Senator Pimentel expressed his gladness that Senator Villar (M) did not report out the Maharlika Bill, as he would have voted “no” to it. He said that he gives the OTOP a thumbs up.

JOINT EXPLANATION OF THE CONFERENCE COMMITTEE

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Joint Explanation of the Conference Committee on the disagreeing provisions of Senate Bill No. 1594 and House Bill No. 1171 was deemed read and inserted into the *Journal and Record of the Senate*. (See Annex C)

APPROVAL OF THE CONFERENCE COMMITTEE REPORT

Submitted to a vote, there being no objection, the Conference Committee Report on the disagreeing provisions of Senate Bill No. 1594 and House Bill No. 1171 was approved by the Body.

ANNOUNCEMENT OF SENATE PRESIDENT ZUBIRI

Senate President Zubiri informed the Body that the House of Representatives will adopt the Senate’s Third Reading version of the Maharlika Investment Fund.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR PIMENTEL

Senator Pimentel remarked that the Second and Third Readings of the measure occurred at around 2:30 a.m.. As his *turno en contra* had been delivered earlier that day, he stated that he would have voted “no” throughout. If the bicameral report been presented that day, he stated that he and Senator Hontiveros would have objected and voted “no” on the basis that there is no surplus, no windfall profit, a difficult economic situation, and the danger of corruption still existed. He emphasized that his vote on the Maharlika Bill will be “no” all the way.

PROPOSED SENATE RESOLUTION NO. 633

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body considered Proposed Senate Resolution No. 633, entitled

RESOLUTION CONGRATULATING AND COMMENDING THE PHILIPPINE NATIONAL ARNIS TEAM AND THEIR COACHING STAFF FOR WINNING

6 GOLD MEDALS, 2 SILVER MEDALS, AND 4 BRONZE MEDALS AT THE 32ND SOUTHEAST ASIAN GAMES HELD AT HALL A, CHROY CHANGVAR CONVENTION CENTRE, PHNOM PENH, CAMBODIA FROM 14 TO 16 MAY 2023.

With the permission of the Body, only the title of the resolution was read without prejudice to the insertion of its full text into the *Record of the Senate*.

Thereupon, the Chair recognized Senator Villanueva for the sponsorship.

SPONSORSHIP SPEECH OF SENATOR VILLANUEVA

Senator Villanueva stated that it was an honor to sponsor Proposed Senate Resolution No. 633, congratulating and commending the National Arnis Team for its victory in the 32nd Southeast Asian Games that held in Cambodia.

He stated that the team delivered an overall strong performance in the regional competition by winning six gold medals, which was tied with the Taekwondo team for the most gold medals won by a national team, two silver medals, and four bronze medals. He stated that with the accomplishment, the Philippines ranked first and was undeniably the best in the sport throughout Southeast Asia. He then mentioned the names of the members of the team: gold medalists Charlotte Ann Paredes Tolentino—niece of Senator Tolentino, Jedah Mae Soriano, Ma. Ella Alcoseba, Dexler Bolambao, Crisamuel Delfin, and Trixie Mary Lofranco; silver medalists Jude Oliver Marie Rodriguez, and the team of Mary Allin Aldeguez, Ma. Crystal Jane Sapio, and Jeanette Agapito; and bronze medalists Ezekyl Habig, Noah Gonzalez, Nino Mark Talledo, and the team of Jeric Arce, Mark David Puzon, and Mack John-Neil Pineda. In addition, he congratulated and thanked the officials and coaching staff, led by Head Coach Richardson Gialogo, who made it possible for the athletes to perform their best, as well as Senate President Zubiri, who was the Philippine Eskrima Kali Arnis Federation chairperson and president, for the guidance and leadership he brought to the national team. He stated that the attention and support provided by Senate President Zubiri have shaped the athletes into who they are today.

Finally, he expressed confidence that the Philippine Arnis Team will once again raise the Philippine flag with pride and distinction in the future.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATE PRESIDENT ZUBIRI

Senate President Zubiri informed the Body that it was the first time arnis had been played outside of the Philippines. He stated that the country hosted arnis in 1991, 2005, and 2019 during its hosting of the Southeast Asian Games. He then solicited the support of the Members for arnis to remain a part of the competition when the SEA Games are conducted in Thailand. He expressed pride for the young athletes of world-class caliber who competed so valiantly, some of whom were two-time SEA Games champions. He stated that the team won six gold medals; Vietnam, two; Cambodia, two; and Myanmar, two. He said that the team proved to its rivals that the Filipino stick fighting and Filipino martial arts are the finest in the world.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR EJERCITO

Senator Ejercito congratulated the National Team and Senate President Zubiri on accumulating the most gold medals in arnis. He observed that other sports contingents had fewer athletes and more coaches, whereas arnis had more athletes and fewer coaches, but still won more gold medals.

Senate President Zubiri stated that the arnis coaching staff was very effective, so he will reward the entire team with a trip to Hong Kong in July.

COSPONSORSHIP SPEECH OF SENATOR GO

In cosponsoring Proposed Senate Resolution No. 633, Senator Go delivered the following speech:

As your Chair of the Senate Committee on Sports, I stand before you to express my utmost admiration and extend my warmest congratulations to the Philippine National Arnis Team and their coaching staff for their outstanding achievements at the recently-concluded 32nd Southeast Asian Games held in Cambodia.

Ako po mismo, sinamahan ko po ang ating Senate President sa dinner noong nag-cheer tayo sa kanila. At hindi lang po magaling si Senate President sa pag-a-arnis, mabilis din po siyang bumunot para suportahan kaagad ang kanyang arnis team. Talagang tumaas lalo ang morale ng ating players.

It is with great pride that I rise to co-sponsor this Senate resolution congratulating and commending our athletes. Our national arnis athletes have once again showcased their exceptional skills and unwavering dedication, proving to the world that the Philippines is indeed a force to be reckoned with in the world of martial arts.

Through their remarkable performance, our arnis team has not only made our nation proud, but also united our country in celebrating their triumph. They have exemplified the core values of discipline, perseverance, and sportsmanship, serving as role models for our aspiring athletes, and inspiring future generations to pursue their dreams. *At isa rin po ito sa pamamaraan na ilayo natin ang mga kabataan sa ilegal na droga – get into sports, stay away from drugs.*

I would also like to extend my heartfelt appreciation to the coaching staff who have tirelessly worked behind the scene, providing guidance, mentorship, and unwavering support to our athletes, especially *kay Senate President Migz Zubiri na nakita ko talaga na sinamahan niya all throughout po sa umpisa pa lamang, at alam kong maraming ginto ang mapapanalunan nila. Iyong mga promises mo pa sa kanila, at talagang ginanahan. Hindi lang magaling mag-arnis, bunot kaagad si SP doon.*

Through this resolution, we convey our heartfelt congratulations and commendation for their exceptional performance and for bringing honor and pride to our nation.

Let us continue to support our national athletes and provide them with the necessary resources and opportunities to excel in their chosen fields. *Ako po, bilang Chairman ng Committee on Sports, full support po ako sa ating mga atleta.*

Mabuhay ang Philippine National Arnis Team! Mabuhay ang mga atletang Pilipino!

MANIFESTATION OF SENATE PRESIDENT ZUBIRI

Senate President Zubiri thanked Senators Go and Tolentino for their presence at the dinner for the athletes to motivate the team before the following day's competition.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR ANGARA

Senator Angara stated that he was amazed that Senate President Zubiri was able to find time to head the National Arnis Team despite his hectic, busy, and demanding schedule. He hoped that the team would share his appreciation for the gesture. He congratulated the team for bringing honor to the nation.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR CAYETANO (P)

Senator Cayetano (P) stated that she was equally proud of the entire Philippine contingent that competed in Cambodia. She disclosed that the week preceding the Arnis Team's competition was a typically hectic one in the Senate. She stated that the Members were informed of the numerous challenges that the athletes and coaching staff were facing. She recalled that Senate President

Zubiri insisted he schedule a weekend flight to Cambodia and return to Manila on Monday. She said that Senate President Zubiri returned from Cambodia with a fresh face, as if nothing happened. She stated that the Senate President traveled to Cambodia because he wanted the sporting world to know that the Philippine leadership cares about its athletes, which she believed conveys a wonderful signal.

Senator Cayetano (P) stated that it was under the leadership of Senate President Zubiri, and Senator Angara as chairperson of the Committee on Finance, that the Senate allocated substantial funding for sports in the belief that it transforms lives. She stated that in addition to fame, athletes find that their sport has given them purpose and changed their lives. She also noted the numerous tales of athletes who received much-needed love and support from teammates and coaches rather than their families.

Senate President Zubiri commended the entire Philippine Team for finishing fifth in the recent Southeast Asian Games, the country's highest finish since the year it hosted the international competition. He also mentioned that Philippine Olympic Committee President Abraham "Bambol" Tolentino was instrumental in urging the team to surpass its gold medal harvest, which brought home six more medals than the previous year.

Senator Villanueva believed that the current Senate was the most supportive in the annals of Philippine sports. He recalled instances when plenary sessions were suspended so that the Members could watch the SEA Games on television as a means of supporting the Filipino athletes.

COAUTHORS

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, all Members were made coauthors of Proposed Senate Resolution No. 633.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATE PRESIDENT ZUBIRI

Senate President Zubiri stated that he was pleased that all senators were coauthors and cosponsors of the proposed resolution. He stated that while he was aware that his position as president of the National Sports Association created a conflict of interest, he could not help but convey his pride in the performance of the Filipino athletes in the SEA Games.

ADOPTION OF PROPOSED SENATE RESOLUTION NO. 633

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body adopted Proposed Senate Resolution No. 633, taking into consideration Proposed Senate Resolution No. 634, subject to style.

PROPOSED SENATE RESOLUTION NO. 619

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body considered 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,

taking into consideration Proposed Senate Resolution Nos. 621, 622, 623, 625, and 640.

With the permission of the Body, only the title of the resolution was read without prejudice to the insertion of its full text into the *Record of the Senate*.

The Chair recognized Senator Villar (C) to sponsor the resolution.

SPONSORSHIP SPEECH OF SENATOR VILLAR (C)

In sponsoring Proposed Senate Resolution No. 619, Senator Villar (C) delivered the following speech:

Today, I rise to congratulate our athletes who showed their strength and capabilities at the 32nd Southeast Asian Games in Cambodia this May. They brought home a total of 260 medals: 58 gold medals; 85 silver medals; and 117 bronze medals. And those are not just their win; it is a win for all of us.

The medals they won are a sign of their hard work and perseverance. They showed us that if we work hard, stay focused, persevere, and have team work, we can achieve great things.

Our athletes have made us proud and have shown to the world what Filipinos can do. Our Filipino athletes are now inspiring many of us, especially the young ones, to dream big and work hard. They have shown us that the Filipino spirit is strong and formidable. *Kaya naman, bilang Senado ng Pilipinas, nais nating magbigay pugay at magpasalamat sa ating mga atletang Pilipino. Ang kanilang tagumpay sa Southeast Asian Games ay karangalan po nating lahat.*

Mabuhay po ang ating mga atletang Pilipino. Salamat po sa inyo. God bless and stay safe.

COSPONSORSHIP SPEECHES

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the cosponsorship speeches of Senators Dela Rosa and Angara were inserted into the *Journal and Record of the Senate*:

By Senator Dela Rosa

I stand here today to sponsor Senate Resolution No. 619 which Congratulates and Commends all members of the Philippine Team who have participated in the 32nd SEA Games which was held at Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

In the spirit of celebration, there are three stories that I wish to share with everyone:

First story, back in the 30th SEA Games, the Philippines sent more than a thousand athletes who in turn brought the Philippines enormous standing in Southeast Asia. In contrast, for the 31st SEA Games in Vietnam, our country was able to send only 656 athletes, which is almost half of the number we sent in the previous SEA Games. Nevertheless, our athletes pushed through and ranked fourth in the overall ranking of 11 countries.

Today, we are blessed to be on the upper rank by placing 5th in the 32nd SEA Games held in Cambodia attaining 86 silver medals, 58 gold medals, and 116 bronze medals.

Second story is about a man named Edwin Giron, he is one of the athletes representing our country. He is a Filipino runner who suffered from a leg cramp during the 800m run finals of the Athletics sport. The cramps pushed him to the ground which resulted in his competitors overtaking him. But his race did not end there, though collapsed, exhausted, notwithstanding his missed chance of winning and standing on the podium of winners, he decided to stand up and finish the race. During that moment, it was impossible to win a medal, but the courage to never succumb in the face of adversity, and finish the race is a moment all Filipinos can learn from. That a true winner never yields in the face of the impossible.

Third story is that of Carlos Yulo, who is a prodigy class of his own. Who would have thought that more than two years ago he struggled due to the harsh levels of training and even mentioned that he almost quit because he was drained mentally and physically. Today, he is considered as a world medallist and has been raking in medals for the Philippines including the 32nd SEA Games.



These stories remind me of how the Filipino spirit refuses to be held down by fate or by circumstance. The athlete Roger Bannister stated, and I loosely quote: “Those who can drive themselves further, once the effort gets painful, are those who will win.”

I am sure that all athletes who participated in the 32nd SEA GAMES have stories of their own to tell, of how lonely training was, how heartwrenching and nerve-racking it was to beat the record day by day, hoping and believing that the moment will come when their determination, hard work and the resolve to not quit would finally bear fruit. Mr. President, that moment did arrive, for all of our athletes.

I am proud of all of them, as they bring honor and pride to their families, fellow Filipinos, and to their country. They have shown us what Bannister shared, that success comes from surpassing the pains that effort may bring, that Filipinos, even when fighting against the odds, can still come out as exemplary. *Dahil kung mayroon mang isang bagay na hinding hindi mo mananakaw sa isang Pilipino, ito ay iyong kanyang lakas ng loob na ituloy ang laban, at ipanalo ito.*

Once again, Congratulations to our athletes you inspire all of us and we commend you for that.

By Senator Angara

We stand to lend our voice to the resounding chorus in this august chamber celebrating the victories of our athletes during the recent 2023 Southeast Asian or SEA Games, held in Cambodia from May 5 to 17 this year.

Malakas ang ating hiyaw at palakpak ngayon dahil hinigitan pa ng Team Philippines ang kanilang nauwing medalya noong nakaraang taon sa Vietnam. Kung sa Hanoi, naka-227 tayo, sa Phnom Penh naman, nag-uwi ang ating mga atleta ng 260. Dagdag pa dito, nakakuha tayo ng 58 na gold—ang pinakamaraming bilang na nakuha natin sa lahat ng SEA games na ginananap sa labas ng Pilipinas nitong nakaraang dalawang dekada.

Since 2003, the only times Team Philippines surpassed this number (58) was in 2005 (112), and 2019 (149). In both instances, Mr. President, our country played host to the biennial multi-sport event. Some say there is a trend with the SEA Games that the host country is usually the one who corners the most number-one finishes. That means the 58 gold-medal haul our athletes brought home earlier this month was earned without that home court advantage. And to us, this showing is a clear sign that in terms of international sporting competitions, we are hitting harder, getting better, running faster, and becoming stronger.

Many Team Philippine athletes also broke SEA Games and Philippine records in Cambodia.

- Pole vaulter EJ Obiena, the 2022 world’s bronze medalist, took home his third gold SEA Games medal, and set the meet record of 5.65 at the Morodok Techo National Stadium.
- After winning his 6th consecutive 400m hurdles gold, track-and-fielder Eric Cray solidified his place in sporting history as among the most successful at the SEA Games ever. Not only does the Olongapo-born athlete hold the Philippine national record for the 400-m hurdles, and the 100-meter dash. He is also considered the most decorated runner to ever compete at the SEA Games.
- Last year, weightlifter Elreen Ando finished at Hanoi with only a silver for the women’s 64kg competition. Earlier this month however, the 24-year old pride of Cebu City came home victorious, not only from winning the women’s gold in weightlifting, but also shattering all records in her new weight class when she raised and kept 98-kg metal plates over her head.
- Meanwhile, Elreen’s weightlifting teammate, Vanessa Sarno bested not just her own record but also the SEA Games’ when she cleared 105kg in snatch, and 120kg in clean and jerk. With a total lift of 125kg, she added to the gold medal haul of Team Philippines.
- Bronze man ang nauwing medalya ng weightlifter na si Dexter Tabique. *Pero pagkatapos niyang mabuhat ang 140kg sa snatch, at 170 sa clean and jerk para makakuha ng 310kg, hinigitan pa niya ang Philippine record na itinalaga ni John Kevin Padullo noong nakaraang taon.*
- Swimmer Teia Salvino competed for Team Philippines for the first time in Cambodia. At 17 years old, not only did she bring home to the Philippines a gold medal, she also beat the SEA Games record for the 100m backstroke event, finishing after only 1:01:64.



- *Nandiyan din po ang dating high school English teacher na si Jaymark Rodelas na nag-uwi ng gold para sa 100m obstacle course race. Dating kasama sa athletics team ng Emilio Aguinaldo College, nilagpasan ni Rodelas ang sarili niyang record. Ganyan din ang ginawa ng kanyang teammate na si Precious Cabuya, na siya rin ay nakauwi ng gold para sa women's obstacle course race.*

Natatangi din ang tagumpay ng Philippine National Arnis Team, dahil kanila ang pinakamaraming medalya para sa Arnis—apat (4) na bronze, dalawang (2) silver, at anim (6) na gold (12 in total). Anim (6) na gold din ang naikalap ng Philippine Taekwondo Team. Kahanga-hanga din ang Athletics team, dahil sa 260 na medalya na inuwi ng Pilipinas, 22 na ito ay galing sa kanila.

Syempre, hindi natin pwede kalimutan na sa Cambodia, nakuha muli ng Gilas Pilipinas ang gold para sa 5x5 basketball, habang ang Gilas Women ay nakauwi ng silver.

Sa aming pagtayo dito, nais namin ihatid sa Team Philippines ang aming lubos na pasasalamat para sa inspirasyon na naibigay nila sa buong bansa dahil sa tagumpay nila noong nakaraang SEA Games. Malaki ang ambag ng kanilang mga panalo para paligayahin, at mabigyan ng pag-asa ang ating mga kababayan.

Mahalagang ipunto G. Presidente na may gantimpalang naghihintay para sa mga atleta natin na nagwagi sa mga international competitions tulad ng SEA Games. Ayon sa RA 10699 o ang National Athletes and Coaches Incentives Act na aming inakda, makakatanggap ang mga nanalo noong SEA Games ng mga sumusunod—P300,000 para sa mga gold; P150,000 sa nag-silver; at P60,000 para sa nag-bronze. May dagdag na cash incentive din para sa mga nakalagpas ng mga Philippine record.

Ang mga halagang ito—pati na rin ang mga resolusyon na inihahain ngayon— ay mga simbolo ng pasasalamat ng bansa sa Team Philippines, kasi tunay na maipagmamalaki natin silang lahat. Nagsilbing inspirasyon sila sa ating lahat. Kaya sana, sa mga payak na pagsasalita at pagbibigay ng insentibo na ginagawa natin ngayon, lalo pa sila maenganyo na ipagpatuloy ang kanilang pagsasasanay at pagpupursige para makakamit muli ng tagumpay sa ngalan ng bansa. Maraming salamat, G. Presidente! Mabuhay ang Atletang Pinoy!

COSPONSORSHIP SPEECH OF SENATOR GO

In cosponsoring Proposed Senate Resolution No. 619, Senator Go delivered the following speech:

As Chairman of the Committee on Sports, I stand before you with immense pride and joy as we celebrate the extraordinary achievements of our Filipino athletes in the recently concluded 32nd Southeast Asian Games. It is with great pleasure that I rise today to extend my heartfelt congratulations and deep admiration to these remarkable men and women who have made our nation proud on the international stage.

The 2023 Southeast Asian Games has once again showcased the exceptional talents and unwavering determination of our Filipino athletes. They have competed with great determination, pushing their limits and displaying true sportsmanship throughout the games.

*I personally went to Cambodia together with Senate President Migz Zubiri and Senator Tol Tolentino to show our full support for our Filipino athletes. During the visit, I witnessed Filipino athletes win medals in their games. I am delighted to share that our athletes have achieved a commendable performance in the 32nd Southeast Asian Games. The Philippines secured the fifth rank in the overall rankings among the 11 participating countries. *Magandang showing na po ito at naalala ko noong 2019, when we hosted the games, tayo po ay nag-number one. Headed po ito ng then-Speaker Alan Peter Cayetano na suportado po ang ating mga atleta.**

Furthermore, the Philippine team won an outstanding number of medals, with a haul of 58 golds, 85 silvers, and 117 bronzes, or a total of 260 medals, from various sports disciplines. We had more medals this year compared to the preceding Southeast Asian Games in Hanoi.



Indeed, the hard work and sacrifices made by our athletes, coaches, and support staff have resulted in a remarkable achievement for our nation. But beyond the medal count and rankings, what truly fills my heart with pride is the unbreakable Filipino spirit and the unity that these games have fostered among our people.

The SEA Games has served as a platform for our nation to come together, support our athletes, and celebrate our shared love for sports. The camaraderie, sportsmanship, and unity displayed by our athletes and their fellow competitors have been truly remarkable, reminding us all of the power of sports to bridge gaps and bring people together.

In light of this extraordinary achievement, I would like to express my sincerest gratitude and appreciation to our Filipino athletes for their relentless pursuit of excellence. As a nation, we are committed to further supporting and nurturing the talent of our athletes. We recognize the need to invest in sports development, infrastructure, and programs that will enable our athletes to continue excelling on the world stage.

As Vice Chair of the Committee on Finance, with the support of our chairperson, Senator Angara, and the entire Senate, we have successfully included a budget for the participation of our athletes in international competitions such as the SEA Games. We are also committed to support grassroots sports development to encourage our youth to engage in sports and, hopefully, be future medalists for our nation.

I would like to reiterate that I will work to champion initiatives that will uplift the state of Philippine sports and provide our athletes with the resources they need to reach even greater heights.

Once again, congratulations to our Filipino athletes for their outstanding performance in the 32nd Southeast Asian Games. Your achievements have brought immense pride and honor to our nation. May your success inspire future generations of athletes and serve as a testament to the incredible potential that lies within the Filipino spirit.

Mabuhay ang atletang Pilipino! Mabuhay ang Pilipinas!

COSPONSORSHIP SPEECHES

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the cosponsorship speeches of Senators Revilla, Padilla, and Estrada were inserted into the *Journal and Record of the Senate*:

By Senator Revilla

I join our esteemed colleagues in honoring our resilient and passionate athletes who have proudly raised our flag in the recently-concluded 2023 SEA Games.

We have sent a 1,233-strong delegation—905 athletes and 257 officials—who have shown the world that we are driven and motivated to triumph. They are among the best of the best in their fields. *Tunay na ang ating atletang Pinoy ay matalas, maliksi, at mahusay!*

Sports have the power to bring people together, create a sense of community, and promote understanding between individuals and nations, and during the 2023 SEA Games, it served to showcase the Filipino spirit and talent by our athletes' continued exemplary performance in arnis, basketball, endurance racing, obstacle racing, soft tennis, e-sports, and kickboxing by garnering gold medals and ranking number one in these events.

We have secured 58 gold medals—considered as our best overseas performance as a non-host country in almost four decades—since 1987 in Indonesia when we won 59 gold medals.

Karapat-dapat lamang na atin silang bigyang pagkilala. Their hard work paid off. Ang kanilang tagumpay ay tagumpay ng buong bayan.

Iba talaga ang ating atletang Pilipino. Kaya naman sa lahat ng inyong hakbang, tandaan ninyong kami ay laging nasa inyong likuran, pumapalakpak at sumasaludo sa inyong husay at galing.

By Senator Padilla

Nais ko lamang pong ipahayag ang aking taas-noong pagpupugay sa lahat ng lumahok—nanalo man o hindi—at naging representante ng bansa sa nakalipas na Southeast Asian Games sa Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

Nakatutuwa po na sunod-sunod ang tagumpay ng ating mga atletang Pinoy sa iba't-ibang panig ng mundo na siyang lalo pang nagpapatunay kung gaano kasarap maging Pilipino.

Walong daan at apatnapu't anim (846) na atletang Pinoy, pero buhat ninyo ang dignidad at karangalan ng 113 milyong Pilipino. Nakatataas po ng upuan ang inyong representasyon sa ating bansa. Pagtapak pa lamang ninyo sa ibang bayan tangan ang ngalan ng Pilipinas, para sa amin na inyong kababayan, kampiyon na po kayo, panalo na po tayo.

Hindi ko man po kayo mabanggit isa-isa, mula po sa aking puso, akin po ang karangalan na sumaludo sa mga atletang simbolo ng hindi matatawarang talento at dedikasyon ng Pinoy.

Muli't muli, ang aking taas-noong pagbati.

By Senator Estrada

I would like to cosponsor Senate Resolution No. 640, entitled "Resolution Commending and Congratulating the Philippine Delegation to the 32nd Southeast Asian Games" for ably representing the country and bringing home 58 gold, 85 silver, and 117 bronze medals from the biennial meet.

We are all so proud and happy with the performance of our athletes in this 32nd SEA Games which was held for the first time in Phnom Penh, Cambodia last May 5-17, 2023 and which was participated in by 6,200 athletes from the 11 countries comprising Southeast Asia, in a total of 584 events in 37 sports in the biennial meet.

What a good way to close the First Regular Session of this 19th Congress by giving honor to our 846 remarkable athletes who have finished fifth place in the overall medal tally with a haul of 58 gold, 85 silver, 117 bronze medals—beating their accomplishment in the 31st SEA Games in 2021 and delivering their best overseas performance since the 14th SEA Games in 1987, where our Philippine contingent garnered 59 gold medals.

Worth mentioning is the amazing performance of our 58 gold medalists who have gained the highest honors in their respective events, not only for themselves, for their teams, but for the entire Filipino people, as well. *Bilib po kami sa inyo!* Keep up the good performance.

Sa inyo pong lahat na ating mga 260 medalists, sa inyo pong lahat na 846 na Pinoy SEA Games delegates, sa inyong lahat na bahagi ng coaching teams, staff at mga sponsors at supporters, sa ating Philippine Sports Commission, our congratulations to your victory. Thank you for your hard work and dedication to giving our nation pride and honor in the field of sports, which, according to Nelson Mandela, has the power to inspire us and unite us.

The remarkable achievements and the great performance of the Philippine Team in the SEA Games brought immense glory, inspiration, and pride to the country. They truly deserve this commendation from the Philippine Senate.

Patuloy po kayong magpakadalubhasa at magpunyagi sa inyong larangan at patuloy po kaming susuporta sa inyo. Mabuhay po kayong lahat! Mabuhay ang Atletang Pilipino!

COAUTHORS AND COSPONSORS

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, all the Members were made coauthors and cosponsors of Proposed Senate Resolution No. 619.

ADOPTION OF PROPOSED SENATE RESOLUTION NO. 619

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body adopted Proposed Senate Resolution No. 619, taking into consideration Proposed Senate Resolution Nos. 621, 622, 623, 625, and 640, subject to style.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR VILLANUEVA

Senator Villanueva recalled his participation in the Southeast Asian basketball games as a member of the national team.

Senate President Zubiri stated that the Philippine basketball team won over the tough-to-beat Malaysia and Singapore in the last SEA Games. He stated that the Philippines finished in the top bracket of basketball.

Senator Villanueva stated that the Philippine basketball team eventually emerged as the SEA Games Basketball champion.

PROPOSED SENATE RESOLUTION NO. 632

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body considered Proposed Senate Resolution No. 632, entitled

RESOLUTION COMMENDING AND CONGRATULATING THE PHILIPPINE NATIONAL SOFT TENNIS TEAM FOR THEIR OUTSTANDING PERFORMANCE DURING THE 32ND SOUTHEAST ASIAN (SEA) GAMES HELD IN CAMBODIA.

With the permission of the Body, only the title of the resolution was read without prejudice to the insertion of its full text into the *Record of the Senate*.

The Chair recognized Senator Angara to sponsor the resolution.

SPONSORSHIP SPEECH OF SENATOR ANGARA

In sponsoring Proposed Senate Resolution No. 632, Senator Angara delivered the following speech:

Tumatayo po tayong muli para mabigyan ng karampatang pansin ang Philippine National Soft Tennis Team para sa kanilang mga nauwing medalya noong nakaraang SEA Games sa Cambodia. It might be the first time that any member of this Chamber has stood up to recognize the Soft Tennis Team. It is not one of the glamour sports of our country, unlike boxing, bowling, basketball, or billiards which earn the lion's share, and now arnis, of course, which now earns the lion's share of the recognition in terms of medals as well as in terms of legislative recognition.

At the recent SEA Games in Cambodia, out of the 260 medals, five medals came from the achievements of the Philippine National Soft Tennis Team—*tatlo ang gold, isang silver, at isang bronze.*

Philippine Soft Tennis is a relatively new sport recognized by the Philippine Olympic Committee (POC) fairly recently in the year 1988. It was incorporated as a regular event during the 1994 Asian Games in Hiroshima, Japan. It is worth noting that the Philippines participated in the sport in both the aforementioned events. And despite being a relatively young sport, we have won medals, *hindi lamang itong nakaraang SEA Games, pati na rin po noong 2011 sa Indonesia, at itong 2019 kung saan nag-host tayo dito sa ating sariling bansa.*

Allow me to put on record our recognition for the following medalists from Phnom Penh, we have—*baka puwede silang tumayo kapag nabanggit iyong kanilang pangalan*—Noelle Conchita Corazon Zoleta-Mahalac and Princess Lorben Marie Catindig won the gold medal in the Soft Tennis Women's Doubles Event having beaten Thailand. Also, again, Zoleta-Mahalac, Catindig, Virvienica Isearis Bejosano, Christy Sañosa, Fatima Ayesha Amirul, and Noelle Nikki Camille Zoleta also won the gold in the Women's Team Event after a great performance against Indonesia. And, finally, Zoleta also won the silver medal in the Women's Singles Event. These are the triumphs of the Philippine National Soft Tennis Team for the Women's Division.



Dito naman po sa Men's Division, si Joseph Arcilla nagkaroon ng leg spasms during the competition, and yet was able to bravely and valiantly claim the gold medal in the Men's Singles Event against Indonesia. And also, Arcilla, Dheo Talatayod, Mark Anthony Alcosoba, Sherwin Ray Nuguit, Adjuthor Moralde, and George Patric Mendoza also made a podium finish after winning bronze in the Men's Team Event.

Congratulations po.

And, of course, let me end by also recognizing the guidance just as you have guided brilliantly the arnis team, the leaders of the National Sports Association of Philippine Soft Tennis led by National President Capt. Robert Joseph Moran, who is here with us, Chairman Emeritus Antonio Laperal Tamayo, Chairman Peter Gaisano, head coach Divina Gracia Escala, *at sina* Coach Michael John Enriquez *at* Josephine Paguyo.

And of course, *segundahan ko na iyong binanggit ni Sen. Pia Cayetano* earlier that because of the presence of so many national sportsmen like yourself (Senate President Zubiri), who represented the Philippines once upon a time, like Sen. Joel Villanueva who also represented the country for basketball, and Sen. Pia Cayetano who I think played for volleyball, if I am not mistaken, and so many other gifted athletes in this Chamber—Senator Bong Go, our chairperson, is the Steph Curry of Philippine Senate Basketball Team. But if we see him shoot, we will be really impressed.

But having said, *gusto ko lamang segundahan iyong sinabi niya* because since then, we have passed laws which will really in the long run produce better sportsmen. Senator Gatchalian, Senator Go, myself, Senator Villanueva, and Sen. Pia Cayetano, we pushed for a National Academy of Sports and also Republic Act No. 10699, which is the National Athletes and Coaches Benefits and Incentives Act.

Dati-rati po, ang nabibigyan lamang po ng biyaya kapag nag-medal ay iyong atleta. Ngayon pati iyong mga coach ay may sarili ng reward dito sa ilalim ng batas na iyon. So, we are giving credit and reward to whom it is due.

So, again, allow me to congratulate the Philippine Soft Tennis team.

COSPONSORSHIP SPEECH OF SENATOR GO

In cosponsoring Proposed Senate Resolution No. 632, Senator Go delivered the following speech:

As chairperson of the Senate Committee on Sports, it is my utmost privilege to cosponsor the Senate resolution commending and congratulating the members of the Philippine National Soft Tennis team for their exceptional performance during the recently concluded 32nd Sea Games held in Cambodia. This year, our Philippine National Soft Tennis team composed of remarkable individuals who won over numerous challenges and emerged victorious leaving an indelible mark in the history of our nation's sporting achievements, brought home gold medals for soft tennis, women's doubles event, women's team event, and men's single event; silver for the women's single event; and bronze for the men's team event, making our nation immensely proud.

The Senate resolution will serve as a symbol of our gratitude, respect and admiration for their unwavering dedication to the sport and their relentless pursuit of excellence. May their achievements serve as a beacon of hope and inspiration for future generation of Filipino athletes.

COAUTHORS

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, all senators were made coauthors of Proposed Senate Resolution No. 632.

ADOPTION OF PROPOSED SENATE RESOLUTION NO. 632

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, Proposed Senate Resolution No. 632 was adopted by the Body, subject to style.

PROPOSED SENATE RESOLUTION NO. 617

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body considered 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.

With the permission of the Body, only the title of the resolution was read without prejudice to the insertion of its full text into the *Record of the Senate*.

Thereupon, the Chair recognized Senator Tolentino for his sponsorship speech.

SPONSORSHIP SPEECH OF SENATOR TOLENTINO

Upon request of Senator Tolentino, there being no objection, his sponsorship speech on Proposed Senate Resolution No. 617 was deemed read and inserted into the *Journal and Record of the Senate*. Following is the full text of his speech:

As the President of the Samahang Kickboxing ng Pilipinas (SKP), it is my honor and privilege to sponsor Senate Resolution No. 617, congratulating the Samahang Kickboxing ng Pilipinas for bagging a grand total of 29 medals at the 2023 SouthEast Asian Games held in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

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.

Two (2) silver and six (6) bronze medals in the Vovinam event.

The Philippine contingent composed of 17 kickboxers showcased their exceptional skills and talent and embodied the resilience and courage of the Filipino people during the course of the competitions.

Jean Claude Saclag notched his third-straight SEA Games Championship title, in the -63.5 kg division of the low-kick event, after he defeated Cambodian Sam Rakim, making it the first gold medal win of Team Philippines in kickboxing.

Gretel De Paz, 30-year old pro boxer out of Naval, Biliran, won the second gold medal for the Philippines in the kickboxing event, defeating Indonesia's Ndapataka Susanti in the -56 kg division.

Claudine Veloso added another gold medal in the kickboxing team haul after she defeated Vietnam's Lin Bui Hai in the -52 kg division.

The following athletes also excelled and won the silver medals in their respective events:

1. Renalyn Dacquel
2. Gina Iniong Araos
3. Fitzchel Fermato
4. Jeremy Pacatiw

Bronze medalists include:

1. Airon Lance Villamer
2. Mikko Cawingawan
3. Kurt Lubrica



4. Jomar Balangui
5. Danny Kingad
6. Daryl Chulipas
7. Carlo Buminaang
8. Honorio Antonio Banario

Likewise, worthy of recognition are the members of the Samahang Kickboxing ng Pilipinas (SKP) who also bagged silver and bronze medals in the Kun Khmer and Vovinam events, namely:

Khun Khmer:

Silver: Kristian Narca

Bronze: 1. Moises Ilogon
2. Jenelyn Olsim
3. Zyra Bonas
4. Felex Dave Cantores
5. Floryvic Montero

Vovinam:

Silver: Hergie Bayacdan
Emmanuel Cantores

1. Jerlyn Kingad
2. Jerome Alidon
3. Rhenel Desuyo
4. Aime Ramos
5. Jovan Medallo
6. Jannah Lavador

Our athletes have shown us that through determination and discipline, we can achieve greatness. I am proud to say, that through their countless hours of training, sacrificing personal comfort and leisure, they have pushed themselves beyond their limits. Each punch thrown, each kick delivered, and each display of skill and technique showcased the immense talent and dedication that lie within each one of them.

As we bask in the glory of this triumph, let us not forget the values that kickboxing instills in us. Discipline, perseverance, and sportsmanship are the foundations upon which this sport is built. These values go beyond the ring and permeate into every aspect of our lives. It is through kickboxing that we learn the power of resilience, importance of determination, and the beauty of striving for excellence.

To the Samahang Kickboxing ng Pilipinas, this victory serves as a testament to our commitment in promoting and developing kickboxing in our nation. Our tireless efforts in nurturing talent, organizing tournaments, and providing opportunities for our athletes have paid off in the most remarkable way. Our dedication to the sport has not only brought glory to our country but has also inspired countless young minds to take up the art of kickboxing.

The exemplary performance of the Philippine Kickboxing Team deserves the highest praise, recognition and commendation for bringing nothing but pride and inspiration to the Filipino people and for showing to the world the unrelenting spirit of Filipino sports excellence.

COSPONSORSHIP SPEECH OF SENATOR GO

In cosponsoring the resolution, Senator Go delivered the following speech:

As the chair of the Senate Committee on Sports, I would like to extend my admiration and support for another remarkable group of athletes who have brought immense pride and honor to our beloved nation. It is with great pleasure that I cosponsor the Senate resolution commending and congratulating the members of the Samahang Kickboxing ng Pilipinas for their outstanding performance at the recently concluded 2023 SEA Games held in Cambodia.

With sheer determination and immense skill, the members of the Samahang Kickboxing ng Pilipinas have shown the world what it truly means to be champions. They have showcased not only their exceptional talent but also the unbreakable spirit of the Filipino people.

In the kickboxing event, the SKP bagged a remarkable three gold medals, four silver models, and eight bronze medals. Their discipline is a testament to their hard work.

I also congratulate their coaches and trainers. Of course, congratulations to our Senator Francis Tolentino, *na buo talaga ang kaniyang suporta sa ating kickboxing team. Sinamahan*

talaga niya roon. Sanay po itong si Senator Tolentino sa kickboxing. Magkatabi po kami, at nakita ko iyong paa niya mayroong patungan. Baka napilay sa kasisipa.

Again, let us join together in applauding the Samahang Kickboxing ng Pilipinas for their remarkable achievements in the 2023 Southeast Asian Games. May we continue to support and uplift our nation's sports and athletes in their pursuit of excellence.

Mabuhay ang Samahang Kickboxing ng Pilipinas!

COAUTHORS

Senator Villanueva manifested that all the senators were made coauthors of Proposed Senate Resolution No. 617.

ADOPTION OF PROPOSED SENATE RESOLUTION NO. 617

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, Proposed Senate Resolution No. 617 was adopted by the Body, subject to style.

PROPOSED SENATE RESOLUTION NO. 618

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body considered 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

taking into consideration Proposed Senate Resolution No. 639.

With the permission of the Body, only the title of the resolution was read without prejudice to the insertion of its full text into the *Record of the Senate*.

Thereupon, the Chair recognized Senator Tolentino for his sponsorship speech.

SPONSORSHIP SPEECH OF SENATOR TOLENTINO

Upon request of Senator Tolentino, there being no objection, his sponsorship speech on Proposed Senate Resolution No. 618, taking into consideration Proposed Senate Resolution No. 639, was deemed read and inserted into the *Journal and Record of the Senate*, as follows:

Today, I rise before you with great pride and honor to extend my heartfelt congratulations to the Philippine National Men's Basketball Team, Gilas Pilipinas, for their remarkable achievement in winning the gold medal at the 2023 Southeast Asian Men's Basketball Championship. This triumph marks our 19th Men's Basketball Title and solidifies our dominance as we earned the 56th gold medal for the Philippine delegation.

Their remarkable achievement showcased the relentless spirit of Filipino sports excellence and serves as an inspiration to the Filipino people. As enshrined in our 1987 Constitution, we recognize the crucial role of sports in fostering self-discipline, teamwork, and excellence for the development of a healthy and alert citizenry. Let us continue to support and nurture our athletes, enabling them to shine on the global stage and bring pride to our beloved Philippines.

Since the inception of men's basketball in the Southeast Asian Games in 1977, the Philippine National Basketball Team has consistently showcased their skills and passion, capturing 18 gold



medals out of the 21 tournaments held. However, in 2021, our 30-year winning streak came to a temporary halt when we settled for the silver medal, losing to Indonesia in the Men's Basketball Championship. But true champions rise above setbacks, and Gilas Pilipinas showcased their unwavering spirit by setting their sights on reclaiming the crown.

Fueled by their burning desire to restore the Philippines' reputation as the basketball powerhouse in the region, Gilas Pilipinas entered the 2023 Southeast Asian Games Men's Basketball Championship in Phnom Penh, Cambodia with a resolute mindset. Despite facing adversities including the lack of a suitable practice facility and the scorching heat in the venue, our team displayed exceptional skill, coordination, and tenacity.

In the final match, Gilas Pilipinas faced the host team, Cambodia, in an intense battle that showcased the true spirit of sportsmanship and competition. Gilas Pilipinas emerged victorious, securing an impressive 80-69 win and bringing home the gold medal.

I would like to extend my deepest gratitude and admiration to the members of Gilas Pilipinas, who made this extraordinary achievement possible. Justin Brownlee, Christian Standhardinger, Brandon Ganuelas-Rosser, Chris Newsome, Calvin Oftana, Arvin Tolentino, Marcio Lassiter, CJ Perez, Chris Ross, Michael Phillips, Jerom Lastimosa, and Mason Amos, along with their esteemed coaching staff led by head coach Chot Reyes and assistant coaches Tim Cone and Jong Uichico, demonstrated exceptional dedication, perseverance, and discipline.

Gilas Pilipinas' triumph is not merely a victory for basketball enthusiasts but also a source of national pride. Their success reverberates across the nation, instilling a sense of unity and inspiring generations to come.

As I end, I stand here today as a proud Filipino, commending and congratulating Gilas Pilipinas for their remarkable achievement in winning the gold medal at the Southeast Asian Games Men's Basketball Championship. Their indomitable spirit, unwavering determination, and exceptional skills have brought honor and glory to our nation.

COSPONSORSHIP OF SENATOR VILLANUEVA

At the instance of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, his sponsorship speech on Proposed Senate Resolution No. 618, taking into consideration Proposed Senate Resolution No. 639, was deemed read and inserted into the *Journal and Record of the Senate*, as follows:

Ako po ay lubos na nagagalak na i-cosponsor ang Senate Resolutions No. 618 at 639 na nagbibigay pugay, pagbati, at parangal sa Gilas Pilipinas Men's National Basketball Team sa kanilang tagumpay sa nakaraang Southeast Asian Games na ginanap sa Cambodia.

As one of the millions of Filipino basketball fans and a player myself, I was one of many that cheered for and prayed that our Gilas Pilipinas bring home the SEA Games crown once again. And they did not fail us. Our national men's basketball team reasserted their dominance with a decisive 80-69 win over host Cambodia in the finals. We are now the winners of 19 SEA Games basketball championships out of the 22 events staged since 1977.

As a former member of the Philippine national basketball team that competed in international competitions, this Representation knows the pressure that our Gilas Pilipinas felt to win the championship this year after the upset by Indonesia in the 2021 edition of SEA Games. Our athletes showed their heart in every play, their passion, hard work, and dedication to ensure that the Southeast Asian basketball crown is home once again.

We would like to congratulate all the players, especially our new *kababayan* Justin Brownlee whose heroics in the semifinals against Indonesia helped Gilas fashion an emotional come-from-behind win and paved the way for our gold medal redemption.

Binabati din po natin sina Head Coach Chot Reyes, Assistant Coaches Tim Cone at Jong Uichico, *at lahat ng bumubuo sa Samahang Basketbol ng Pilipinas*. This victory is most certainly a morale booster for Gilas as they head to the upcoming 2023 FIBA World Cup, which we will host alongside Japan and Indonesia.



COSPONSORSHIP SPEECH OF SENATOR GO

As chair of the Senate Committee on Sports, Senator Go delivered the following speech:

It is with great pride and honor that I cosponsor the Senate resolution commending and congratulating Gilas Pilipinas men's national basketball team for winning the gold medal at the 32nd Southeast Asian Games held in Cambodia.

Their remarkable display of skill and determination in the recently concluded 32nd SEA Games has undoubtedly redeemed our nation's standing in the game of basketball as they valiantly competed and pursued the ultimate goal of securing the gold medal. *Hindi po sila nawalan ng pag-asa at talagang bumawi sila sa huli kahit na madulas ang playing court at may problema sa mismong basketball venue. Talagang lumaban po sila.*

As everyone knows, *pumunta po kami nina Senator Tolentino at Senate President Zubiri. Nanonood din po si Senator Tolentino ng laban nila kontra Cambodia para suportahan ang ating mga atleta na lumahok sa 2023 SEA Games, kasama na rin ang panunood namin ng Gilas Pilipinas. Ako po mismo ay nanood ng laban kontra Singapore at doon ako nagkaroon ng pag-*

kakataon na bulungan ang ating mga player at coaching staff. Ang sabi ko, "Babawi po tayo."

Mas masarap ang pakiramdam na makabawi tayo. At talagang nakabawi tayo. Tinalo natin ang Indonesia na tumalo po sa atin noong nakaraang taon. Tinalo natin ang Indonesia sa semifinals at tuluyan po nating tinalo ang Cambodia. Ang sarap po ng pakiramdam na nakabawi at nag-champion tayo.

As the chairperson of the Senate Committee on Sports and as an avid sports enthusiast, let me reiterate my unwavering commitment to the advancement and promotion of the National Sports Development Program in the country to cement our status as a sports powerhouse in Asia.

As we await the forthcoming FIBA World Cup, I am very confident that each and every member of the Gilas team will rise to the challenge against all odds. It is my fervent belief that they will demonstrate the unrelenting competitiveness of Filipino athletes. *Patuloy lamang po nating ipakita ang dedikasyon natin at pusong Pilipino na talagang lumalaban.*

I would like to extend my congratulations to Gilas Pilipinas men's basketball team and to their coaches. Kay Coach Chot Reyes, congratulations po. Coach Tim Cone, Coach Jong Uichico, *sa lahat ng bumubuo ng Gilas Pilipinas, at sa lahat ng players, including the adopted son of Senator Tolentino na si Justine Brownlee, na talagang lumaban at nakahabol po tayo sa championship.*

COSPONSORSHIP SPEECHES

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the following cosponsorship speeches on Proposed Senate Resolution 618 were deemed read and inserted into the *Journal and Record of the Senate*:

By Senator Estrada

With the indulgence of the sponsor, I would like to cosponsor Senate Resolution No. 618, taking into consideration Proposed Senate Resolution No 639, 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. I also filed Senate Resolution 639 entitled "Resolution Commending and Congratulating Gilas Pilipinas Men's National Basketball Team For Winning The Gold Medal at the 32nd Southeast Asian Games Held In Phnom Penh, Cambodia."

The astounding performance of our Gilas Pilipinas men's basketball team who successfully reclaimed the regional championship title thereby re-establishing the country's stature as a basketball powerhouse in the Southeast Asia region, is truly another good news for all Filipinos. *Dahil alam naman po natin na basketball ang isa sa mga unofficial national sports nating mga Pilipino.*

The Gilas Pilipinas men's national basketball team demonstrated discipline, resilience and perseverance which are positive values that their fellow athletes and the younger generation can emulate. Their success story showcased the indomitable Filipino spirit and world-class caliber, as it brought pride, joy, and honor to the nation which professes immense passion for basketball.

Their momentous accomplishment in the international tournament merits commendation and recognition from the Philippine Senate.

By Senator Dela Rosa

With pride swelling up in my heart, I rise to cosponsor Proposed Senate Resolution No. 618, 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.

"We came here for the gold medal." *Iyan ang sinabi ni* Head Coach Chot Reyes *noong siya ay ininterview ng Olympics.com*. This decisiveness, this certainty, reflects only one thing and, on that fateful day, Team Gilas Pilipinas came to win and to reclaim their place as basketball champion.

Today it is not primarily the gold medal that we celebrate. Instead, we rejoice over the fact that the Filipino spirit of unity is very much alive, even in our performance in sports. Basketball, after all, is not a path to stardom or to some celebrity status. Although admittedly, these days, *tila ganun na nga ang tingin ng mga tao sa mga basketbolista*. This makes the Gilas victory even sweeter, because it was not driven by celebrity status. It was simply the attainment of a victory, accomplished as a real team effort.

Marami ang nagsasabi na hindi raw nababagay sa basketball ang mga Pinoy. "Bakit masyado kayong mahilig sa basketball, hindi naman kayo nabiyayaan ng height?" Many do not expect much from Filipinos to perform well in basketball. Yet, once again, here we are — proving our critics wrong — winning gold in a sport that they said was "not meant for us." Exceeding expectations.

As a side note, I would like to take this opportunity to also honor this august Body for supporting the grant of Philippine citizenship to Mr. Justin Brownlee in November 2022. He has proven himself to be a valuable addition to our team. *Talagang hindi tayo nagkamali sa ating boto.*

Sa buong Team Gilas Pilipinas, maraming salamat! Thank you for showing the world what the Filipino spirit is all about, and more importantly, for showing the world that with this spirit, we can all truly win.

COAUTHORS

Senator Villanueva manifested that all senators were coauthors of Proposed Senate Resolution No. 618 taking into consideration Proposed Senate Resolution No. 639.

ADOPTION OF PROPOSED SENATE RESOLUTION NO. 618

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, Proposed Senate Resolution No. 618, taking into consideration Proposed Senate Resolution No. 639, was adopted by the Body, subject to style.

PROPOSED SENATE RESOLUTION NO. 650

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body considered Proposed Senate Resolution No. 650, entitled

RESOLUTION EXPRESSING THE DEEPEST SYMPATHY AND CONDOLENCES OF THE SENATE ON THE PASSING OF NEGROS ORIENTAL GOVERNOR CARLO 'GUIDO' REYES.

With the permission of the Body, only the title of the resolution was read without prejudice to the insertion of its full text into the *Record of the Senate*.

Thereupon, the Chair recognized Senator Tolentino for his sponsorship speech.

SPONSORSHIP REMARKS OF SENATOR TOLENTINO

In sponsoring Proposed Senate Resolution No. 650, Senator Tolentino stated that for the last several weeks, the people have been hearing about the Degamo case. He informed the Body that the governor of Negros Oriental, Gov. Carlo Jorge Juan Guido Reyes, the successor of Gov. Ruel Degamo, passed away.

He said that during the last May 2022 elections, Governor Reyes was elected vice governor of Negros Oriental where he ran in tandem with Governor Degamo and he took the position of governor when Governor Degamo was tragically killed last March 4, 2023. He averred that prior to assuming the position as governor of Negros Oriental, Gov. Guido Reyes served as mayor of Guihulngan of Negros Oriental for three terms and as vice governor of Negros Oriental.

Senator Tolentino lamented that Negros Oriental was already moving on from the death of Gov. Degamo when another tragedy hit the province. He mentioned that some mayors of the province met with him the previous day, and they indicated their preference to have the barangay elections in the province as scheduled.

He believed that the Senate should honor a man who served not just the city of Guihulngan but also the province of Negros Oriental.

Thereupon, Senator Tolentino moved that the Body adopt the resolution expressing the deepest sympathies and condolences of the Senate to the family of Negros Oriental Gov. Carlo Guido Reyes on his untimely death; and to express support to the people of Negros Oriental.

REMARKS OF THE CHAIR

Senate President Zubiri observed that three governors of the province of Negros Oriental have passed away, Governors Perdices, Degamo and Reyes.

COAUTHORS

Senator Villanueva manifested that all senators were coauthors of Proposed Senate Resolution No. 650.

ADOPTION OF PROPOSED SENATE RESOLUTION NO. 650

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, Proposed Senate Resolution No. 650 was adopted by the Body.

SUSPENSION OF SESSION

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, the session was suspended.

It was 7:00 p.m.

RESUMPTION OF SESSION

At 7:18 p.m., the session was resumed.

PRIVILEGE SPEECH OF SENATOR GATCHALIAN

Availing himself of the privilege hour, Senator Gatchalian spoke on the theory of the mother tongue-based multilingual education program whose purpose was defeated by its actual implementation on the ground.

Following is the full text of Senator Gatchalian's speech accompanied by slide and video presentation:

The passage of the K to 12 Law in 2013 has transformed the Philippine basic education system in a number of ways. Most of the attention, both then and now, has drawn to the addition of two grades to the basic education curriculum. However, the K to 12 Law also marked a seismic policy shift regarding the languages of instruction used from Kindergarten to Grade 3.

Since 1987, Philippine elementary schools had implemented a bilingual education program utilizing the country's two official languages—Filipino and English. However, the Department of Education began developing the Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education or MTB-MLE program under Department Order No. 74, series of 2009. DepEd then declared that the mother tongue policy would begin implementation during the 2012-2013 school year under Department Order No. 16, series of 2012.

The shift to mother tongue-based multilingual education was formalized by Section 4 of Republic Act No. 10533 which requires children in Kindergarten and Grades I to III to be taught using the regional or native tongue of learners.

The use of mother tongue as the medium of instruction in the early grades of school has long been endorsed by UNESCO and UNICEF as an essential foundation for learning. In simple terms, the theory supposes that children in the initial levels of schooling would be better able to grasp the curriculum if they are taught in the language they are most familiar with—the one they speak at home.

It is only in later years of primary education when a *lingua franca*, such as English, should be introduced as a medium of instruction once a solid foundation of knowledge and competencies has been built using the mother tongue. *Sabi nga nila, ang wika ay nagsisilbing tulay tungo sa pagkamtan ng kolektibong layunin. Sa lente ng edukasyon, malaki ang papel ng wika sa pagkatuto ng mga kabataan. Tiyak na mas magiging epektibo ang pagtuturo ng mga guro at mas mapapadali rin ang pagkatuto ng mga mag-aaral kung sila ay nagkakaintindihan sa kanilang ginagamit na wika.*

The late President Benigno Aquino III, a staunch advocate of the mother tongue policy, framed it within the Philippine context in this way: "We should become trilingual as a country. Learn English well and connect to the world. Learn Filipino well and connect to our country. Retain your dialect and connect to your heritage." However, the mother tongue policy has come under scrutiny over the past decade of implementation. In fact, the House of Representatives even passed a bill this February, calling for the suspension of the MTB-MLE. Public sentiment on the use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction appears to have soured as well.

Our office commissioned the following question in the September 17-21, 2022 survey conducted by Pulse Asia: *Sa inyong opinyon, ano ang dapat gamiting pangunahing wika ng pagtuturo sa mga estudyante sa primarya o Grade I hanggang III?* Respondents were provided three choices from which they could choose one or more—Filipino, English or vernacular language or dialect spoken by the ordinary Filipino in a particular region.

Eighty-eight percent (88%) of the respondents said Filipino should be a primary language of instruction for Grades I to III students while 71% chose English. Only 38% of respondents chose the vernacular or mother tongue.

Considering the fundamental importance of the language of instruction in a country like the Philippines, where 183 languages are spoken among our ethnically diverse population, the merits of the mother tongue policy and the effectiveness of its implementation are vital topics of study for legislators, policy makers and education stakeholders.

To learn more about the issues surrounding the implementation of MTB-MLE, the Committee on Basic Education conducted a series of localized focus group discussions with teachers and administrators and classroom observations at sites to spread across Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao, namely: Lingayen I Central School, Mangataram I Central School in Pangasinan, Minglanilla Central School in Cebu, and Marahan West Elementary School in Davao City.

Pursuant to the Proposed Senate Resolution No. 5 authored by this Representation, the Committee on Basic Education then conducted an inquiry in aid of legislation on October 17, 2022 to validate our findings in the field. After the public hearing, we then revalidated our findings with the classroom observation and post-conference with stakeholders at the Poblacion Elementary School in Muntinlupa City.

I will present some of the important findings gleaned from the case studies we conducted. For one, we observed some difficulties in the implementation of the MTB-MLE in linguistically diverse areas. For example, the mother tongue used as a medium of instruction in Lingayen I Central School is Pangasinan; however, only 75% of learners enrolled at the school declared Pangasinan as their mother tongue. In other words, one out of four Key Stage 1 students at the school is not fluent in the language in which their textbooks are printed, and in which lessons are conducted by teachers.

The situation is even worse at Marahan West Elementary School in Davao City, where around 40% of Key Stage 1 learners declared Davao Bisaya as their mother tongue while the rest of the learners declared Matigsalug, Manobo, Ubo Manobo, Diangan, Bagobo, English, Ilonggo, and Tausug as their mother tongue. In other words, there was not a single learner enrolled at the school whose mother tongue is Sinugbuanong Bisaya, which is the language of instruction used in the school.

Likely a result of this conundrum, we observed limited levels of class participation in linguistically heterogeneous Grade 1 class at Marahan West; however, in a more linguistically homogeneous classes such as Grade II, there was a markedly higher level of class participation among learners.

Based on data, we can see that the implementation of the mother tongue policy in linguistically diverse areas may be discriminatory against learners who are not fluent in the regional language chosen as the mother tongue medium of instruction. Speakers of the mother tongue hold a significant advantage over those who do not speak it—a situation that is unlikely to arise under the previous bilingual program of education.

In Pangasinan, the DepEd District Supervisor of the Municipality of Bolinao also reported difficulties in the implementation of the MTB-MLE due to the linguistic diversity of the area. While the mother tongue medium of instruction is Bolinao, Iloko and Pangasinan are also spoken in the area. Even some of the teachers who hail from municipalities outside of Bolinao are not fluent in the medium of instruction.

As a result of these factors, teachers in the area often resort to the *lingua franca* of Filipino to conduct lessons, as this is the language spoken and understood by all learners.

Kung ang mga guro mismo na sila ang nangunguna sa mga talakayan ay hindi bihasa sa ginagamit nilang wika, paano pa kaya ang mga bata? Paano sila matututo?

Again, we must remember that one of the strongest theoretical selling points of the mother tongue policy is that it is better to teach learners in the language they already know and understand. However, as we see, this theory does not hold in practice among linguistically diverse learner populations. And in the Philippines, this is a common circumstance.

Instead, we are left with situations in which large portions of our learners are forced to study materials and participate in class discussions using languages which they are not familiar with. These are learners being left behind.

Another issue observed in the implementation of the MTB-MLE is problems in bridging between Key Stage 1 or Kindergarten to Grade 3, and Key Stage 2 or Grade 4 to Grade 6. In Key Stage 1, the mother tongue is the medium of instruction for Math and Science. However, in Key Stage 2, the medium of instruction abruptly switches to English.

Bridging refers to when the teacher switches between the mother tongue and English during instruction to ensure that the learner is able to understand the corresponding terms in English. In Pangasinan, Cebu, and Muntinlupa, teachers reported significant difficulties for Grade 4 learners who are suddenly forced to take up Math and Science classes in English after four years of schooling in the mother tongue.

During the Muntinlupa classroom observation, we observed that learners in Key Stage 1 were significantly more participative in Math and Science lessons compared to Grade 4 students. Their lack of engagement may be partially attributed to their lack of competency in English.

Kung tutuusin, sadyang mahirap na ngang aralin ang asignaturang tulad ng Math at Science, daragdagan pa ba natin ang pasanin ng mga mag-aaral sa biglang pagpapalit ng wika ng pagtuturo?

A veteran teacher in Pangasinan also identified bridging as a problem because of the extra time it takes to get through lessons. Explaining the same lessons twice in two different languages takes away significant time which could have been spent delving deeper into the lesson plan for the day.

Yet another significant issue observed in the implementation of the MTB-MLE is the language used in textbooks. The form of Bisaya used in Cebu region DepEd textbooks is formal and academic. In contrast, teachers and parents are more familiar with the conversational form of Bisaya. Because of this, even the teachers themselves have a difficult time understanding the terms used in the textbooks.

When learners are given homework wherein the textbooks are to be used as reference materials, the parents would get in touch with teachers to request help as they too do not understand the terms used in the textbooks.

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

An example provided by a teacher is how a reference is made to the term one-fourth in Cebu Bisaya. In the mother tongue, text books' one-fourth is referred to as "sikaupat" which even the teachers do not understand. To make matters worse, there are many variations of Bisaya spoken across 20 school divisions of Cebu. For example, during our focus group discussion, a school head from Bantayan Island narrated that the form of Bisaya spoken in her island is different from the Bisaya utilized in the text books and the Bisaya spoken in the main island of Cebu.

However, all learning materials provided across the entire region use a single form of standardized Bisaya. As such, learners' parents and teachers face difficulties in relying on the textbooks.

Ipinapakita lamang ng mga naratibong narinig natin na nahihirapan ang mga magulang, mga guro, lalong-lalo na ang mga mag-aaral sa pag-unawa ng wika na ginagamit sa pagtuturo. Hindi ito ang hinahangad nating kalidad ng edukasyon.

Perhaps, the most alarming obstacle observed in the implementation of the MTB-MLE is in Davao where the form of the mother tongue chosen as the medium of instruction is not the form of the language actually spoken by learners in the area.

The prevailing mother tongue of the Davao Region is Davao Bisaya, a specific form of the language. However, Davao Bisaya does not have the orthography, a system of writing the language. Because of this, the DepEd Central Office chose Sinugbuanong Bisaya or Cebu Bisaya, as the medium of instruction for mother tongue education in Davao.

Conversational Davao Bisaya is different from the Sinugbuanong Bisaya found in the textbooks and modules used at Marahan West Elementary School and other schools in the Davao Region. Hence, the terminologies used are in fact foreign to the learners, parents, and even teachers. This was a major challenge, especially during the pandemic, when parents themselves could not understand the modules to guide their children. Consequently, the lack of orthography for the Davao Bisaya language affects the availability of training and other resources that would have capacitated the teachers to teach in the mother tongue.

Again, we see here that a purpose behind the mother tongue based multilingual education in theory is defeated by its actual implementation on the ground. Learners in Davao are forced to

learn in a language that is not actually their mother tongue, a language they do not speak or understand well.

At this juncture, a video presentation was played.

It is clear that the implementation of the MT-BMLE in Davao does not comply with Section 5 (f) of the K-12 Law, which states that:

“(f) The curriculum shall adhere to the principles and framework of Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) which starts from where the learners are and from what they already knew proceeding from the known to the unknown x x x”

The policy decision of the DepEd Central Office to use Sinugbuanong Binisaya in the Davao Region clearly violates the MTB-MLE mandate because Davao schools are not using the actual prevalent mother tongue in the region, Davao Bisaya, but rather, the mother tongue of Cebu.

Ten years into the implementation of the MTB-MLE, there has not been a national impact evaluation conducted on the effect of the policy on learning outcomes.

Three empirical questions remain unanswered: Did the MTB-MLE improve early grade literacy in the mother tongue, Filipino, and English? Did the use of the mother tongue as a medium of instruction improve learner outcomes in other learning areas, particularly in Math and Science? What is the long-term effect of MTB-MLE in both learning and non-cognitive outcomes, such as learning confidence from key stages 2 to 4?

To be fair, it should be noted that the anecdotal evidence from the classroom observation does return positive results in some respects. For example, it was clear across the board that learners who speak the mother tongue medium of instruction of their schools were more active participants in lessons conducted in that language. This point is highlighted by the noticeably lower levels of participation in key stage 2 Math and Science, for example, where the medium of instruction shifts from mother tongue to English.

In the absence of direct empirical evidence of MTB-MLE’s impact on learning outcomes, we may look to data extrapolation using validly comparable data. In our case, we used scores in Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study, or TIMSS, in 2003 and 2019.

National performance in Grade 4 Math and Science substantially declined in TIMSS 2019 compared to TIMSS 2003. The absolute decline in Math is 61 points, and 83 points in Science.

Controlling for other variables, such as the language of assessment, curriculum coverage, socioeconomic status, and teacher quality, it is empirically valid to conclude, based on what we have observed in our focus group discussions and case studies of national scope, that the decline in learner outcomes observed may be partially attributable to the implementation of the mother tongue-based multilingual education program, which started during the 2012-2013 school year.

Of course, the major caveat here is that these hypotheses must be subjected to further validation after in-depth data collection and analysis.

Hindi natin maipagkakaila na ang pagpapayabong ng inang wika ay pagpapayabong din ng kultura at kasaysayan. Ngunit kung sa pagpapatupad nito ay nakasalalay ang kalidad ng pagtuturo sa mga mag-aaral, marahil ay napapanahon na ring masuri natin ang implementasyon nito.

To be sure, the Mother Tongue Policy was set into place with only the best intentions of its architects, who hoped to provide Filipino learners with a linguistic advantage in the critical early years of their education. However, based on what we have discussed here today, it is more than reasonable to conclude that there are serious challenges facing the implementation of the MTB-MLE in areas all throughout the Philippines. Considering that the MTB-MLE was one of the major reforms instituted by the K-12 Law, this is a serious topic of discussion for legislators, policy-makers, and education stakeholders.

Education policy, like any public policy, is a perpetual work in progress. What may have seemed like a good idea a decade ago may not necessarily be a workable solution today. At the same time, however, it is often the case in the Philippines—that while the law itself is sound, its implementation leaves much to be desired.

Bilang isang arkipelagong bansa na kinabibilangan ng iba't ibang komunidad na may kani-kaniyang wika at diyalekto, tiyak na hati ang kinahinatnang epekto ng implementasyon ng MTB-MLE. Saksi ang mga guro at mga magulang na hindi ito epektibo para sa lahat. Pakinggan natin ang boses nila lalo na at walang teorya ang makakapantay sa realidad na nararanasan nila. Sa huli, sila mismo ang patunay na hindi one-size-fits-all ang pagpapatupad ng MTB-MLE. Bilang mambabatas, panahon na upang pakinggan natin ang boses ng mga guro at magulang na tinaguriang frontliner ng sektor ng edukasyon.

While this Representation will not make a definitive conclusion about the propriety or effectiveness of MTB-MLE at this time, it is clear that the policy execution on the ground requires serious recalibration to succeed. At the same time, however, I hope we can somehow maintain the nationalistic spirit behind the Mother Tongue Policy, which promotes the preservation of culture and heritage by imbuing many of our local languages with greater prominence and relevance, which they do not enjoy during the days of bilingual education. However, the continuation of the MTB-MLE's policy may not be an appropriate method of perpetuating this aim.

All in all, I hope that this speech will be the catalyst for a swift national impact evaluation on the implementation of the MTB-MLE so that we can craft necessary policy reforms and amend MTB-MLE provisions of the K-12 Law, as may be required.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR LEGARDA

At this point, Senator Legarda thanked Senator Gatchalian for his timely message, noting the just concluded summit on language inclusion the previous week by the Department of Education with the Vice President in attendance. She believed that the privilege speech should be referred to the Committee on Basic Education.

INTERPELLATION OF SENATOR TOLENTINO

At the outset, Senator Tolentino commended Senator Gatchalian for raising the matter, saying that it was indeed a novel and creative way of teaching the pupils in the country. He then asked whether it is Filipino or English which was provided by the Constitution as a medium of instruction.

Senator Gatchalian, in reply, cited Section 6, Article XIV of the Constitution, which reads as follows: "The national language of the Philippines is Filipino. As it evolves, it shall be further developed and enriched on the basis of existing Philippine and other languages subject to the provisions of law and as the Congress may deem appropriate. The government shall take steps to initiate and sustain the use of Filipino as medium of official communication and as language of instruction in the education system."

Senator Tolentino stated that the Constitution is clear that the medium of instruction should be Filipino, adding that the following section of the same article cited by Senator Gatchalian provides that:

"For purposes of communication and instruction, the official languages of the Philippines are Filipino and, until otherwise provided by law, English.

"The regional languages are the auxiliary official languages in the regions and shall serve as auxiliary media of instruction therein."

Noting that there are 183 dialects as mentioned by Senator Gatchalian, Senator Tolentino asked whether there is a difference between the mother tongue and the auxiliary language. Senator Gatchalian clarified that the number of dialects which he provided was based on the data of the group called the Summer Institute of Linguistics, a non-profit NGO in the Philippines that has the most extensive research in terms of languages in the country. As to the difference between the mother tongue and the auxiliary language, he explained that his understanding of the Constitution

was that auxiliary language is used to aid the use of the main language; hence, the main language which is Filipino should be supplemented in terms of instruction and communication by regional languages, the mother tongue of various localities. He added that mother tongue is defined as the first language or L1 of a child. He averred that it can be any language but there has been no official research as to the mother tongue or L1 of a Filipino child.

In his experience as a national politician who goes around the country, he said that there is no place in the Philippines where a Filipino child could not understand Filipino. He averred that a Filipino child can have two languages, saying that the same can be naturally bilingual being exposed to Filipino and his or her mother tongue at home, influenced by the exposure to the television, the environment, and the community.

For her part, Senator Legarda stated that mother tongue is the first language to which a child has been first exposed or the language being used in the first environment to which a child has been exposed. As regards the native language, she averred that it could sometimes be interchangeably used with the mother tongue. Moreover, she believed that a native language can be that mother language of a child or could be another native language in his or her environment. To cite an example, she said that if a child is from Antique, his or her mother tongue could be Hiligaynon, Aklanon, Kiniray-a or Filipino.

However, she shared that there were children and even adults who do not understand Filipino. She said that she came from a province whose language is called Kinaray-a which is different from that of their neighboring province of Iloilo which speaks Hiligaynon, and that of those in upland areas which may not even understand languages of other neighboring provinces such as Hiligaynon and Filipino.

Senator Tolentino stated that based on his quick research, mother tongue is a child's language from birth, emanating from the language of his or her parents. To cite an example, he said that a child born in New York to a Filipino mother and father who strive to speak in their home the Filipino language could have Filipino as his or her mother tongue. Hence, he said that even if the child would grow in a suburb of Queens or in a Latino district where the native language is English, and attend school as a kindergarten learning English, the child's mother tongue would still be Filipino which his or her parents and siblings use when speaking at home. Similarly, he stated that if a migrant family coming from Luzon transferred to Cebu, the child whose mother tongue is Filipino would still speak Filipino in their home, but would also learn Cebuano from his environment which is the native language of the place.

Asked how would the Body would reconcile the difficulties that children face when listening to a mother tongue and a native tongue, both of which may have probable differences, Senator Gatchalian stated that Filipino children, particularly those living outside of Metro Manila and Tagalog-speaking areas, are exposed to multiple languages. To illustrate, he emphasized Senator Tolentino's earlier point that inside the home, the child may be subjected to Sinugbuanong Binisaya, while outside, the child may be exposed to another form of Binisaya, or Filipino. He mentioned that in the case under discussion, Filipino could be deemed the most prominent language due to its widespread use, adding that children are exposed to the language due to its traditional use in television and other media.

At this juncture, he informed the Members that the mother tongue, by definition, is the first language a child learns. However, he stated that no national survey has been conducted on the subject. He added that exposure to multiple languages at a young age as a result an area's bilingual or trilingual influences may explain the phenomenon, with language and culture simultaneously evolving over time.

However, he expressed concern that complications would arise not with the mother tongue itself which is the language spoken at home, but with the use of language as a medium of instruction in a multilingual context, such as a school.

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

Senator Tolentino agreed with Senator Gatchalian that the child would have had a simpler time learning the fundamentals of mathematics and science if had they been taught in the mother tongue. He surmised, however, that the teachers would not be familiar with the child's mother tongue because their background and training would be aligned with a universal delivery of instruction. In this regard, he believed that it was now up to the students to adapt to the teacher's methodology.

Senator Gatchalian, for his part, stated that in a perfect learning environment, teachers should be able to consult books corresponding to the 183 languages if they are to provide instruction using the mother tongue in a particular area, with the assumption that a classroom is linguistically homogenous. He believed that if such was the case, then the theory that a child would learn faster in his or her mother tongue would be valid. He stated that as a consequence of migration, at least four distinct languages are typically spoken in urban areas, including Tagalog, English, and two or three other dialects. He cited the instance as an example of a situation in which complications would arise as a result of the DepEd's mandate to use the mother tongue as a medium of instruction in a K-12 setting, which are linguistically diverse as a result of urban migration.

Senator Tolentino opined that the Constitution anticipated the distinction between the mother tongue and the native tongue when it referred to Filipino, English, and other auxiliary languages that he considered to be the mother tongue. He surmised that the teachers and the education curriculum were simply adhering to what was stipulated in the Constitution, as was the use of native languages in the instruction of students. He reaffirmed his understanding that the language spoken at home would be the mother tongue, while in school, the children would speak their native tongue, either English or Filipino.

Referring to Senator Gatchalian's argument that the mother tongue could improve the quality of teaching in schools because children would be more receptive to instructions, Senator Tolentino maintained that the divide between the mother tongue and native tongue would not be easily resolved due to fund, resource, and training concerns of teachers. Senator Gatchalian concurred with the statement.

In addition, Senator Tolentino noted that in Senator Gatchalian's previous presentation, the need to advance learning in science and mathematics remained a pressing issue. He stated that neither the Americans nor the Japanese could claim dominance in either field, as Singaporeans and Germans were performing well in mathematics and science, respectively. He then pondered whether if the country would be in a prolonged predicament if the government maintained the current teaching modes, or whether the lack of learning quality could be attributed to other factors, such as poverty, malnutrition, and lack of household resources, among others.

Senator Gatchalian acknowledged Senator Tolentino's observations regarding other factors that may be hindering learning outcomes besides the language barrier. He added that the graph he previously displayed to his colleagues based on the TIMSS examination took poverty and socioeconomic status into account. He informed the Body that between 2003 and 2019, there was little change in the country's classroom demographics. He added, however, that the data required expert validation because no further studies had been conducted since the full implementation of the Mother Tongue - Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) Program in 2013.

In the absence of a study or evaluation of the program, he stated that he considered socioeconomic and other demographic factors in the available assessment. He noted that the only significant change was the change from a bilingual policy in 2013 to the MTB-MLE Program. Although he acknowledged that the data were inconclusive, he believed that the change in the medium of instruction may have negatively affected the learners' performance, particularly in math and science. Relative thereto, he urged that an official evaluation of the DepEd's MTB-MLE Program be conducted in order to determine whether or not it had a negative on the learners' performance.

Senator Tolentino emphasized that it may be worthwhile to look into learners' situations at home, which may also be affecting their academic performance. He believed that situations of poverty, such as children helping with household chores or having to walk miles to reach school, could affect their performance. He then challenged the Body to think of possible solutions to the problem. He then thanked Senator Gatchalian for bringing the matter to the attention of the Body.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR PIMENTEL

Senator Pimentel requested that the Body continue deliberating the issue upon return from its *sine die* adjournment. Senate President Zubiri noted that Senator Gatchalian's motivation for bringing his concern to the Body's attention was so that he could conduct committee hearings on the subject during the recess. Senator Gatchalian confirmed the Senate President's conjecture and promised to invite Senator Pimentel to the committee hearings. Senator Pimentel commended Senator Gatchalian for his initial efforts on the issue, which included undertaking stakeholder consultations in various areas of the country, including Pangasinan, Davao, Cebu, and Muntinlupa City.

REFERRAL OF SPEECH TO COMMITTEE

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Chair referred the privilege speech of Senator Gatchalian and the interpellations and manifestations thereon to the Committee on Basic Education.

PROPOSED SENATE RESOLUTION NO. 638

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body considered Proposed Senate Resolution No. 638, entitled

RESOLUTION CREATING A SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON THE REHABILITATION OF THE MANILA CENTRAL POST OFFICE.

With the permission of the Body, only the title of the resolution was read without prejudice to the insertion of its full text into the *Record of the Senate*.

The Chair recognized Senator Legarda for the sponsorship.

At this juncture, upon motion of Senator Legarda, the session was suspended and resumed shortly thereafter.

SPONSORSHIP SPEECH OF SENATOR LEGARDA

In sponsoring Proposed Senate Resolution No. 638, Senator Legarda delivered the following speech:

This is the last day, I believe, of Heritage Month, and this is very apt.



During the late evening of May 21, 2023, a massive fire broke out at the historic Manila Central Post Office, resulting in the destruction of the iconic building and famous landmark in Manila. This caught the attention of every Filipino and left our hearts heavy, and our spirits saddened. One of the country's historic buildings has been engulfed in flames, which reduced cultural treasures to ashes.

Originally built in 1926, the Manila Central Post Office is a masterpiece of a neoclassical design by renowned Architects Tomas Mapua, Juan Marcos Arellano, and Ralph Doane to house the headquarters of the then-Bureau of Post. After being severely damaged during the Battle of Manila in 1945, the Manila Central Post Office was rebuilt in 1946 and has since then continued to serve as the center of Philippine postal services and served as the headquarters of the Philippine Postal Corporation for its mail sorting-distribution operations immediately prior to the fire.

The Manila Central Post Office building has witnessed the ebb and flow of time—a silent observer of countless stories, events, and memories. The ravages of the devastating fire threatened to erase a part of that history. It is unfortunate that this incident took place during National Heritage Month.

This important cultural heritage holds immeasurable value and its destruction is a profound loss for us Filipinos. The Manila Central Post Office is not just a building from a bygone era, it is a part of our identity, our collective memory, and our legacy that has stood for generations.

The preservation of a historical treasure should not only be a passion, but a lifelong mission, and preserving our cultural heritage is not just about the physical structures but also about the intangible aspects—the stories, traditions, and values that are intricately woven into the fabric of this building. This restoration project is a tribute to those who have come before us, to their craftsmanship and their vision. It is a commitment to future generations, a promise that we will pass on this rich heritage, instilling in them a sense of pride and responsibility.

As legislators, let us take up the mantle of stewardship so we can breathe new life into this magnificent structure. This august Chamber can exhibit our unwavering commitment and collective efforts to allow this heritage building to stand tall once again.

We must stand firm in our belief and the trust of the Filipinos that the national government and concerned agencies must work hand in hand to restore and rehabilitate this significant structure.

With this, we propose for the creation of a special committee to be known as the Senate Special Committee on the Rehabilitation of the Manila Central Post Office. This committee will be responsible for studying, reviewing, assessing, examining, investigating, and inquiring about various aspects related to the reconstruction and rehabilitation of this historic site, as well as options for the redevelopment of its contexts.

Under this special committee, we commit to restore this heritage site to its former glory, not only for ourselves, but also for future generations, ensuring that the legacy of our ancestors lives on.

May this tragedy serve as a catalyst for renewed dedication and collective action. Together, let us rebuild not just a structure but also the heart and spirit of our nation. Let us reclaim what has been reduced to ashes and preserve our cultural legacy for our sons and daughters.

ADOPTION OF PROPOSED SENATE RESOLUTION NO. 638

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, Proposed Senate Resolution No. 638 was adopted by the Body, subject to style.

COAUTHORS AND COSPONSORS

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, all the Members of the Senate were made coauthors and cosponsors of Proposed Senate Resolution No. 638.

MEMBERSHIP IN THE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON THE REHABILITATION OF THE MANILA CENTRAL POST OFFICE

With the concurrence of Senator Legarda, upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, Senate President Zubiri designated Senator Legarda as chairperson of the Special Committee on the Rehabilitation of the Manila Central Post Office, with Senators Cayetano (P), Binay, Angara, and Pimentel as members.

COSPONSORSHIP SPEECH OF SENATOR PADILLA

Senator Villanueva stated that Senator Padilla would be submitting his cosponsorship speech on Proposed Senate Resolution No. 638 for insertion into the *Journal and Record of the Senate*.

Following is the text of Senator Padilla's speech:

Ginoong Tagapangulo, sa mga kagalang-galang na miyembro ng lupon na ito, lalo't higit sa butihing sponsor ng Resolusyon Bilang 638, Senadora Loren Legarda:

As-Salaam-Alaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuhu.

Ang maikling manipestasyon pong ito ay upang ipahayag ang aking buong-buong suporta sa panukalang pagbuo ng espesyal na Komite upang suriin, busisiin, at imbestigahan ang naging pinsala sa trahedya ng pagkasunog ng Manila Central Post Office, gayundin ang muling pagtatayo at rehabilitasyon ng makasaysayang gusaling ito.

Sa katunayan, kagyat na naghain din po ng resolusyon ang inyong lingkod – ang Senate Resolution No. 627 – upang hikayatin ang angkop ng komite ng Senado na magsiyasat sa naganap na sunog. Ang layunin po natin ay upang muling bisitahin at palakasin ang ating mga patakaran at hakbang para sa pangangalaga at proteksyon ng mga kultural na ari-arian laban sa sunog at iba pang mga panganib.

Ito po ay bahagi ng ating pagkilala at pagpapahalaga natin sa mga “mahahalagang kultural na ari-arian ng estado” sapagkat ang mga imprastrakturang ito po ay sumasalamin sa ating kasaysayan, pagkakakilanlan, at mayamang sining at kultura.

Makakaasa po kayong susubaybayan ng inyong lingkod ang magiging progreso ng ating unti-unting pagbuo sa mga naiwang bahagi at alaala ng napakahalagang gusaling ito.

Bilang pangwakas, nais ko pong ipahayag na gaano man kalaki ang tumupok na apoy sa pundasyon ng edipisyong ito, hindi nito kayang tapatan ang ating nag-aalab na mithiin upang muling maibalik ang karingalan ng ating Manila Central Post Office.

Maraming salamat, Ginoong Tagapangulo.

SUSPENSION OF SESSION

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, the session was suspended.

It was 8:23 p.m.

RESUMPTION OF SESSION

At 8:24 p.m., the session was resumed.

SPECIAL ORDER

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body approved the transfer of Committee Report No. 85 on Senate Bill No. 2243 from the Calendar for Ordinary Business to the Calendar for Special Orders.

COMMITTEE REPORT NO. 85 ON SENATE BILL NO. 2243

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body considered, on Second Reading, Senate Bill No. 2243 (Committee Report No. 85), entitled

AN ACT STRENGTHENING AND REVITALIZING THE SALT INDUSTRY IN THE PHILIPPINES, APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR, 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 Villanueva, 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 Villar (C) for the sponsorship.

SPONSORSHIP SPEECH OF SENATOR VILLAR (C)

In presenting Senate Bill No. 2243 for plenary consideration of the Body, Senator Villar (C) delivered the following speech:

I rise today to sponsor Senate Bill No. 2243, or the Philippine Salt Industry Development Act, under Committee Report No. 85, which recommends the approval of the strengthening and revitalizing of the salt industry in the Philippines, in substitution of Senate Bill Nos. 2185, authored by Senator Dela Rosa, 1932 authored by Senator Binay, 1870, authored by Senator Legarda, 1685 authored by Senator Tulfo; 1450 authored by Senator Villanueva, and 1334 by this Representation, taking into consideration Proposed Senate Resolution No. 211, authored by Senator Binay.

The History of ASIN Law

Salt is one of the oldest commodities produced, traded, and consumed in the Philippines. In the early 1990s, major salt producers were from the provinces of Bulacan, Pangasinan, Occidental Mindoro, and Cavite. However, by the year 2000, the supply had reduced dramatically due to a variety of factors.

In 1993, or two years prior to the passage of Republic Act No. 8172, known as the "Act for Salt Iodization Nationwide," or the ASIN Law, a survey showed that 12.6% of Filipino children aged six to 12 years old suffered from iodine deficiency. Thus, former President Fidel V. Ramos sought to combat iodine deficiency in the country through the enactment of RA 8172 in December 1995.

Sufficient iodine nutrition is crucial for the proper growth of young children and is a most critical micronutrient for pregnant women for the healthy development of the fetus in the early stages of pregnancy. To address this problem, the government mandated the integration of iodized salt in the Filipino diet. RA 7182 required all food grade manufacturers to iodize the salt they produce, distribute, or trade. It also compelled restaurants, food outlets, and stores to make available only iodized salt in their establishment. The law imposes an administrative fine of P1,000 to P100,000 on violators.

On a positive note, the country has eliminated iodine deficiency among the selected population group based on previous National Nutrition Surveys. Iodine levels of school-age children six to 12 years old are now adequate according to the last four surveys, the latest of which was published in December 2020.

However, pregnant women and women of childbearing age still suffer from mild iodine deficiency over the last decades based on 2013 and 2018 surveys.

Unfortunately, the ASIN Law has become somewhat a deterrent to the development of the salt industry that produces 300,000 metric tons of salt in 1994, a year before ASIN became law. According to the NFRDI, our annual requirement is 683,000 metric tons, and we produce 114,000 metric tons or 16.78% of the demand.

The supply of salt in the domestic market is reliant on imports which has led to a call from local players for the government to revitalize the industry. Currently, we import from other major salt producing countries like Australia and China. Evidently, the current state of the Philippine salt sector displays a stark contrast to what it once was. This implies the need to revitalize the dying salt industry. We need to meet the growing demand of Filipino households and the additional annual demand for 300,000 metric tons of salt as coconut fertilizer under the 2021 Coconut Farmers and Industry Trust Fund Act. To keep up with the growing population's demand for salt, there is a need to expand the current 2,000 hectares of salt farms concentrated in Pangasinan and 18,000 hectares in Mindoro.

The iodization requirement under RA 8172 is good for public health but is detrimental for non-food salt production. There was no one in charge of the salt industry development among the government agencies. Aside from the fact that there is no single government agency that oversees and helps develop the salt industry and the current government policies, salt farmers also face the adverse effect of unpredictable weather patterns caused by climate change. Intermittent rain patterns and long dry spells affect salt yield since production heavily relies on the temperature, humidity, sunlight, and other weather-dependent factors.

The study by the NFRDI also showed the lack of government support for the industry, especially in the development of post-harvest technology. This technology entails high capital for salt farmers but it cannot guarantee the production of high-quality salt. The requirement for iodized or locally-produced salt poses a challenge for the coconut industry particularly for coconut farmers located far from the coastline that need non-iodized salt as fertilizer. The use of rock salt or common table salt as coconut tree fertilizer is known to increase coconut sweat and yield per tree. Instead of repealing the law altogether, the salt industry for iodized and non-iodized can co-exist to meet the demands of Filipino households, food manufacturers, and crop producers. The government should provide support to both local food grade and non-food grade salt farmers and artisanal salt producers and provide better technical assistance in the form of equipment for the iodization of salt.

This proposed legislation includes provision for enhancing salt cooperatives and organizing salt farmers into cooperatives. It also calls for the establishment of a Philippine Salt Industry Development Council responsible for formulating and implementing policies and programs for the sector, including cooperatives of salt producers.

Furthermore, the legislation categorizes salt as an aquatic resource placing it under the supervision of the Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources. It also requires the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, the National Mapping and Resource Information Authority or NAMRIA, and BFAR to finalize salt development and expansion areas across the country within 90 days of the law's approval. Public lands identified as suitable for salt production would be transferred by the DENR to the BFAR for management and disposition. BFAR would issue tenurial instruments to eligible salt producers for the utilization of public lands. The proposed laws suggest the creation of a Salt Industry Development Fund to support the programs by increasing the tariff on imported salt, including industrial grade salt and raw salt. Such fund shall be plowed back to the industry.

This legislation suggests allocation of the Salt Competitiveness Enhancement Fund from tariff collected on imported salt in the amount of P150 million.

At present, salt is charged with 1% tariff and generates around P17.92 million only. That is why we are suggesting the increase of tariff to 9%, which will generate around P161 million if the import volume remains unchanged.

Twenty-five percent of the fund should go to the establishment of warehouses or storage areas, to be implemented by BFAR; 25% shall be provided for the salt production materials, machineries, and equipment, to be implemented by BFAR; 15% shall be utilized for capacity building and training, to be implemented by BFAR and ATI; 10% shall be for the provision of easy access low interest loans, to be serviced by LANDBANK; 5% shall go to the establishment and strengthening of salt producers coop, to be implemented by CDA; 10% shall be allocated for the Department of Modern Salt Production and Processing, to be implemented by the NFRDI; and 10% shall go to the construction of roads to salt farms, to be implemented by the DPWH.

Additional significant provisions include a 25-year lease period for use of public lands for salt farms, which can be renewed for an additional 25 years. The size limitation is set at 500 hectares for individuals, while corporations, associations, and cooperatives are allowed up to 1,000 hectares.

Current holders of fishpond lease agreements have the opportunity to convert their fishponds into salt farms, and apply with BFAR, subject to the stipulations of this Act.

Furthermore, this legislation references the Ease of Doing Business and Efficient Government Service Delivery Act of 2018, emphasizing streamlined processes and efficient government services.

Lastly, the purchase of locally-produced salt for government programs, specifically for the Philippine Coconut Authority, is mandated within the provisions of this Act.

The salt industry has been appealing to us for assistance in revitalizing their dying sector. We must respond to this plea and take action without delay. Thus, I urge the passage of this measure.

COSPONSORSHIP SPEECHES

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body approved the insertion of the following cosponsorship speeches of Senators Legarda and Dela Rosa on Senate Bill No. 2243 into the *Journal and Record of the Senate*:

By Senator Legarda

It is with great pleasure that I register my full support for the passage of Senate Bill No. 2243, or the Philippine Salt Industry Development Act.

Our country ranks fifth among countries with the longest coastline and first in the highest coastline-to-land area ratio, a geographic feature that makes it prime for salt production. The country is endowed with rich and fine salt beds, thus, making the country self-sufficient at the height of salt production in the 1980s.

Despite the industry's huge potential, this once-vibrant undertaking declined to the brink of extinction.

In 1995, Republic Act No. 8172, or the ASIN Law was passed which requires salt iodization to curb iodine deficiency disorders in the country. However, salt iodization requires the use of more sophisticated and costly machinery and technology making the industry generally limited to large-scale salt traders, marginalizing the small and medium salt farmers who cannot afford the corresponding costs. Due to a lack of training, funds, resources, and government support for the small producers, the eventual death of the salt industry became inevitable.

The situation was worsened by the flooding of cheap salt imports (of industrial grade) into our country, which restricted the price of salt produced domestically from competing with the price of salt imported.

At present, the Philippines imports up to 93% of the country's annual salt requirement. The number is expected to increase in the coming years due to the rapidly growing population.

The demise of the industry is also attributed to urbanization or the conversion of salt farms into residential and industrial areas; high repair and maintenance costs for salt farm development and exorbitant land rental fees which limit the capacity of salt producers to invest in productivityenhancing methods and technologies; climate change as salt production in the Philippines is highly dependent on weather conditions; and limited government support services and policies supporting the local salt industry as there is no law or policy that protects and charts the direction of the local salt industry; among others.

It is very clear that the country's salt industry needs to be revived, alongside addressing the challenges and gaps found to make the Philippine salt industry competitive in both domestic and foreign markets, as well as creating opportunities for local employment and establishing salt-based community enterprises.

For these reasons, it is my honor to cosponsor these bills seeking to revitalize and develop our salt industry.



By Senator Dela Rosa

It is my honor to co-sponsor Senate Bill No. 2243, under Committee Report No. 85, or the "Philippine Salt Industry Development Act." I wish to commend the ever industrious Chairperson of the Committee on Agriculture, Food, and Agrarian Reform, the Mama Bear of the Senate, Senator

Cynthia Villar. Truly, this legislative proposal is not just about salt; it is a measure that aims directly at improving upon our agricultural sector.

As the title of a news article goes: "It is a sin to let the local salt industry languish." If we ignore the salt industry and all the benefits that come with it, then we must also bear the consequences of such an ignorance. Mabuti na lang, Mr. President, na tayo dito sa Senado, hindi natin ipinagsasawalang bahala ang halaga ng asin.

Sa ilalim ng panukalang batas na ito, mabubuo ang Philippine Salt Industry Roadmap. Indicated in the Salt Roadmap will be programs and projects directed towards the development, modernization, and commercialization of Philippine salt. We shall finally be able to give the salt industry the attention it deserves.

The bill also mandates the creation of the Philippine Salt Industry Development Council. With the help of this Council, the efforts to develop and modernize our salt industry will be harmonized and more effectively implemented. We will be placing the Philippines in a better position to assist our salt farmers, especially in increasing their productivity and modernizing their farming methods.

May kasabihan: "You don't miss the water 'til the well runs dry." Gayundin sa asin, mamimiss mo lang ang asin kapag wala na siya sa pagkain mo. Mas maintindihan mo kung gaano siya kahalaga, upang magkaroon ng lasa ang pagkain mo. This is why this measure is very important, Mr. President. Because today, what we are saying, essentially, is that we won't wait until the well runs dry for us to appreciate the water. We won't wait for our salt industry to disappear before we begin to appreciate salt.

And so, because I for one do not wish to commit "a sin" so grave, that sin of ignoring the salt industry and our salt farmers, I wholeheartedly support the passage of this measure into law. I trust, Mr. President, that my colleagues in this august body feel the same.

COSPONSORSHIP SPEECH OF SENATOR VILLANUEVA

In cosponsoring Senate Bill No. 2243, Senator Villanueva delivered the following speech:

First of all, let me thank and commend our very hardworking chairperson of the Committee on Agriculture *sa kaniya pong pangunguna upang mabigyang linaw itong napakahalagang bagay at agarang tugon sa krisis na ating kinakaharap sa industriya ng asin.*

We are happy that our bill, Senate Bill No. 1450, or the Salt Industry Development and Revitalization Act, is among the bills considered in the committee report. Again, we thank our *ninang*, "Mama Bear," and "principal" of the Senate, Sen. Cynthia Villar.

The history of salt traces back to as far as 6050 B.C. when the Egyptians used it as a religious offering and to preserve mummies. In fact, in the Bible, we find numerous references to salt, which is usually a metaphor for permanence and conviction—"Salt of the Earth," "a covenant of salt," et cetera.

Throughout history, salt has proven to be of high value in meaning. In fact, the word "salary" comes from the Latin word "*sal*," for salt, since it was used in Ancient Rome as payment.

In the present-day setting, salt has over 14,000 uses and is an important raw material to produce a great number of products and chemicals. We say all these to emphasize that, indeed, salt has been and remains to be one of the most important commodities in the world.

Our country is blessed with over 36,000 kilometers of shoreline, the fifth longest in the world, suitable for salt-making. The Bible says, "To whom much is given, much is expected, much is required." But unfortunately, we have not made full use of the resources that we have.

During the hearing conducted and led by our dear colleague, Sen. Cynthia A. Villar, we found out that 93% of our salt requirement is being imported. This is really unacceptable.

Magwawakas po ako by saying we have an enormous, untapped, and neglected resource that could change the lives of about 60% of our total population who live in the coastline zones. Aside from the urgency of addressing the needs of the industry, it is also significant to this representation since our home province in Bulacan is the third largest producer of salt, next to Pangasinan and Occidental Mindoro.

Ang root word ng Pangasinan ay asin—Pang-asinan—kaya napakarami pong naapektuhan sa probinsya na iyan. Kaya napakaganda po ng panukalang batas na ito at hinihikayat ko ang ating mga kasamahan dito Senado na suportahan ito.

Muli, maraming salamat kay Sen. Cynthia A. Villar.

Muli nating buhayin ang produksiyon ng asin, as in.

SUSPENSION OF CONSIDERATION OF SENATE BILL NO. 2243

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

CONFEREES

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Senate President designated the following to constitute the Senate panel in the Bicameral Conference Committee on the disagreeing provisions of Senate Bill No. 1359 and House Bill No. 6483 (No Permit, No Exam Prohibition Act): Senator Escudero as chairperson, and Senators Gatchalian, Angara, Dela Rosa, and Hontiveros as members.

PROPOSED SENATE RESOLUTION NO. 647

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body considered Proposed Senate Resolution No. 647, entitled

**RESOLUTION DECLARING AS READ AND APPROVED THE JOURNAL OF THE
77TH SESSION OF THE SENATE.**

With the permission of the Body, only the title of the resolution was read without prejudice to the insertion of its full text into the *Record of the Senate*.

ADOPTION OF PROPOSED SENATE RESOLUTION NO. 647

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, Proposed Senate Resolution No. 647 was approved by the Body.

PROPOSED SENATE RESOLUTION NO. 648

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body considered Proposed Senate Resolution No. 648, entitled

**RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING THE PRODUCTION AND DISTRIBUTION OF
TWENTY (20) PRINTED AND ONE HUNDRED (100) DIGITAL COPIES OF
THE JOURNAL AND THE RECORD OF THE SENATE FOR THE FIRST
REGULAR SESSION OF THE NINETEENTH CONGRESS OF THE PHILIPPINES.**

With the permission of the Body, only the title of the resolution was read without prejudice to the insertion of its full text into the *Record of the Senate*.

ADOPTION OF PROPOSED SENATE RESOLUTION NO. 648

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, Proposed Senate Resolution No. 648 was approved by the Body.

SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 11

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body considered Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 11, entitled

CONCURRENT RESOLUTION PROVIDING FOR THE ADJOURNMENT OF THE FIRST REGULAR SESSION OF THE NINETEENTH CONGRESS OF THE PHILIPPINES NOT LATER THAN TWELVE O'CLOCK, MIDNIGHT, TODAY, MAY 31, 2023.

With the permission of the Body, only the title of the resolution was read without prejudice to the insertion of its full text into the *Record of the Senate*.

ADOPTION OF SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 11

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 11 was approved by the Body.

COMMITTEE TO NOTIFY THE PRESIDENT

Pursuant to Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 11, upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, Senate President Zubiri appointed Senators Ejercito, Angara, and Binay as members of the committee, on the part of the Senate, to notify the President that the First Regular Session of the Nineteenth Congress was about to adjourn *sine die*.

CLOSING STATEMENT OF SENATE PRESIDENT ZUBIRI

Senate President Zubiri delivered the following statement prior to the adjournment of session *sine die*:

Today, we take a short break from a productive year during which we responded to the needs of our people and challenges of the times, with high work and high purpose.

As a result, your Senate has approved the total of six measures enacted into law—four of national application, two of local laws, twenty-two bills are now also for the President's signature—seven of them national, 15 local, three national bills are pending, the bicameral conference committee, and six more national bills have been approved on Third Reading.

The highlight among our accomplishments is the approval of the eight of the priority measures of the administration. Of these, three have been signed into law—the SIM Registration Act, the Act Postponing the Barangay Elections, and the APEC's Term Law.

While four more are for signature of the President, namely, the measure on the condonation of unpaid amortization and interest of loans for Agrarian Reform beneficiaries, Regional Specialty Centers Act, Extension of the Estate Tax Amnesty Act, and Maharlika Investment Fund. The Trabaho Para sa Bayan Act has also been approved on Third Reading.

While we have primarily focused on measures in the common legislative agenda, we have also acted on various local measures that will infuse much-needed funding into local governments and schools. But while the scoreboard shows the quantity of our outputs, it cannot even begin to describe the quality of each.

True to our tradition, we do not agree to proposals without discussion nor embrace ideas without debate before we approve. We do not trade scrutiny for speed. *Lahat naman po ng batas na ating ipinapanday dito ay dumadaan sa masusing pag-aaral. Hindi po natin ito pinapabagal. Ang ating ginagawa ay ipinapabuti natin itong mga batas.* And it is the people who have assigned us that role to be the final checkpoint before bills become law. They want our guarantee that every bill that passes here bears the Senate seal of great lawmaking. And I am proud that every Member of this Senate has done their part in honoring our pledge to the people. We show up, we step up, we speak out every session day that the roll is called. We prefer head-to-head debates of our hybrid sessions where every senator, given his or her mandate, participates because we believe that without the full exchange of ideas, our Legislature ceases to be liberative.

There is another thing which our scoreboard does not reveal. The courage to investigate abuses. Senate watchers and the nation, in general, can attest to the headline-making investigations of our committees who have held exhaustive probes into various national issues, from agriculture to peace and order, to malversation of public funds and, of course, the POGO mess.

But when we conducted hearings on anomalies. We do not merely find faults; we find solutions as well. Our intention is not merely to look for crooks to be indicted but to find what remedial laws must be initiated.

I assure the nation that while we are going into a Sine Die adjournment today, this is only the Plenary approval of bills that will take a pause.

Your Senate will still be hard at work. The production of bills in the committee, the heartbeat of lawmaking will continue, and the pursuit of public accountability and good governance will not go on vacation either. There is no moratorium on the conduct of our oversight.

Now, just as we open the first day session with the roll call, today we must end the credits' roll. *Kaya magpapasalamat po ako sa ating leadership.* From the Senate President Pro Tempore, Sen. Loren Legarda, to the Majority Leader, Sen. Joel Villanueva; to the Minority Leader, Sen. Aquilino "Koko" Pimentel III; to our Deputy Minority Leader, Sen. Risa Hontiveros; to our Deputy Majority Leader, Sen. Joseph Victor "JV" G. Ejercito and Sen. Mark A. Villar; to all the members of the different committees, the chairpersons of the different committees, and our colleagues in the majority: Sen. Sonny Angara, Sen. Maria Lourdes Nancy S. Binay, Sen. Alan Peter S. Cayetano, Sen. Pia S. Cayetano, Sen. Ronald "Bato" Dela Rosa, Sen. Francis Joseph G. Escudero. Sen. Jinggoy Ejercito Estrada, Sen. Win Gatchalian, Sen. Christopher Lawrence T. Go, Sen. Manuel "Lito" M. Lapid, Sen. Imee R. Marcos, Sen. Robinhood C. Padilla, Sen. Grace Poe, Sen. Ramon Bong Revilla Jr., Sen. Francis "Tol" N. Tolentino, Sen. Raffy T. Tulfo, Sen. Cynthia A. Villar together with Sen. Mark A. Villar. Some of the hardest-working Members of the Senate, thank you for your patience—Did I miss anyone?

Thank you for your patience, diligence, and cooperation throughout the past year. Sometimes we vote unanimously, and sometimes we have division. But in the end, we work as a single body, united in the goal of uplifting the lives of our people.

We also thank our tireless Senate Secretariat—let us give them a big round of applause—and staff of the senators whose work makes our work possible.

Maraming, maraming salamat po.

Iyong pinakamalakas na palakpak ay iyong staff ni Senator Gatchalian kasi overtime po sila tonight.

And when we return in July, I promise to continue wielding the gavel as firmly and as fairly as those have done before me. We will return with high-impact legislation, and we will unleash the forces of the Philippine economy, but we will also provide a soft landing for the less fortunate.

When we meet again in this Hall, let it be with greater determination and renewed commitment to perform our duties that this republic of ours and our people expect us to do.

Maraming, maraming salamat po.

Daghang salamat sa inyong tanan. Mabuhay ang Senado.



MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR VILLANUEVA

Senator Villanueva, citing the Bible, emphasized the importance of “giving honor to whom honor is due.” He expressed gratitude and admiration for Senate President Zubiri, describing him as hard-working, charismatic, and inspirational.

He recounted their shared experiences of late nights, sleep deprivation, and irregular meals. He expressed his admiration for the Senate President’s tenacity and ability to work diligently even under duress, exemplifying Churchill’s adage that “kites rise highest against the wind, not with it.”

MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR PIMENTEL

Senator Pimentel joined the others in heaping praise upon the Senate President, as well as thanking their colleagues, their staff, and the Senate Secretariat.

In response, Senate President Zubiri thanked the Minority for their constructive criticism. He acknowledged the steadfastness of their conviction on many issues, and recognized their tremendous help in passing what are called “happy bills” for the country.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR VILLANUEVA

Senator Villanueva placed on record that at 8:55 p.m. on that day, majority of the senators were still physically present in the Session Hall, namely, Senators Risa Hontiveros, Aquilino “Koko” Pimentel III, Joseph Victor “JV” G. Ejercito, Loren Legarda, Maria Lourdes Nancy S. Binay, Sonny Angara, Cynthia A. Villar, Ramon Bong Revilla Jr., Win Gatchalian, and Christopher Lawrence T. Go.

REMINDER OF SENATOR VILLANUEVA

Senator Villanueva reminded the Body of Senate Resolution No. 21, entitled “Resolution Authorizing All Regular Standing Committees, Oversight Committees, and Special Committees of the Senate to Conduct Hearings, Meetings, and Consultations During Every Recess of the Senate to Have Continuity in the Process of Passing Pending Proposed Legislation and to Conduct Investigations on Issues of National Interest to Aid in Crafting Relevant Legislation.”

ADJOURNMENT OF SESSION

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, Senate President Zubiri declared the First Regular Session of the 19th Congress of the Philippines, on the part of the Senate, adjourned *sine die*.

It was 8:57 p.m.

I hereby certify to the correctness of the foregoing.

Approved on

Atty. RENATO N. BANTUG Jr.
Secretary of the Senate

