

# *e-M* The Senate MONITOR

*Official Newsletter of Senate of the Philippines*

January - December 2021



## *2021 Senate Milestone Awardees*



Maria Teresa S. Bondoc, LRB



Rodrigo Noel A. Gonzalez, AMB



Eduardo C. Garvida, CAB



Enrico M. Balitbit, MPFS



Teresita G. Bunag, PPS



Juney A. Caballero, SES



Renato P. Cabanero, LBIS



Josephine F. Costo, BAC



Marilyn I. Ducusin, LAS



Cely D. Ecija, AMB



Eduardo M. Escosia, OS Angara



Alan C. Juanerio, MPFS



Fernando O. Martinez, LBIS



Ma. Teresa M. Mutuc, MDB



Rafael P. Ofilada, SES



Angelo G. Sabado, SES



Jaime I. Sarmiento, SSS



Divina P. Taruc, LBS



Ida V. Terry, LAS

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## HONORING OUR RETIREES

By Pilar S. Macrohon



**RETIREES HONORED:** Senate President Vicente C. Sotto III led the institution in honoring officers and employees of the Senate, who recently retired, for serving the country well as an integral part of the Senate of the Philippines.

In a simple ceremony held last December 9, Senate President Vicente Sotto III expressed his appreciation for 19 milestone awardees who showed dedication to the institution and worked hard during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sotto, who sent his video message to the awardees during the virtual 2021 Milestone Awarding Ceremony, said the retirees had served the country well as an integral part of the Senate of the Philippines.

"I applaud all of you for your hard work and dedication in providing genuine public service for our people by ensuring effective and continuous operations of our offices even amid this public health crisis," he added.

"I am incredibly grateful to all our Senate employees and officers who have fulfilled their duties in the Senate, notwithstanding the threat of our health and safety caused by the COVID-19 pandemic," Sotto said.

Sotto had placed the Senate under a lockdown in March after several employees tested positive for COVID-19. Employees from several offices were also under quarantine, including the entire staff of the Legislative Bills and Index Service who performed crucial tasks in the legislative process.

Sotto wished well the 2021 retirees as they embarked on what he said was a new chapter in their lives.

"It is now time for you to enjoy the fruits of your hard labor. May you cherish every moment of your retirement. Thank you very much," he said.

For his part, Senate Majority Leader Juan Miguel "Migz" F. Zubiri said the awardees formed the foundation of the Senate.

"My warmest congratulations to our Senate milestone awardees. Thank you so much for your service, not only to the Senate but to the country. Now that you are retiring, I hope you can look back on your time here at the Senate and be proud of your contributions to the institution," Zubiri said.

He expressed hope that the retirees would keep the values, knowledge and relationships they formed in the Senate.

As chairperson of the Committee on Civil Service, Government Reorganization and

Professional Regulation, Sen. Ramon "Bong" Revilla Jr. said the dedication of the awardees to the institution and the country was quite admirable. In his 15 years in the Senate, Revilla said he personally witnessed the invaluable contribution of the employees in upholding the ideals and aspiration of the Philippine Senate.

"As chairman of the civil service committee, it is my pride to grace a corps of dedicated and loyal employees. The employees whom we honor today have been our partners for 15 years or more. It is a delight to see that they have remained loyal to the Senate while realizing their full potentials and achieving self fulfillment and happiness. This representation is supportive of all endeavors giving due recognition and appreciation to the contribution of our civil servants," Revilla said.

Revilla commended the Senate leadership for instituting the Senate Milestone Award.

The Senate Milestone Award is a part of the Collective Negotiation Agreement (CNA) signed in 2010 by officials of the Senate and the Samahan ng mga Empleyadong Nagkakaisa sa Adhikain ng Demokratikong Organisasyon (SENADO). It was ratified last September 7, 2021. The award is granted to qualified employees in recognition of their long, dynamic and dedicated service to the Institution. Under Policy Order 2011-002A, awardees of the Senate Milestone Award are entitled to a plaque of appreciation, P30,000 in cash and a 14 carat standard Senate gold ring.

To qualify, employees must have rendered at least 15 years of service in the Philippine Senate and they must be eligible to retire at the age of 65 or declared eligible for optional retirement after reaching the age of 60 years.

This year's Milestone awardees are Enrico Balitbit, 33 years of service, Maintenance and Physical Facilities Service (MPFS); Teresita Bunag, 33 years of service, Property and Procurement Service; Juney Caballero, 33 years of service, Security Enforcement Service of the Office of the Sergeant-At-Arms (SES-OSAA); Renato Cabañero, 34 years of service, Legislative Bills and Index Service (LBIS); Josephine Costo, 34 years of service, Bids and Awards Committee; Cely Ecija, 27

years of service, Administrative Management Bureau (AMB); Eduardo Escosia, 29 years of service, Office of Sen. Juan Edgardo "Sonny" Angara; Alan Juanerio, 32 years of service, Maintenance and Physical Facilities Service (MPFS); Fernando Martinez, 27 years of service, Legislative Bills and Index Service (LBIS); Maria Teresa Mutuc, 33 years of service, Medical and Dental Clinic; Rafael Ofilada, 20 years of service, Security Enforcement Service of the Office of the Sergeant-At-Arms (SES-OSAA); Angelo Sabado, 33 years of service, SES-OSAA; Divina Taruc, 30 years of service, Legislative Budget and Service; Ida Terry, 33 years of service, Legislative Accounting Service; Dir. Maria Teresa Bondoc, 34 years of service, Legislative Reference Bureau and Dir. Rodrigo Noel Gonzaoes, 29 years of service, Administrative Management Bureau (AMB).

Posthumous Recognition 2021 were awarded to Marilyn Ducusin, 33 years of service, Legislative Accounting Service; Jaime Sarmiento, 33 years of service, SES-OSAA and Eduardo Garvida, 34 years of service, Committee Affairs Bureau.

Dir. Irah Ruth Borinaga, who delivered a message on behalf of Senate Secretary Myra Marie Villarica, said the Senate Secretary thanked the awardees for their dedication and loyal service to the Senate.

According to Borinaga, Villarica was grateful for the retirees' unwavering support and cooperation which made her tasks in the Senate as well as the challenges she faces in the everyday work much easier to handle.

She said it is the hope of the Senate Secretary that as the retirees open a new chapter in their lives, they would keep the lessons in public service.

"I pray for your happiness and success in your next personal and professional endeavors as well as good health for you and your loved ones," Villarica said in her message.



**INVALUABLE SERVICE CITED:** Sen. Ramon "Bong" Revilla Jr. commended the invaluable contribution of Milestone awardees in upholding the ideals and aspirations of the Philippine Senate. Revilla also commended the Senate leadership for instituting the Senate Milestone Awards.







## SOTTO LEAVES LEGACY WITH NEW CNA

By JP Lopez



**'LEGACY CNA' SIGNED:** Senate President Vicente C. Sotto III signs the collective negotiation agreement with the employees' union Sept. 7, 2021. Joining Sotto in the signing ceremony are (from left) Senate Secretary Myra Marie Villarica, Sandigan ng mga Empleyadong Nagkakaisa sa Adhikain ng Demokratikong Organisasyon President Rosella Eugenio, and Deputy Secretary for Administration and Finance Arnel Jose Bañas.

Senate President Vicente C. Sotto III will be leaving a legacy as he signed the collective negotiation agreement (CNA) with the employees' union Sandigan ng mga Empleyadong Nagkakaisa sa Adhikain ng Demokratikong Organisasyon (SENADO) Tuesday, September 7, 2021.

Sotto said the 4th CNA that he signed with the employees' union will be a "milestone" in his career as a senator and a Senate President before leaving the Senate in June next year.

"It gives me pride and pleasure to have signed the 2021 Collective Negotiation Agreement. I shall consider this as a milestone in my career as a senator and as a Senate President. For after all, how many among us are given this opportunity to ink an agreement uplifting the lives of the employees in the Senate," Sotto said.

Also present during the signing were Senate Secretary Myra Marie Villarica, Deputy Secretary for Administration and Financial Services Arnel Bañas and SENADO President Rosella Eugenio.

The CNA signing was the culmination of 12 days of negotiation in a span of three months, between the management panel led by Bañas, and the union panel led by Elena Valentus. Other members of the management panel were Senate Legal Counsel Valentina Cruz, then Administration and Financial

Services Executive Director Renato Chua, Deputy Secretary for Legislation Edwin Bellen and Atty. Carisa Barcarse from the Office of the Senate President.

Members of the union panel, aside from Eugenio and Valentus, were former union president Dakila Millamena, Geralice Perlawan and Nueva Gacutan.

"All our hard work had paid off. After 12 days of negotiating and asserting employees' rights and benefits, we have finally inked a new and improved CNA that acclimates with these challenging times," Eugenio said.

In a resolution, the SENADO board said the new and improved CNA "responds to the needs, health, and safety of the employees amid the pandemic."

The resolution recognizes the union and the Senate as partners in the effective delivery of public services.

"The board deems it right to thank His Honor for his goodwill and effort to uphold Senate employees' rights and advance our welfare through this CNA," the union said.

Sotto, for his part, said the signing of the CNA is a "clear manifestation that we, in the Senate, recognize the rights and privileges of the rank-and-file employees which are held sacrosanct by no less than our Constitution and echoed in our laws."

"This also demonstrates our strong commitments to promote and protect the economic welfare of our employees," he said, adding that this has been the commitment of the Senate leadership as shown by the signing of policy orders increasing the benefits

of the employees."

"Finally, please remember that the Senate is the beacon of democracy and hope in the Philippines. Thus I implore you, as public servants, to protect its mandate under the Constitution. Let us continue to do our part and, in the process, make a better Philippines," the Senate chief said.

For the union, the signing of the 4th CNA is a significant point in the union's existence since it has been 10 years now since the first CNA was concluded under Eugenio.

"We consider the new CNA as 'improved' since it has new provisions that ensure the health and safety of the employees while rising to the challenges of the pandemic and there are several provisions from the first-ever CNA that were removed in the past two CNAs especially the identity of the union which we asserted to be included again," Eugenio said.

"Through this CNA, the union was able to regain its strength through the unity and active participation of our members," she added.

One of the significant provisions in the CNA is the security of tenure that not only focused on expanding regular employment in the Senate workforce but also ensure

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## LIVESTREAMING THE WORK OF THE SENATE

By Vanne Elaine P. Terrazola

No person or country in the world could have prepared for what would be described as one of the deadliest pandemics in history. When COVID-19 broke out, it was as if the world shut down, with various governments imposing lock downs, restricting, if not stopping, travels, while businesses were also forced to close.

Like other government agencies, the Senate was not spared. In March, 2020, Senate President Vicente C. Sotto III placed the upper chamber's building under "restricted access" which saw the implementation of strict health protocols, including limiting the entry of resource persons and visitors, and operating on a skeleton workforce. Since then, lawmakers have resorted to videoconferencing and hybrid plenary sessions or committee hearings, so the Senate could still deliver key pieces of legislation even in a time of crisis.

The sudden shift to virtual operations put the Electronic Data Processing and Management Information System (EDP-MIS) Bureau and the Public Relations and Information Bureau (PRIB) on the spot, seeing the need to immediately adjust to the demands of the situation.

"With skeleton workforce, it was like walking on a tight rope. You need to have a good balancing act. Because on one hand, you make sure you're able to deliver the required service. On the other hand, you keep watch on the health and safety of the people," Director Conrado Dagdag, chief of the EDP-MIS Bureau, said in an interview.

"When this pandemic necessitates us to have less physical interaction and more virtual meetings, there is a need for robust and secured videoconferencing solutions that should address the Senate's requirements as far as virtual meetings are concerned, conferences, and the plenary session," he added.

Dagdag said EDP-MIS employees then had to work "double time" in acquiring the necessary skills and knowledge to be able to carry out their videoconferencing solutions, as far as virtual meetings, conferences, and plenary sessions are concerned.

The lockdown had also been a challenge for the PRIB, said Director Fleur de Liz Godoy, who concurrently heads the bureau's Broadcast Media Service and Print Media Service.

"The Senate lockdown and the implementation of the skeleton workforce was difficult for PRIB. Most of our services needed the physical attendance of our personnel, particularly the photographers, videographers, technical and admin staff. PRIB had to make a lot of adjustments," Godoy admitted.

She said PRIB, as the Senate's information and media relations arm, had to find ways to assist senators, members of the press, and the institution itself without their staff



**PRESIDING IN THE NEW NORMAL:** Senate President Vicente C. Sotto III presides over a hybrid plenary session attended physically and virtually by senators.

being physically present in the chamber's premises.

"The lockdown and the need to follow strict protocols, such as social distancing, meant that the press would no longer be allowed to do their onsite media coverage. We had to close the press office," Godoy recalled.

"This was a hard decision to make, as we are the communications arm of the Senate, and the mandate of PRIB and the media is crucial in informing the people of the legislative work of our senators," she continued.

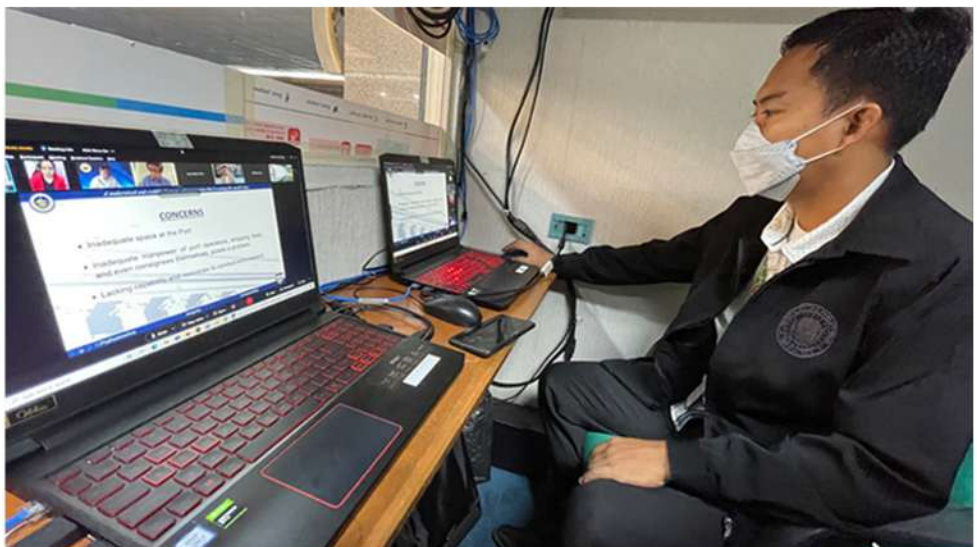
Godoy said the COVID-19 outbreak also called for several adjustments in PRIB, "foremost of which is coordinating closely with the offices of the Senate President, the Senate Secretary, Committee Affairs, Plenary Affairs, Maintenance and General Services, and the

EDP-MIS bureaus, among others."

### **New technology, aid of internet**

At the height of the enhanced community quarantine (ECQ) in April last year, Senate officials led by Senate President Vicente "Tito" Sotto III, Majority Leader Juan Miguel "Migz" F. Zubiri and Secretary Myra Villarica conducted a dry run of the first-ever hybrid videoconference in the Senate plenary hall.

The Rules of the Senate were eventually amended to allow teleconferencing in plenary sessions and committee hearings. Proceedings were also livestreamed via the Senate's YouTube channel and Facebook Live.



**EDP STAFF ON DUTY:** Erwin Jimenez of the Electronic Data Processing and Management Information System Bureau helps ensure the smooth operation of the Webex software, which is used for videoconferencing in plenary sessions and committee hearings.





**DOCUMENTING THE SENATE:** Mark Mendoza of the Broadcast Media Service makes sure to capture senators in action during a hybrid plenary session.



**PRIB STAFF ON DUTY:** Blend Lising and Rico Estupigan of the Public Relations and Information Bureau operate the audio-video switcher during a hybrid plenary session of the Senate.

But the Senate offices were not unprepared in facing the challenges of the pandemic. Dagdag said prior to the lockdowns, the EDP-MIS has been looking at available videoconferencing softwares that the Senate and its employees could use.

"We have to look for different technologies available in the market and create some selection criteria on what's best for the Senate—all these in consultation with the management, particularly the Senate Secretary, on what is best for the organization," he said.

"[The] number one consideration was safety and security of the software," he pointed out.

Godoy, for her part, said: "The use of new technologies come with greater challenges: foremost is the security and archiving of all our records which necessitate amendments to our existing guidelines on the matter; the need to continuously upgrade our equipment; and the need to train, retrain, and upskill our people on the use of available and new platforms."

Messaging apps and social media platforms, were also of "utmost help."

"Apps such as Viber and Messenger became our 'extension and virtual offices' where internal memoranda and important advisories are posted. Everyone of us, even the most 'technologically-challenged individuals,' were forced to learn how to use Viber and Messenger, and other social media modes, to be able to adapt to the so-called new normal," Godoy said.

The COVID-19 pandemic likewise paved the way for the birth of PRIB's social media team, and the "jazzing up" of the Senate's Facebook, Twitter and Instagram accounts, "to make them more engaging and up-to-date," she added.

The internet also became the means for PRIB to communicate with members of the media, sending them online pertinent data such as photo and press releases, plenary agenda, media advisories and the like, on a timely manner.

"Viber and Messenger became our 'online media office' in place of what used to be a busy working area of people from the mainstream media covering Senate events," Godoy said.

The Senate leadership has also been supportive in providing the office the necessary equipment and additional manpower.

"We are fortunate that we are now in a digital environment and enabling technologies are already present," Dagdag said.

Ensuring mental health wellness is also key, stressed Dagdag, who made sure that he did not treat EDP-MIS staffers "like machines" in a time of uncertainty and anxiety.

"As far as the challenges are concerned, the challenge is how willing and how quick you can adjust to the call of [the] times. I think that's the challenge... Basically, this is a question of attitude," he pointed out.

#### Delivering the mandate

After about two years since the onset of the pandemic, offices and employees have adjusted to their "new normal" in the Senate, unhampered by frequent changes in government policies and quarantine protocols, and delivered their tasks, despite risking their lives amid the coronavirus threat.

***The Senate, even with the ECQ in place, must continue its mandate to serve the people, Godoy said.***

As for their office, Godoy said, PRIB "has ably performed its mandate more than what is expected during this pandemic."

"We have seen how effective we have done our job from the regular feedback that we get from media personalities who cover the Senate issues. Despite their absence in the Senate, their job remains unhampered because our information disseminating efforts on the Senate's legislative work, accomplishments, and other institutional issues are comprehensive and complete, enabling them to have all the materials they need in their news reporting," she noted.

"PRIB has also been relevant to Senate offices that need assistance in photo and video documentation of their activities inside or outside the institution," she added.

While initially "hesitant" about the technology, said EDP Operations Services head John Lusabia, Senate personnel eventually gained the confidence to handle online hearings and meetings on their own or with less assistance from EDP-MIS.

Dagdag, meanwhile, said he was thankful that EDP-MIS personnel were "very proactive" and had a "high sense of responsibility."

***I would say, our people (in the EDP-MIS) accepted the challenges and have willingly adapted to the call of time, they are proactive in the discharge of their duties and responsibilities, Dagdag said.***

#### New practices

Even as the country slowly opens up, both bureaus believed that their new practices would become their new normal at work as COVID-19 continues to be a threat.

"Senators have learned to join the sessions and hearings either physically or virtually. They know it can be done with almost the same outputs when they do it with everyone in actual attendance in the Senate," Godoy noted.

"We really do not know when the COVID-19 pandemic would end. We just hope that the government's Covid response will improve significantly so we can be resilient to the effects of this pandemic, both in the office, and our personal lives," she said.

Dagdag, also said: "For as long as the employees...have the positive attitude, have the good fighting spirit, and the leadership also has that great fighting spirit which we witnessed...may mga challenges na darating sa atin in the future, whether it is COVID-related or whatever, mao-overcome natin 'yan."

"Whatever problems that may come, or challenges that may come to any organization, for as long as there is that spirit, that willingness to overcome it, makakayanan 'yon," he said.





## EMPLOYEES' COMPASSION SHINES THROUGH COMMUNITY PANTRY

By Pilar S. Macrohon

The concept of community pantry is not new but it embodies the spirit of bayanihan. Communal unity. Helping others without expecting rewards. Community pantries were reported in the United States, dubbed "food banks," and in Thailand, known as "sharing pantries" during the pandemic.

While 26-year-old Ana Patricia Non, an alumna of the University of the Philippines, sparked the country's imagination when she organized a community pantry along Maginhawa St. in Quezon City early April this year, the first community pantry in the Philippines was actually conceptualized by Caritas Philippines through Alay Kapwa, a fundraising program of the Philippine Catholic Church that serves as an emergency fund during calamities and other major social concerns.

Caritas had set up what they called "kindness stations" in communities in 30 dioceses across the country benefitting some 122,000 families last year.

The Sandigan ng mga Empleyadong Nagkakaisa sa Adhikain ng Demotikong Organisasyon (SENADO) joined the bayanihan effort to help hungry Filipinos who could hardly make their ends meet. SENADO's community pantry operated for nearly two months powered by the donations of its members, senators and their staff and Senate officials.

"We held a meeting on holding a community pantry and the board approved it. So, we immediately organized a committee to handle the project and in three days we implemented the Senate community pantry. This was part of SENADO's Sagip Kawani Sagip Mamamayan program, a relief operations program we conduct as part of our service to the people," SENADO President Rosel Eugenio told the Senate Monitor.

Last year, SENADO participated in the Taal Relief and the Bicol Relief Operations.

With a seed money of P10,000 from Sagip Kawani, SENADO bought fresh harvests from from Bulacan and Batangas farmers "to help them as well" and started the Senate community pantry on April 27 "to help nearby communities in time of the pandemic."

"Donations came from officers and members of the union at first. We also coordinated with the senators' media relations officers and donations started pouring in. Every day we had donations either in cash or in kind," Eugenio said.

She said senators' media relations officers donated rice, canned goods, among others, while Senators Imee Marcos, Ramon "Bong" Revilla Jr., Sonny Angara, Kiko Pangilinan and Pia Cayetano donated vegetables and other goods to the pantry.

"Some of the vegetables were donated by the employees who grew them. Sen. Pia Cayetano donated vegetables almost weekly and the donations from Sen. Kiko Pangilinan



**EASING PANDEMIC WOES:** Senate employees help ease the difficulties of vulnerable sectors of society during the COVID-19 pandemic by giving food and basic goods for free.



**BAYANIHAN AT WORK:** Headed by the Senate union, employees pooled resources to set up a community pantry and help feed the hungry.

came from his sagip," Eugenio said.

Records collated by SENADO staffer Mhargie Carola showed that union members also donated eggs, dried fish, vegetables, rice, t-shirts, face shields, medicines, donuts, bread, diapers, alcohol, coffee, spaghetti and cash.

In total, more than 3,500 food/grocery packs were distributed to the community outside the Senate, Philcare, Senate Philippine National Police, shuttle bus drivers, SENADO union staff, construction workers, Bureau of Fire Protection (BFP) personnel, waiters and waitresses from the canteen and the lounge.

Carola reported that cash donations reached P86,500 and approximately P230,000 worth of goods were donated.

"We were happy and proud because there really was an effort to participate and help our hungry kababayans. The unity and action are important to the community pantry," Eugenio said.

"We can see that the recipients were really happy and thankful. And we did this despite the red-tagging of community pantries because this was our way of helping the people," she added. #





## 31 EMPLOYEES PASS 2021 CSC EXAMS

By Leonard Postrado

The Senate registered a 16.55-percent passing rate in the recent Career Service Commission (CSC) Examination for professional, the highest passing rate of the agency since 2019.

According to the Civil Service Commission (CSC), 24 out of the 145 Senate employees who took the CSE for professional last July 18, 2021 passed the exams.

The civil service exams passers are: Andrea Mae P. Esteban and Ariel S. Buenaventura II from Public Relations and Information Bureau (PRIB); Anthony C. Gurtiza, General Services (GS); Bianca Marie M. Aquino and Carlo Franco R. Amian (O/S Gatchalian); Brenda Cuentas, Executive-Legislative Liaison Service (ELLS); Clarissa Aquino (O/S Pimentel); Cyrianne Lorraine Trecia R. Gonzalez, Office of the Sergeant-at-Arms (OSAA); Davidde Kyle Venturillo (O/S Hontiveros); Gordon Philip W. Bellen (O/S Dela Rosa); Harly V. Ng, Senate Public Assistance Office (SPAPO); Jamielyn B. Dilidili, Legislative Bill Drafting Service (LBDS); Japit M. Tijap, Legislative Committee Support Service for Economic and Socio-Cultural Concerns (LCSS-ESCC); Joseph Benedict A. Labayen, Office of the International Relations and Protocol (OIRP); Juliet M. Padre Juan (LCSS "B"); Lindsay-Anne D. Alega (O/S Go); Madeiline Joy J. Aloria (O/S Villanueva); Marielle C. Santos (O/S De Lima); Mauricio L. Magtoto, OSAA - Security Enforcement Service (SES); Michelson M. Panganiban (O/S Binay);

Raul C. Balansag, OSAA - Security Support Service (SSS); Rhea Joy D. G. Juanitas (LCMS); Romeo E. Regacho, Senate Tax Study and Research Office (STSRO); and Timmy Rose H. Ortega (O/S Pimentel).

On the other hand, 18.42 percent or seven out of the 38 Senate employees succeeded in the CSE for subprofessional. Those who passed the CSE for subprofessional are Anthony G. Reyes (OIRP); Arnold E. Sarles (MPOAB); Carlo B. Nepomuceno (OSAA-SES); Jocelyna O. Timajo (SPB); John Roger A. Silao (EDP-MIS); Maikie Krystle O. Lopez (O/S Villar); and Regina A. Casugbo (O/S Pacquiao).

Sandigan ng Empleyadong Nagkakaisa sa Adhikain ng Demokratikong Organisasyon (SENADO) President Rosel Eugenio said the CSE was conducted in partnership with the Senate Human Resources Management Service (HRMS) and the CSC to ensure the non-politicized appointment and professional advancement of the Senate workforce.

"We are truly satisfied with the outcome of the career service examination this year. Our efforts to help our employees to excel in the exams, such as providing review classes, really paid off," Eugenio said.

It is in our collective negotiation agreement that we need to provide professional growth and development to all Senate employees. For this activity, our

intention is really to assist employees so that they'll have eligibility while for others it means assisting them to get promotions," Eugenio said.

This is the first time since 2019 that the CSC conducted the exam in the Senate. Last year, the CSC cancelled the holding of the exams due to the COVID-19 outbreak that prompted the national government to put the country under community quarantines.

Eugenio recalled that in the previous CSEs, only two or three employees would pass the exams. Learning from their previous experience, Eugenio said SENADO has provided review classes for Senate employees planning to take the CSE.

"Passing the CSC examination is really important because this means advancement for the Senate employees. It will also enhance their confidence to perform their daily jobs efficiently and effectively," the SENADO president said.

Adhering to the COVID-19 protocols at that time, the Senate HRMS, SENADO and CSC ensured compliance for the 50 percent occupancy per testing room to observe physical distancing even during the exams.

Senate Secretary Lawyer Myra Marie Villarica has authorized at least 20 employees led by Sarah Jalandon of the Senate HRMS to assist in the conduct of the CSC exams in the Senate.

"We would like to thank the CSC for accommodating our request to hold a professional exam in the Senate," Eugenio said.

## SSFI ANSWERS PGH'S CALL FOR HELP

By Anna Yvonne A. Almirañez

The Senate Spouses Foundation, Inc. (SSFI), upon the initiative of Ms. Ciara Sotto, turned over some essential supplies to the Philippine General Hospital (PGH) Pediatric Ward.

On May 16, a fire that started from the PGH's operating room on the third floor seriously damaged the nursery room for newborn babies, prompting the evacuation of the hospital's Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) and the transfer of the babies to Sta. Ana Hospital.

Learning about the incident, Sotto immediately mobilized the SSFI and called for a donation drive in response to the hospital's appeal for help. Together they were able to gather diapers for the babies, PediaSure milk for children who are critically ill, as well as baby wipes, surgical gloves and masks, pulse oximeters, sphygmomanometers (blood pressure instrument), alcohol and bath soaps, among others.

"The Senate Spouses Foundation has always been actively supporting the welfare of our nation's children. PGH Children's Ward has a special place in the heart of our organization. Over the years, we have been a proud partner in their various projects.

When we heard about the fire affecting the nursery, we just had to extend our help," Sotto said.

The SSFI has always been a partner of PGH in many advocacies and charities.



SSFI DONATES TO FIRE RAVAGED PGH: Philippine General Hospital Director Dr. Gerardo "Gap" Legaspi receives essential supplies donated by the Senate Spouses Foundation, Inc. on June 1, 2021, upon the initiative of Ms. Ciara Sotto. PGH recently appealed for help when the operating room located on the third floor of the hospital was damaged by fire and consequently damaged the nursery room for newborn babies. SSFI's donations were delivered by the foundation's representatives, Asuncion Gumabay and Beverly Sotto.

PGH, the country's largest government-run hospital catering to thousands of indigent Filipinos nationwide, was in need of a major facelift in 2006, and SSFI was among those who donated funds and helped address the increasing medical needs of indigent patients by taking part in the renovation of the hospital's charity wards.



SSFI RESPONDS TO PGH CALL FOR HELP: The Senate Spouses Foundation, Inc., through the initiative of Ms. Ciara Sotto, donated essential supplies to the Philippine General Hospital Tuesday, June 1, 2021. Sotto's call for donations enabled the foundation to donate diapers for babies, PediaSure milk for children who are critically ill, baby wipes, surgical gloves and masks, pulse oximeters, sphygmomanometers (blood pressure instrument), alcohol and bath soaps, among others.





**COVID-PROOFING THE INSTITUTION:** In an effort to keep the business of lawmaking unhampered, the Senate of the Philippines adapted changes in addition to the COVID-19 minimum health protocols in order to make the Senate a safe place for senators and its employees.

## OUTSTANDING EMPLOYEES COMMENDED

By Jeff Antiporda



**BIG WINNER:** Arriel Ahorro of the Office of the Sergeant-at-Arms is the 2019 Most Outstanding Senate Secretariat Employee

The selection of winners was changed eventually to one winner each department regardless of rank and the winners received P2,500 each.

The selection process was again changed to only one overall winner for the entire Senate who will receive a cash award of P35,000, a plaque of distinction and a 14k karat gold Senate pin.

"This is the Senate's way of saying thank you to the services being provided by many of our employees and this is also our way of giving recognition to employees who work every day and give their best," said Atty. Arnel Jose Bañas, Deputy Secretary for Administrative and Financial Services, during the awarding ceremony held last December 15, 2021.

"I also thank the officers and staff of the office of the Senate Sergeant-at-Arms, especially our Senate officers for choosing me (as the most outstanding employee)," Ahorro said.

Ahorro was one of the four departmental awardees, who also include Angelique Patag, from the Office of the Secretary; Geralice Galang, from the Legislation department; and Audrey Ruth Angcos-Daleon, from the Administrative and Financial Services.

Senate President Vicente C. Sotto III expressed his gratitude to Ahorro for his dedication in fulfilling his duties and providing genuine public service for the people by ensuring the effective and continuous operations of the senators' offices, notwithstanding the threat to health and safety brought by the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Your exemplary performance in the Senate deserves the highest possible accolade. You have served our country as an integral part of the Senate of the Philippines"



**SENATE'S OUTSTANDING EMPLOYEES:** Recipients of the 2019 Senate Secretariat Exemplary Employee Awards (from left seated) Audrey Ruth Angcos-Daleon, Ariel Ahorro, Geralice Galang and Angelique Patag pose with Secretariat officials and employees.

competent workforce," Sotto said in is congratulatory message.

As public servants, Sotto underscored the importance of maintaining a stable, dependable and strong management to be able to perform their duties not only as a branch of government but also as a partner of every Filipino.

Senate Majority Leader Juan Miguel "Migz" F. Zubiri, also congratulated Ahorro and other awardees and nominees, stressing that they deserved to be recognized for their service not only to the Senate but to the country.

"The Senate will not function, and we won't be able to pass law if it not for all of you especially during the pandemic. That is why through your hard work, we were able to fulfil our legislative duties," Zubiri said.

Sen. Ramon "Bong" Revilla Jr., chairman of the Committee on Civil Service, Government

Mr. Arriel Ahorro, who has been serving the Office of the Sergeant-at-Arms (OSAA) for 35 long years, bested other nominees for the "2019 Senate Secretariat Exemplary Employee Awards" after he was chosen as the most outstanding Senate Secretariat Employee.

The Senate Secretariat Exemplary Employee Awards (SSEEA) is an annual search for outstanding employees administered by the Human Resources Management Service in recognition and gratitude for the exemplary service rendered by employees to the Senate of the Philippines.

The award was based on a policy order issued during the term of former Senate President Edgardo Angara in the 9th Congress and was revived in 1998 by former Senate President Marcelo Fernan.

There used to be several awardees divided into two groups, from the rank and file and from the supervisors, and winners are selected from each department.

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**SENATORS IN ACTION : DESPITE THE CRISIS,**

**THE SENATE CONTINUES TO SERVE THE FILIPINO PEOPLE**









## THREE GRADUATING 'PILLARS' OF THE SENATE

By Jeff Antiporda

Three of the most seasoned members of the Philippine Senate will bid the chamber goodbye next year after serving their two consecutive terms, leaving behind a good, lasting legacy that will benefit the country's current and coming generations.

Senate President Vicente C. Sotto III, Senate President Pro-Tempore Ralph Recto and Minority Leader Franklin Drilon, considered as the three "pillars" of the upper chamber, will be ending their second six-year term on June 30, 2022.



Senate President Vicente Sotto III

As Senate President, Sotto has made sure that the chamber would be able to provide solutions to problems besetting the country particularly in addressing issues brought by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Senate was able to swiftly pass the Bayanihan to Heal as One Act (Bayanihan 1) and the Bayanihan to Recover as One Act (Bayanihan 2) that enabled the government to respond to the challenges brought by the pandemic, including providing relief packages to jumpstart the recovery of the Philippine economy.

Sotto also authored the Doktor para sa Bayan Act or Republic Act (RA) No. 11509 that established a Medical Scholarship and Return Service (MSRS) program for deserving students in state universities and colleges (SUCs) or partner private higher education institutions (PHEIs) in regions where no SUCs offer a medical course.

"I believe that the Senate was never remiss in providing solutions to the problems being faced by our country, especially during this time of the pandemic," Sotto said in an earlier interview with the Senate media.

Since his return to the Senate in 2010, Sotto was never late or absent in plenary sessions and was considered an expert on the Rules of the Senate and has a vast institutional memory.

Sotto, during his term as senator, sponsored and authored more than a hundred laws, making him one of the most prolific senators.

He authored the Comprehensive Dangerous Drugs Act of 2002 (Republic Act 9165), which served as the government's framework in battling illegal drugs, the Family



Senate President Vicente Sotto III

Courts Act of 1997 (RA 8369), which established family courts with exclusive jurisdiction over child and family cases.

He also introduced the Kasambahay Law (RA 10361) for the protection and welfare of domestic workers and co-authored The Anti-Hazing Law of 2018 (RA 11053) which prohibited hazing and imposed harsher penalties on organizers and participants in hazing.

Sotto also held several positions in the upper chamber including as Majority Leader from 2002 to 2004 and again from 2010 to 2013. He also served briefly as Minority Leader in 2002.

Sotto considered his family as his best treasures, and his untarnished record as a public servant, as his lasting legacy.

### Recto: A Dedicated Legislator

Recto was known for his competence, compassion and hard work who approached legislation with a passion to make a better life for the Filipino people.

Before joining the Senate, Recto served three consecutive terms as Representative of the 5th district of Batangas and even held the distinction of being the youngest elected member of the House of Representatives during the 9th Congress.



Senate President Pro-Tempore Ralph Recto

As a neophyte senator during the 12th Congress, Recto served as Deputy Majority Floor Leader and headed the Committee on Ways and Means, the Committee on Trade and Commerce and the Committee on Accounts.

In his first term as senator, Recto authored significant bills that boosted the economy and improved the lives of the people like the

Lifting of the 70 percent cap on input value added tax (VAT), Special Purpose Vehicle Act and its Extension, Excluding Several Services from VAT Coverage, Restoring the Tax Exemption of Offshore Banking Units (OBUs) and Foreign Currency Deposit Units (FCDUs), Amendments to the Base Conversion and Development Authority (BCDA) and the BCDA's One-Time Tax Amnesty, Philippine Overseas Shipping Act, and the Domestic Shipping Act, Barangay Microbusiness Enterprise Act, Rent Control Act and Rental Reform Act.

He was also responsible for the Amendments to the National Internal Revenue Code, Rationalization of Excise Tax on Automobiles Increasing the Excise Tax Rates on Alcohol and Tobacco Products, Rationalizing the Provisions of Documentary Stamp Tax, Attrition Act of 2005, General Tax Amnesty and Expanding the Jurisdiction of the Court of Tax Appeals (CTA).

Recto however failed in his reelection bid in 2007 apparently because of his support for the E-VAT law in the Senate. The said measure was later credited as one of the reasons for the country's stable economy and its benefits are still being felt even at present.

Recto made a Senate comeback in 2010 and was made chairman of the Committee on Ways and Means and later held the Senate President Pro-tempore position.



Senate President Pro-Tempore Ralph Recto

It was during this period where he introduced landmark legislations related to education like the K to 12, Unified Student Financial Assistance System for Tertiary Education (UniFAST), Open High School System, Open Learning and Distance Education Act, and Ladderized Education Act.

He also authored laws making mandatory PhilHealth coverage for senior citizens, additional benefits for Persons with Disabilities, Centenarians Act, and increasing the tax-exempt ceiling on 13th-month pay and other benefits, and extension of the Agricultural Competitiveness Enhancement Fund, among others.

Recto won his reelection bid in 2016 and pursued his advocacy in defending the Filipino people in consumer issues like universal health care, social security, oil price, electric power, transportation fare and services, telecommunication services, license plates, and rice supply and pricing.

At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic,

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Recto initiated budget priorities that were necessary not only to stem the spread of the virus but also to speed up the economic recovery which included support for health programs particularly funding for testing, isolation and quarantine, contact tracing, treatment, and eventually for the purchase and logistics of COVID-19 vaccines.

Recto also backed budget allocation for social amelioration programs to alleviate the plight of those who were without income because of the lockdowns as well as initiatives intended to soften the impact of an economic downturn that benefitted the micro, small, and medium enterprises, cooperatives, hospitals, tourism and overseas Filipino workers.

Recto's deep sense of equity and fairness defined his balanced handling and scrutiny of legislative measures and issues with great value on the people's needs.

## Senate's Big Man

His moniker, "Big Man" of the Senate doesn't only refer to his appearance but even more to his achievements as a lawmaker and as a member of the Cabinet during the time of former presidents Corazon Aquino and Fidel V. Ramos.

Apart from his legislative skills and mastery of the parliamentary rules, Drilon's good performance and integrity as a public servant have been proven many times and his almost three decades in public service was a testament to that.

He held the distinction of being the only senator elected Senate President four times particularly during the 10th, 11th, 12th, and 13th Congresses.

Prior to his stint at the Senate, Drilon served as Deputy Minister of the Ministry of



Senate Minority Floor Leader Franklin Drilon

Labor and Employment in 1986, Secretary of the Department of Labor and Employment from 1987 to 1990, Secretary of the Department of Justice from 1990 to 1991 and 1992 to 1995, and Executive Secretary from 1991 to 1992.

Drilon's main focus in crafting priority legislation was vast – from judicial reforms and transparency in government transactions to streamlining the bureaucracy and modernizing the economy.

His advocacy was centered on pursuing honest, efficient and responsive governance and this could be seen in his numerous proposed measures which were now part of the laws of the land.

Drilon has authored and sponsored numerous landmark laws such as the Government-Owned and Controlled Corporation (GOCC) Governance Act, Amendments to the Sandiganbayan Law, Sin Tax Reform Law, Graphic Health Warning Act and the Marina Law.

He was also responsible for the Citizenship Retention and Reacquisition Act, Expanded Senior Citizens Act, Foreign

Investments Liberalization Act, and Overseas Absentee Voting Act, Amendments to the Revised Penal Code, the Philippine Identification System Act, Anti-Money Laundering Act and the Revised Corporation Code, among others.

In his 34 years of outstanding service to the nation, Drilon received numerous awards and citations including "Philippine Legion of Honor (Degree of Commander)" by President Corazon Aquino and the Grand Cordon of the Order of the Rising Sun by Japan's Emperor Akihito and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.

Drilon has pushed for measures to prohibit political dynasties, strengthen the political party system, amend the Public Service Law and the Retail Trade Liberalization Act, ban waste importation, and increase public teachers' pay, among others.



Senate Minority Floor Leader Franklin Drilon

Of the three graduating senators, Drilon is the only one who plans to retire from public service once his term ends in June 2022. Sotto is seeking the vice presidency while Recto is vying for a seat in the House of Representatives in 2022.

## Sotto leaves legacy... from page 3

the continuity of benefits being received by both regular and non-regular employees.

Section 1 of Article IV of the regularization of employment states that the Senate and the SENADO shall strongly support the regularization of qualified casual employees of the Senate who shall be given equal opportunity in the filling-up of

vacant positions.

To be able to accommodate the casual employees, the Senate management may consider the creation of additional positions, if warranted, and in accordance with pertinent rules and regulations.

The Senate also agreed to conduct a review of the position descriptions of various

positions under the Senate secretariat to ensure that they are appropriate to the needs of the institution.

Upgrading and reclassification of positions will not be limited to regular employees of the Senate because under this new provision, the management agreed to conduct a review of positions every three years.

## Outstanding Employees... from page 8

Reorganization and Professional Regulation, commended the SSEEA awardees as he recognized their "outstanding" work ethics and performance of their duties and functions.

"It is my honor to congratulate the most outstanding Senate Secretariat exemplary employee and all the department level awardees of the 2019 Senate Secretariat Exemplary Employee Awards," he added.

Senate Secretary Myra Marie Villarica also expressed her appreciation to the awardees and hoped that the recognition they received would inspire them and the rest of the Senate employees to strive further to become a better version.

"You have impressed me not only with your excellence in the work that you do, but also with your grit and your diligence. May we all remain steadfast in our commitment to contribute substantially to our beloved

institution and to nation building," Villarica added.

Senate Sergeant-at-Arms MGen. Renato C. Samonte (Ret.) also lauded the awardees for exerting so much effort to accomplish their assigned tasks extraordinarily and for exhibiting the best standards of public service.

Deputy Secretary for Legislation Edwin Bellen challenged the awardees and all employees of the institution to further aspire to become responsible, inspiring, and exemplary and be a greater influence for good.

"My fellow workers in the Senate, there will be more awardees amongst you in the coming years. Our awardees today are your models. If they were able to do it, so can you," Bellen added.

In congratulating the awardees and nominees, Deputy Secretary for External

Affairs and Relations Enrique Luis D. Papa expressed the belief that more than money and recognition Senate employees will be more interested in doing what is right and doing it the best way they could.

There were a total of 26 nominees from the Administrative and Financial Services, Legislation, and the Office of the Secretary and from among the nominees, four would be chosen as departmental awardees.

From the four awardees, the SSEEA executive committee which is headed by the Senate Secretary and with the Senate Sergeant-at-Arms and all deputy secretaries as members will select the most outstanding employee.

The awarding was supposed to be held last year but did not push through because of the pandemic.



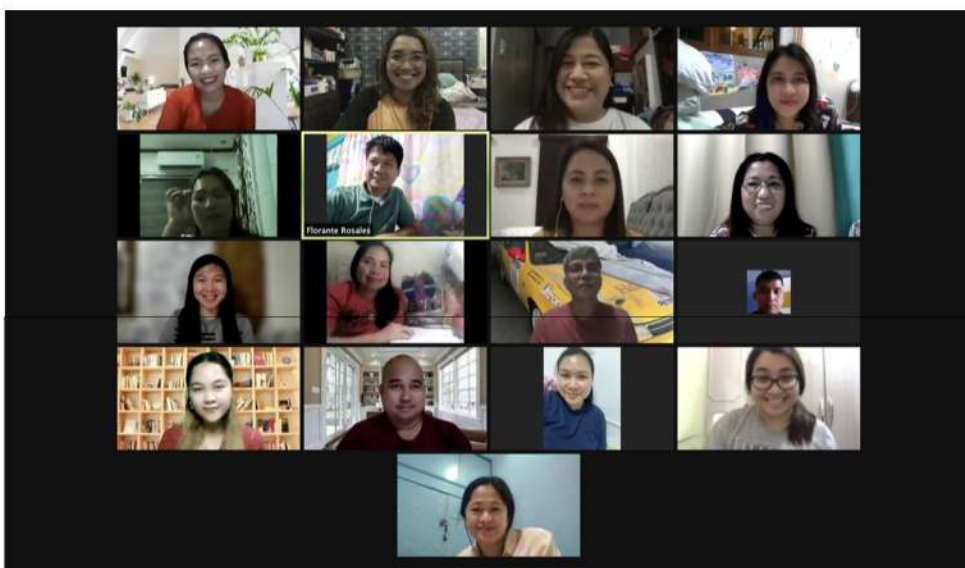


## SUPPORTING EMPLOYEES' QUEST FOR KNOWLEDGE

By JP Lopez



**CONTINUING EDUCATION:** Twenty five Senate employees double time to earn a Master's degree in public management at the Philippine Christian University while working full time in the Senate.



**UPDATING KNOWLEDGE:** Senator's media relations officers and Secretariat employees take up courses leading to Master in Public Management and Governance degree at the Universidad de Manila.

The Senate employees' pursuit for higher education never stops.

In line with career development program, about 60 employees have enrolled in master's degree programs at the Pamantasan ng Lunsod ng Maynila, Unibersidad de Manila and the Philippine Christian University.

The Sandigan ng mga Empleyadong Nagkakaisa sa Adhikain ng Demokratikong Organisasyon (SENADO) launched an off-campus program in accordance with the recently-signed collective negotiation agreement (CNA) between the Senate of the Philippines and the union.

Article VIII (Sec.1) of the CNA states the "The Senate shall establish a career development program which shall ensure equitable distribution of career development opportunities to all

employees subject to the provisions of pertinent legislative and executive

Under Section 7 of the same provision, it states that the Senate, with the participation of SENADO shall develop an education and scholarship program for all employees, especially the rank and file. The program covers both the undergraduate and graduate studies. It also covers, but not limited to study leave, local and foreign scholarships, studies, trainings, seminars, workshops, conventions, conferences and other programs.

The program, which started in October this year, has attracted 21 Senate employees who are now enrolled at the Pamantasan ng Lunsod ng Maynila - Master in Public Administration.

The Distance Learning Program started in 2009 with the creation of SENADO's Education Committee under the leadership of Perla Mayor. It serves as a machinery to broaden employees' awareness about their rights and raise their consciousness on issues affecting their welfare and interest.

As part of the union's service to its members and expanding the Committee's task, it pioneered the Distance Learning Program during that time aimed at helping undergraduate employees complete a bachelor's degree. Through the efforts of SENADO, the Distance Learning Program of the Pamantasan ng Lungsod ng Maynila was offered to the Senate employees.

The first batch, composed of one class, had produced graduates of the Bachelor in Public Administration.

The second batch, under the leadership of Rosella Eugenio, had three classes. It included a class for the Masters in Public Administration that benefited not just the rank-and-file employees but also some officers and directors. The tuition fees are being shouldered by the students and classes are being held at the Senate committee rooms every Friday and/or Saturday.

The same program was adopted by SENADO during the term of its former president Mr. Dakila Millamena. It was the last program implemented by the union since 2016.

Currently, 13 senators' media relations officers and three Senate secretariat personnel are enrolled at the Unibersidad de Manila. They are now in the third semester and are hoping to graduate in June next year.

Hoping to graduate also in June are 31 master's degree students at the Philippine Christian University, three of them are non-Senate employees. They have just finished their third semester and are expected to take their comprehensive examinations next year.

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## NOTES ON THE PANDEMIC FROM AN OSAA OFFICER

By Gil Merino Valdez

As I am writing this, the second year of the pandemic is about to end. Less than five hundred daily COVID-19 cases are being reported compared to about 20,000 just three months ago. Much has happened since last year. Sad news and anxiety have filled-up social media and private conversations.

In the first lockdown, which we avoided calling a lockdown the Office of the Sergeant-at-Arms, with MGen. Rene C. Samonte AFP (Ret) at the helm, a contingent of battle-tested personnel secured the Senate from March 17 to May 15 of last year. The rest of the employees took safe refuge in their homes for much of the Enhanced Community Quarantine period. We monitored instructions and the news from our "personal" bunkers.

When skeleton duty started right after the regular session of the Senate, we reported to work with trepidation. The first rapid testing that ensued resulted in several "positive" staff and officers. The water-cooler conversation (although there was really no water-cooler conversation) was the question "who's next?"

I made sure I applied alcohol on my hands like the others every single time we handled or touched something, like doorknobs and ballpens. The Solbac supply easily ran out. I had a Lysol canister in my bag (just to make sure I'd have something to spray with). We all carried a small alcohol plastic bottle either attached to belts or bags.

We made a collective sigh of relief when the Senate made sure a regular disinfection procedure was done after office hours and on weekends.

The first tragic news then started trickling in. Informal channel (or what they call "tsismis") told us of cases in several offices. It hit home just a couple of months. A former colleague died in the US, a suspected case of COVID. A Senate employee had difficulty breathing in the parking lot. He would later die in a hospital. The OSAA had a suspected case and a death.

This year, the Medical and Dental Bureau (MDB) conducted a vaccination program for Senate personnel including the Philcare and the Alexis security staff.

The timing couldn't be more than an act of grace and a stroke of fortunate foresight. Just a month after the bulk of the vaccines were shot into our arms, the Delta variant came rushing in. Several of my colleagues and close friends turned out positive including their family members. Two had severe conditions but luckily survived. Two former Senate employees wouldn't be so lucky.

I had to undergo a battery of RT-PCR and antigen tests just to perform my assignment at the SONA.

I personally begged for PPEs. Fortunately, the Senate Spouses Foundation, Inc. thru the efforts of Ms. Ciara Sotto, Dir.



**IN DETENTION:** Personnel of the Office of the Sergeant-at-Arms headed by MGen. Rene Samonte, Ret. (right) escort Pharmally Pharmaceutical Corp. executive Linconn Ong (in blue polo) to his detention room in the Senate, September 21, 2021.



**PASAY JAIL-BOUND:** Office of the Sergeant-at-Arms officers accompany Pharmally's Linconn Ong (in white shirt) and Mohit Dargani (in gray hoodie) to the Pasay City Jail after senators ordered their transfer, November 29, 2021.

Asuncion Gumabay and Dr. Cristeta Cocjin, PPEs were delivered to us as we started monitoring the entry of employees and those under quarantine.

The OSAA-Security Enforcement Service (SES) worked hand-in-hand with the MDB in monitoring the cases in the Senate. In the middle of this year, we watched in horror as the numbers climbed daily from about twenty to a hundred and then to more than two-hundred. As the numbers climbed we even chatted in a Facebook Messenger group until the wee hours of the morning.

In the cases involving OSAA-SES personnel, Dr. Renato Sison has been giving us advice and updates as late as one o'clock in the morning.

Delta variant or none, the OSAA had to deploy several teams to implement the Arrest

Orders from the Blue Ribbon Committee. It felt surreal going out in face masks and face shields, constantly spraying alcohol, and dealing with security and building administrators in PPEs and hazmats. It was like stepping into those Hollywood disaster movies about contagions and zombie apocalypses.

I finally boarded a plane, after awhile, last month, going to Cebu, looking for someone under legislative contempt. In some portions of Cebu City, the streets were almost empty. I was told the hospital in front of the hotel where we stayed, had patients lining up to enter the ER on the length of the road just two months ago, which now housed empty isolation tents.

I got my booster shot on December 4, 2021.





## EMPLOYEES ELECT NEW SEF BOARD OF TRUSTEES

By JP Lopez



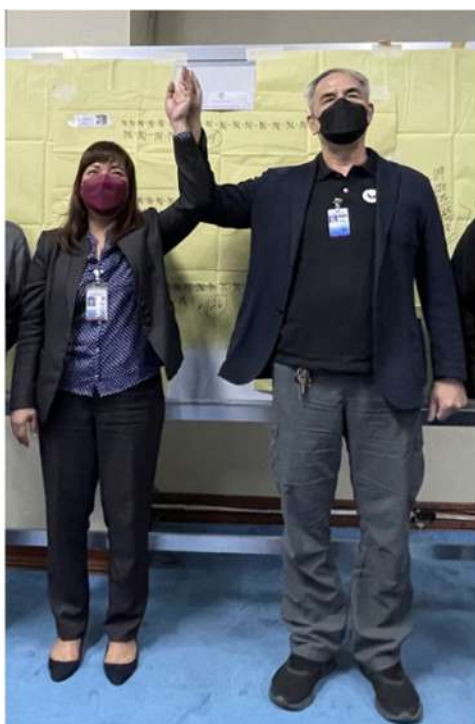
NEW SEF BOARD OF TRUSTEES: Senate Secretary Myra Marie Villarica (extreme left) inducts the new set of Board of Trustees of the Senate Employees' Fund Wednesday, December 15, 2021.



NEW SEF OFFICERS: Dir. Gen. Ronald Golding (center) raises the hands of Mark Christopher Zulueta (left) and Bienvenido Dimen (right), who were proclaimed winners in the Senate Employees Fund Board of Trustees elections held December 6 to 9, 2021.

Senate Secretary Myra Marie Villarica inducted the new members of the Board of Trustees of the Senate Employees Fund (SEF) last December 15, 2021.

The new officers are Dir. Ma. Antoniette Aristozza chief of the Plenary Affairs Bureau; Famirexie Gallares (Office of the Senate Sergeant-At-Arms); Bienvenido Dimen (Office of the External Affairs and Relations); and Mark Christopher Zulueta (Property Procurement Service).



SEF ELECTIONS: Famirexie Gallares of the Office of the Sergeant-at-Arms got the most number of votes to represent employees in Salary Grades 14 to 25 in the Senate Employees' Fund Board of Trustees. Also in the photo is Dir. Gen. Ronald Golding of the Senate Economic Planning Office, chief operating officer of SEF.

Aristozza, who ran unopposed, represents officers with Salary Grades 26 - 31. She got the support of 70 directors who voted during the three-day election. Gallares, on the other hand, represents employees with Salary Grades 14 - 25. She got 126 votes of 370 ballots cast in a three-way close fight. Zulueta and Dimen represent Salary Grade 4 - 13. Zulueta got

199 votes, while Dimen got the second spot with 163 votes of 274 ballots cast.

Elections were held on December 6, 7, and 9. Canvassing of ballots were done in the afternoon after the last day of elections.

The new members of the Board of Trustees will join Villarica, chairperson of the BOT; Chief Executive Officer Director General Ronald Golding, Senate Economic Planning Office; Director Xerxes Nitafan, Assistant Chief Executive Officer; Director Levy Ordoñez, head of the Financial Management Bureau; Director Juliet Cervo, accountant; Director Felicisima Dato, treasurer; Ms. Melanie Inocentes, Auditor; Director Rhodora Alindada, loan officer; Director Ma. Asuncion Gumabay, secretary; and Joel Sigue, membership officer.

From an initial capital of P16.5 million when SEF was established in 2010 during the administration of Senate President Juan Ponce Enrile, the Fund's assets as of June 30, 2021 increased to P233.408 million, or an increase of P33.056 million from the previous fiscal year's figure of P200.352 million.

This was contained in a memorandum submitted by Golding to Senate President Vicente C. Sotto III dated August 3, 2021.

The 16.5-percent increase in assets was attributed to contributions collected and added to the combined employer's and employees' shareholdings \*(net of withdrawals), and the income netted for the fiscal year.

For fiscal year 2021, the fund realized an excess of receipts over disbursements after general reserve fund or net income after general reserve fund of P16.216 million from its lending operations, the highest in SEF history.

The P16.216-million income was declared as dividends and was distributed to the account of all qualified members of the Fund.

Despite the decrease in loan releases during pandemic, the Fund was able to earn a higher income due to continuous collection of dues from borrowers that resulted in an increase of P3.867 million over the P12.349 million earned in the previous year.

Due to pandemic, the total loan processed and released for Fiscal Year 2021 is P76.079 million, lower than the P225.327 million loaned out in FY-2020.





## 105<sup>TH</sup> SENATE ANNIVERSARY: 'PAG-IGPAW' CONCERT DELIVERS MESSAGE OF HOPE

By Leonard Postrado

Philosophers Plato and Pythagoras believe that music has a power to heal the aching bodies of men as it takes them to a familiar home base within themselves. More than just a mood booster, music is said to give meaning to life.

Recognizing the therapeutic properties of music to people, the Senate held its first-ever virtual concert called "Pag-Igpaw: Awitin Alay sa Bayan," to cap the week-long celebration of the institution's 105th founding anniversary last October 28, 2021.

Among those who performed during the more than two-hour concert were artists Ciara Sotto, Alyana Cabral, Cookie Chua, Bayang Barrios, Gary Granada and Chickoy Pura. Senate Secretary Myra Villarica also serenaded virtual concert watchers with her piano rendition of the songs "Put Your Head on My Shoulders" by Paul Anka and Ed Sheeran's hit single "Perfect."



**HIDDEN TALENT:** Senate Secretary Myra Marie Villarica unveils a hidden talent when she played Paul Anka's "Put Your Head on My Shoulders" and Ed Sheeran's "Perfect" on piano during the Pag-igpaw virtual concert October 28, 2021.

Senate President Vicente Sotto III led senators in giving their heart-warming congratulatory messages to all the Senate employees during the virtual concert.

"As we all celebrate the founding anniversary of the Senate of the Philippines, I want to express how incredibly grateful I am to all our Senate employees and officers, from our security personnel, utilities, legislative staff, and others who have fulfilled their duties notwithstanding the threats to our health and safety because of this pandemic. I applaud all of you for your dedication in providing genuine public service for our people by ensuring our offices' effective and continuous operation even amid this public health crisis," Sotto said in his opening remarks.

"The COVID-19 pandemic has brought new waves of challenges for our country, now that we are toward the process of healing, we should take the initiative to extend our help and our assistance in areas that were badly hit by this pandemic. Now, more than ever, we are in the best position to help those who are in need," he said.



**MUSICIANS SERENADE SENATE EMPLOYEES:** As part of the celebration of the Senate's 105th anniversary, officers and employees treated to a night of music with performances from Ciara Sotto, Cookie Chua, Gary Granada and others.

Sandigan ng Empleyadong Nagkakaisa sa Adhikain ng Demokratikong Organisasyon (SENADO) President Rosel Eugenio said the Senate labor union, through the Gender and Development Focal Point, suggested to hold the virtual concert in order to give employees the strength to carry on amid the COVID-19 pandemic, which has been hard for everyone.

Eugenio noted that the term "Pag-Igpaw" is a Visayan term which means to move forward or jump over any obstacles.

"Why Pag-igpaw? Because we believe that we all faced yet another challenging year brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic and yet, we are still here and very much alive. We are still here, banding together so that each of us would be able to get through this pandemic," Eugenio said.

For Eugenio, the concert was not only a celebration of the 105th anniversary of the Senate but also a celebration of life and struggles of many Filipinos for equal opportunities, wages, and rights.

"We all know that every Filipino suffered in this pandemic. Relief efforts and vaccination rollout for our kababayan are slow. Because of the hard lockdowns, many Filipinos suffered from hunger. Many industries and businesses folded-up, resulting in the job loss of Filipinos," she lamented.

"Despite all these hardships, we thrived and prevailed. We succeeded because we helped each other to survive amid our struggles during the pandemic," Eugenio said.



**BEST CHRISTMAS DOOR:** The Legislative Committee C's entry bags first place in the Christmas Door Decoration Contest with the theme 'Christmas Feel of Being Safe and Free.'



**DOOR DECORATION CONTEST WINNERS:** The Legislative Committee C receive P25,000 for winning 1st place in the Christmas Door Decoration Contest, followed by the Management Planning and Operations Audit Bureau at 2nd place; and the Human Resources and Management Service at 3rd place.