



REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES
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Journal

SESSION NO. 64

Monday to Wednesday, May 11 to 13, 2020

EIGHTEENTH CONGRESS
FIRST REGULAR SESSION

SESSION NO. 64
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CALL TO ORDER

At 3:00 p.m., Monday, May 11, 2020, the Senate President, Hon. Vicente C. Sotto III, called the session to order.

PRAYER

Senator Ramon “Bong” Revilla, Jr. led the prayer, to wit:

Our Most Gracious Heavenly Father,

We honor You as we gather today in this Chamber.

Cover us, Lord, with Your love and wisdom, and under Your wings we will find refuge.

Ama, sadyang napakabigat po ng dinaraan ng aming bansa at ng buong mundo. The COVID-19 pandemic has hit us very hard, especially those most vulnerable.

Kaya’t sa pagtalakay po namin ng napakahalagang lehislyasyon ngayon, pastolin Niyo kami tungo sa tamang

direksyon upang matulungan ang aming bayan hindi lamang upang makabangon at makapagsimulang muli, kundi upang makapamuhay nang matiwasay sa pagpasok ng tinatawag naming “new normal.”

I pray that we fix our eyes and our hearts on You with humility. Fill this place with Your Most Holy presence, Your wisdom, and Your love.

Father, it has always been Your grace and Your mercy that made us who we are. This time, I pray that You enable us to be dispensers of Your unlimited grace to everyone around us.

Nananalig kami na Ikaw lang ang may kapangyarihan at Hari ng aming bansa.

Lord, in this ordeal, may we respond in faith and not in fear.

Proverbs 24:10 reminds us, “If you faint in the day of adversity, your strength is small.”

Nawa’y ang aming pananampalataya sa Inyo ang manaig at kaming mga

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Pilipino ay magkaisa sa pagpapatupad ng lahat ng mga alituntunin ng pamahalaan tungo sa tagumpay laban sa COVID-19.

Lord, pour out Your bountiful blessings and protection in us. *Nawa'y gabayan Niyo po kami at bigyan ng liwanag sa lahat ng desisyon na kailangan naming gawin.*

Iadya Mo ang bawat Pilipino sa lahat ng panganib at ipagkaloob po Ninyo ang agarang paggaling sa aming mga kababayan na nagdurusa sa nasabing karam-daman.

We know that we will overcome this because we have You, and as You said in Your word, "Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord."

Amen.

NATIONAL ANTHEM

Everyone remained standing for the singing of the national anthem.

ROLL CALL

Upon direction of the Senate President, the Secretary of the Senate, Atty. Myra Marie D. Villarica, called the roll, to which the following senators responded:

Angara, S.	Marcos, I. R.
Binay, M. L. N. S.	Pangilinan, F. N.
Cayetano, P. S.	Poe, G.
Dela Rosa, R. B. M.	Recto, R. G.
Drilon, F. M.	Revilla Jr., R. B.
Gatchalian, W.	Sotto III, V. C.
Go, C. L. T.	Tolentino, F. T. N.
Gordon, R. J.	Villanueva, J.
Hontiveros, R.	Villar, C. A.
Lacson, P. M.	Zubiri, J. M. F.
Lapid, M. L. M.	

With 21 senators present, the Chair declared the presence of a quorum.

Senators Pacquiao and Pimentel arrived after the roll call.

Senator De Lima was unable to attend the session as she was under detention.

APPROVAL OF THE JOURNAL

Upon motion of Senator Zubiri, there being no objection, the Body dispensed with the reading of the Journal of Session No. 63 (May 4-6, 2020) and considered it approved.

REFERENCE OF BUSINESS

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

BILLS ON FIRST READING

Senate Bill No. 1515, entitled

AN ACT PROVIDING LIABILITY PROTECTION FOR PRIVATE ESTABLISHMENTS AND THEIR OWNERS FROM CORONAVIRUS-RELATED CLAIMS OF THEIR EMPLOYEES

Introduced by Senator Sotto III

To the Committee on Trade, Commerce and Entrepreneurship

Senate Bill No. 1516, entitled

AN ACT AUTHORIZING THE COMMISSION ON ELECTIONS TO USE AND IMPLEMENT AN AUTOMATED AND ONLINE SYSTEM FOR VOTER REGISTRATION, PROVIDING FUNDS THEREFOR, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

Introduced by Senator Villanueva

To the Committees on Electoral Reforms and People's Participation; Science and Technology; and Finance

Senate Bill No. 1517, entitled

AN ACT PROVIDING SENIOR CITIZENS FREE MOVIE ACCESS TO ALL MOVIE THEATERS NATION-WIDE AND PROVIDING FUNDS THEREFOR

Introduced by Senator Gatchalian

**To the Committees on Social Justice,
Welfare and Rural Development; and Finance**

Senate Bill No. 1518, entitled

AN ACT ESTABLISHING A NETWORK
OF POP-UP BICYCLE LANES AND
EMERGENCY PATHWAYS FOR USE
DURING THE DURATION OF THE
COVID-19 PANDEMIC, AND FOR
OTHER PURPOSES

Introduced by Senator Cayetano

**To the Committees on Public Services;
Public Works; and Finance**

RESOLUTIONS

Proposed Senate Resolution No. 395, entitled

RESOLUTION EXPRESSING THE SENSE
OF THE SENATE TO URGE THE
NATIONAL TELECOMMUNICA-
TIONS COMMISSION (NTC) TO
RECONSIDER ITS CEASE AND
DESIST ORDER AGAINST ABS CBN
CORPORATION AND TO ALLOW
THE CONTINUOUS OPERATION OF
ABS CBN CORPORATION, ITS SUB-
SIDIARIES AND AFFILIATES ABS
CBN CONVERGENCE INC., SKY
CABLE CORPORATION, AND
AMCARA BROADCASTING NET-
WORK, INC., PENDING THE DIS-
POSITION OF ITS FRANCHISE
RENEWAL

Introduced by Senators Hontiveros, Zubiri,
Drilon, Recto, Angara, Binay, Cayetano,
Gatchalian, De Lima, Lapid, Pacquiao,
Pangilinan and Villanueva

To the Committee on Rules

Proposed Senate Resolution No. 396, entitled

RESOLUTION DIRECTING THE APPRO-
PRIATE SENATE COMMITTEE TO
CONDUCT AN INQUIRY, IN AID
OF LEGISLATION, ON THE ACTUA-
TIONS OF THE PAGCOR IN LOBBY-
ING FOR AN EXCEPTION IN FAVOR

OF PHILIPPINE OFFSHORE GAM-
ING OPERATORS (POGOS) DURING
THE COMMUNITY QUARANTINE
IMPOSED IN THE PHILIPPINES
AMIDST THE THREAT OF COVID-19

Introduced by Senators Pangilinan and
Hontiveros

**To the Committee on Games and Amuse-
ment**

Proposed Senate Resolution No. 397, entitled

RESOLUTION DIRECTING THE SENATE
COMMITTEE ON LABOR, EMPLOY-
MENT, AND HUMAN RESOURCES
DEVELOPMENT AND OTHER APPRO-
PRIATE SENATE COMMITTEES, TO
CONDUCT AN INQUIRY, IN AID OF
LEGISLATION, ON THE ADEQUACY
OF PROGRAMS FOR AFFECTED
WORKERS IN THE PHILIPPINES IN
LIGHT OF THE CORONAVIRUS
DISEASE (COVID-19) PANDEMIC,
THE POTENTIAL MASSIVE EMPLOY-
MENT DISPLACEMENTS AND THE
READINESS OF THE COUNTRY'S
RECOVERY PLAN

Introduced by Senator Villanueva

**To the Committee on Labor, Employment
and Human Resources Development**

Proposed Senate Resolution No. 398, entitled

RESOLUTION EXPRESSING THE PRO-
FOUND SYMPATHY AND SINCERE
CONDOLENCES OF THE SENATE
OF THE PHILIPPINES ON THE DEATH
OF ONE OF THE PHILIPPINES'
MOST TALENTED DIRECTORS,
MAURICE RUIZ DE LUZURIAGA
GALLAGA OTHERWISE KNOWN AS
PEQUE GALLAGA, AND HONOR-
ING HIS CONTRIBUTIONS TO
PHILIPPINE CINEMA

Introduced by Senator Zubiri

To the Committee on Rules

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COMMUNICATION

Letter from the Executive Secretary of the Office of the President, respectfully transmitting to the Senate the 6th Report of the President to the Joint Congressional Oversight Committee, pursuant to Section 5 of Republic Act No. 11469, otherwise known as the Bayanihan to Heal as One Act.

To the Committee on Finance

PROPOSED SENATE RESOLUTION NO. 395

Upon motion of Senator Zubiri, there being no objection, the Body considered Proposed Senate Resolution No. 395, entitled

RESOLUTION EXPRESSING THE SENSE OF THE SENATE TO URGE THE NATIONAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION (NTC) TO RECONSIDER ITS CEASE AND DESIST ORDER AGAINST ABS CBN CORPORATION AND TO ALLOW THE CONTINUOUS OPERATION OF ABS CBN CORPORATION, ITS SUBSIDIARIES AND AFFILIATES ABS CBN CONVERGENCE INC., SKY CABLE CORPORATION, AND AMCARA BROADCASTING NETWORK, INC., PENDING THE DISPOSITION OF ITS FRANCHISE RENEWAL.

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 Hontiveros for the sponsorship.

SPONSORSHIP SPEECH OF SENATOR HONTIVEROS

Senator Hontiveros delivered her sponsorship speech on Proposed Senate Resolution No. 395, as follows:

Karangalan ko po ngayong araw na i-sponsor sa Mataas na Kapulungan ang Senate Resolution Number 395. Nagpapasalamat po ako sa mga kasama kong senador na umakda ng resolusyon na ito at nakiisa sa panawagan

na himukin ang National Telecommunications Corporation na iatras ang cease and desist order laban sa ABS-CBN at ang kanyang mga subsidiaries at affiliates.

Hahayaan ko na po sa korte ang mga legal na usapin hinggil sa pagpapatuloy ng operasyon ng ABS-CBN. I do not want to preempt the courts, or even the Lower House which is currently deliberating on the network's franchise bill.

But there is a specific message I want to express today. We are in the middle of an unprecedented pandemic. Libu-libo ang nasasawi dahil sa isang virus na kahit ang health experts ay hindi pa lubusang nauunawaan. Milyun-milyon ang nagugutom. Milyun-milyon ang nawawalan ng trabaho at wala pang kasiguraduhan kung ano ang mangyayari sa mga susunod na araw o linggo. Kaalaman ang pinakamahalaga nating sandata upang labanan ito. Access to accurate and up-to-date information is absolutely crucial in ensuring that the public is a partner in health-enhancing community measures.

Marami ang nagsasabing may kakayahan naman ang ABS-CBN na makapag-broadcast sa internet. Oo, tama yun. Pero maraming Pinoy pa rin ang walang access o maayos na koneksyon sa internet. Marami ang naka-free data at walang pambili ng load para makapanood sa YouTube o Facebook live. Walang smartphone, laptop, or tablet. Marami pa rin ang walang kakayahang mag-subscribe sa cable at matali sa buwan-buwang pagbabayad. Sa mga liblib na lugar ng ating bansa, tanging radyo at telebisyon lang ang mapagkukuhanan ng impormasyon ng ating mga kababayan. Cutting off this source of information is ill-timed at best, dangerous at worst.

Hindi lang mahalaga na may access sa impormasyon. Mahalaga na ang impormasyong ito ay dumadaloy mula sa lawa ng malayang pamamahayag. A free press holds public officials accountable and helps ensure transparency in government processes. Napakaimportante nito lalo na ngayong mabilisan ang mga desisyon at literal na buhay ang nakataya.

A free press also corrects disinformation and misinformation na laganap ngayon. Fake news is best fought in the marketplace of ideas, where access to information is not restricted and the public is given the right to choose its best source of information. Hindi ba't sa mga panahong ito mas kailangan ng gobyerno ng katuwang upang labanan ang fake news? Bakit ngayon pa ito ipasasara?



Ang ABS-CBN ay araw-araw nagbabalita, pumupunta sa LGUs, mga ospital at testing centers para maibalita ang tinig ng taong bayan at gobyerno. Higit sa lahat, sinisikap nitong may broadcast operation kahit sariling kalusugan ng kanyang mga empleyado ay mailagay sa panganib.

Ako po ay naniniwala na ang mga bata-yang prinsipyong ito — access to information, malayang pamamahayag — ay hindi lang mahalaga sa panahon ng pandemya, ito ay haligi ng isang matibay na demokrasya.

Kaisa ng libu-libong empleyado ng ABS-CBN na nangangambang mawalan ng trabaho sa gitna ng napipintong krisis pang-ekonomiya, at ng milyun-milyong Pilipinong naging bahagi na ng buhay ang ABS-CBN, isinusulong ko ang resolusyon na ito.

TERMINATION OF THE PERIOD OF INTERPELLATIONS

There being no interpellation, upon motion of Senator Zubiri, there being no objection, the Body closed the period of interpellations and proceeded to the period of amendments.

TERMINATION OF THE PERIOD OF AMENDMENTS

There being no committee or individual amendment, upon motion of Senator Zubiri, there being no objection, the Body closed the period of amendments.

INQUIRY OF SENATOR LACSON

Senator Lacson asked if the resolution up for adoption was simply an expression of the sense of the Senate and does not in any way intend to preempt the House of Representatives or contravene with the Constitution, particularly Section 24, Article VI. Senator Zubiri answered in the affirmative, reiterating that the resolution was similar to that which the Body passed recently.

Noting that there was a pending petition filed by ABS-CBN before the Supreme Court, Senator Lacson asked what would happen supposing the Body adopted the resolution, as he expressed concern that the action of the Body on the resolution might be construed as an unnecessary influence on the Supreme Court.

Senator Zubiri explained that Proposed Senate Resolution No. 395 was not about the ABS-CBN

franchise as it was simply an expression of the sense of the Senate urging the National Telecommunications Commission (NTC) to reconsider its cease-and-desist order. He reminded the Body that two months earlier, the Senate unanimously passed Senate Resolution No. 40, which asked the NTC to grant provisional authority to ABS-CBN. But Senate President Sotto pointed out that Senate Resolution No. 90 was adopted before the NTC issued the cease-and-desist order.

Additionally, Senator Lacson noted that Proposed Senate Resolution No. 395 was about the cease-and-desist order of the NTC which the ABS-CBN questioned before the Supreme Court.

MANIFESTATIONS OF SENATORS ON PROPOSED RESOLUTION NO. 395

By Senate President Sotto

Senate President Sotto stated that when the time comes for the Senate to consider the ABS-CBN franchise, he would vote in favor of its renewal. But he pointed out that Proposed Senate Resolution No. 395 runs counter to the prerogative of the Executive department, the NTC particular, to come out with such a decision and that he shares the views expressed by Supreme Court Justice Antonio Carpio, national artist F. Sionil Jose, dean of the San Beda Graduate School of Law, Fr. Ranzilio Aquino, and former Senate President Juan Ponce Enrile. Thus, he said that he would abstain from voting on Proposed Senate Resolution No. 395.

By Senator Lacson

Senator Lacson likewise said that he would go along with the thinking of Senate President Sotto and would also abstain from voting on the proposed resolution at the proper time.

By Senator Tolentino

Senator Tolentino noted that Proposed Senate Resolution No. 395 resurrected the issue of the separation of powers particularly because it seeks to have the Executive department reconsider its previous order, and as had earlier been mentioned by Senate President Sotto, there was already a petition brought before a separate department which is the Supreme Court. He expressed his inclination to abstain from voting on the resolution not because he was not in favor of it, but because he was invoking the powers

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of Congress under Section 24, Article VI of the Constitution which states that franchises must originate in the House of Representatives.

By Senator Villar

Senator Villar noted that even though the Senate had previously adopted a resolution urging the NTC to give ABS-CBN a temporary franchise, the Commission had come already out with a decision which was now being questioned before the Supreme Court. She believed that the Supreme Court should decide and let the House of Representatives pass the franchise. She stated that she would abstain from voting on the resolution.

By Senator Marcos

Senator Marcos said that she would abstain from voting on the resolution for the same reasons as earlier stated by Senator Villar.

By Senator Dela Rosa

Senator Dela Rosa said that he was inclined to register an obstruction because the Senate might end up being hit with a double whammy should the NTC disregard the Senate for a second time.

By Senator Go

Senator Go said that he agreed with the view expressed by Senator Dela Rosa and, as such, indicated that he would abstain from voting and would wait for the decision of the House of Representatives.

By Senator Revilla

Senator Revilla said that he would abstain from voting, preferring that the matter be left to the House of Representatives.

By Senator Gordon

Senator Gordon said that he was voting in support of the resolution and that his decision was made on the basis of principles.

By Senator Cayetano

Preliminarily, Senator Cayetano said that she has the unique position of being the sister of House

Speaker Cayetano which was why she was privy to his position as well as of the House of Representatives which had been made public. She explained that she signed the resolution which was filed on May 7, with a notation that it was simply reiterating Senate Resolution No. 344 which had been signed by most, if not all, the Members in March of the same year.

However, she said that as a lawyer it would be best for her to refrain from expressing her views since ABS-CBN already filed a case with the Supreme Court. She said that in Proposed Senate Resolution No. 344, she had already expressed her view along with the majority of the Members on granting the network provisional authority and on allowing Congress to do its job. She believed that she ought to withdraw her signature because it would not be consistent for her as one of the authors to then abstain from voting on the resolution.

By Senator Pacquiao

Senator Pacquiao expressed his support for the resolution as he believed that the NTC ought to grant the network provisional authority while its application for renewal is with the House of Representatives. He noted that since the NTC had previously granted such authority to the CBCP which also had a pending application with the House of Representatives, not doing the same for ABS-CBN would indicate bias on the part of the NTC since it did not give the latter fair treatment on its application.

By Senator Pangilinan

Senator Pangilinan manifested his support for the resolution. He said that there had been precedents wherein the Senate took a position and approved resolutions on matters of national interest even though a case had already been filed and pending before the Supreme Court.

He recalled that in 2006, the Senate passed a resolution condemning as contrary to the Constitution Executive Order No. 464, which was then President Arroyo's executive order that prohibited executive officials from appearing before Congress, notwithstanding the fact that the executive order was subject of a petition before the Supreme Court.

He also cited the resolution expressing the sense of the Senate that the arrest of columnist Randy David and the raid on the *Daily Tribune* in 2006

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amid the declaration of a state of emergency by President Arroyo in that same year was unconstitutional and unlawful. He recalled that the resolution was adopted despite the fact that both incidents were questioned before the High Court.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR HONTIVEROS

Senator Hontiveros also made it of record that the resolution was not in any way intended to preempt the action of the House of Representatives on the issue.

ADOPTION OF PROPOSED SENATE RESOLUTION NO. 395

With the majority voting in favor, nobody voting against, and nine Members abstaining, Proposed Senate Resolution No. 395 was adopted by the Body, subject to style.

PROPOSED SENATE RESOLUTION NO. 398

Upon motion of Senator Zubiri, there being no objection, the Body considered Proposed Senate Resolution No. 398, entitled

RESOLUTION EXPRESSING THE PRO-
FOUND SYMPATHY AND SINCERE
CONDOLENCES OF THE SENATE
OF THE PHILIPPINES ON THE DEATH
OF ONE OF THE PHILIPPINES'
MOST TALENTED DIRECTORS,
MAURICE RUIZ DE LUZURIAGA
GALLAGA, OTHERWISE KNOWN
AS PEQUE GALLAGA, AND HONOR-
ING HIS CONTRIBUTIONS TO
PHILIPPINE CINEMA.

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 Zubiri for the sponsorship.

SPONSORSHIP SPEECH OF SENATOR ZUBIRI

Senator Zubiri stated that he had long known Mr. Peque Gallaga not only as a great and ground-breaking director through such films as "*Oro, Plata,*

Mata" but also because the director was a fellow Ilonggo who, like his father, also hailed from the same province of Negros Occidental and Bacolod. He noted that despite being semi-retired from the film industry, Mr. Gallaga was able to harness and train many artists in that area. He said that Mr. Gallaga's death was indeed a great loss to Philippine cinema.

COSPONSORSHIP REMARKS OF SENATOR MARCOS

Senator Marcos expressed her condolences to the family of the late director as she recognized and celebrated Mr. Peque Gallaga's great extraordinary filmography.

She recalled that she was the executive director for "*Oro, Plata, Mata*," at that time the most expensive film that was made by a first-time director. She said that it was a major risk that paid off as the film received many awards from various film festivals including the Flanders-Ghent Award for Best Film. She noted that Mr. Gallaga also directed such classics as *Scorpio Nights*, *Virgin Forest*, *Tianak*, *Shake, Rattle and Roll*, and other unforgettable films, and became a leader in regional film making in the Visayas and Bacolod. She said that she was mourning his loss but at same time celebrating his legacy.

COSPONSORSHIP REMARKS OF SENATOR REVILLA

Preliminarily, Senator Revilla manifested his intention to be made a coauthor of the proposed resolution, as he joined the entire Philippine film industry in grieving the death of Mr. Gallaga who was considered an institution in local cinema. He said that he had been fortunate to have been directed by the late filmmaker in the film "*Dugo ng Panday*" and how Mr. Gallaga had helped him advance his career. He said that he was, in fact, heartbroken upon hearing the news of the death of his good friend, thanking the late director for all that he had done for the industry.

ADOPTION OF PROPOSED SENATE RESOLUTION NO. 398

Upon motion of Senator Zubiri, there being no objection, Proposed Senate Resolution No. 398 was adopted by the Body, subject to style.

Handwritten signature/initials

ALL MEMBERS AS COAUTHORS

Senator Zubiri manifested that all senators are coauthors of Senate Resolution No. 398.

COMMITTEE REPORT NO. 49 ON SENATE BILL NO. 1354 (Continuation)

Upon motion of Senator Zubiri, there being no objection, the Body resumed consideration, on Second Reading, of Senate Bill No. 1354 (Committee Report No. 49), entitled

AN ACT AMENDING ARTICLES 183
AND 184 OF ACT NO. 3815, AS
AMENDED, OTHERWISE KNOWN
AS THE REVISED PENAL CODE.

Thereupon, the Chair recognized Senator Gordon for the period of individual amendments.

PROPOSED AMENDMENT OF SENATOR GORDON

On page 2, Senator Gordon proposed to delete lines 7 to 16 as well as delete the word "FURTHER" on line 17.

Senator Lacson reiterated his objection to the deletion of lines 7 to 16 on page 2, maintaining that a person making perjurious imputations against another person should be completely or equally liable for the crime that he was imputing.

Senator Gordon explained that the penalty had been increased uniformly by two degrees to obviate the possibility of having to compute because anyone who commits an offense of perjury would be already subjected to *prision mayor* in its minimum period to *prision mayor* in its medium period or six (6) years and one (1) day to ten (10) years.

Senator Lacson pointed out that at one time or another, Senate President Sotto and some of the other Members had also been victims of malicious and perjurious accusations.

Noting that he too had also been a victim, Senator Gordon nevertheless maintained that the increase of the penalty to six (6) years and one (1) to ten (10) years was sufficient.

Senator Drilon expressed his support for the amendment as proposed by the Committee because to retain the wording as found in the committee report would punish perjury much heavier than the penalty imposed for false testimony. He said that as ruled by the Supreme Court, "while falsehood is reprehensible, it is particularly odious when committed in a judicial proceeding as it constitutes an imposition upon the court and is a serious miscarriage of justice." Therefore, he said that by logic, the penalty for false testimony in court is heavier than the penalty imposed on other false testimonies. He said that if the provision is retained, then a falsity is being punished even if committed outside the court or the penalty is heavier than what is imposed in a false testimony before a court of law.

Responding thereto, Senator Lacson believed that a six-to-10 year sentence was too light a punishment and would not deter the Lascañas and Matobatos of the world from perjuring themselves even during committee hearings.

Senator Pacquiao expressed support for the proposed amendments of Senators Drilon and Gordon.

For his part, Senator Zubiri suggested that the Body withhold action on the proposed amendment to a later time and tackle the other amendments that are not as a controversial.

Senator Revilla also expressed his objection to the proposed amendment as he believed that it would not deter people from telling lies.

For his part, Senator Gordon clarified that he was not only a sponsor, but also a coauthor of the bill. He stated that he had no further amendments on the measure and hoped that his proposal could be put to a vote. He acknowledged that Senator Lacson's position was justified as he had been unjustly abused through false testimonies. However, he maintained that the proposal to increase the penalty by two degrees was a major amendment that would discourage witnesses from making false testimonies.

In addition, Senator Drilon stated that since the penalty has been increased by two degrees—the amendment increased it to six years and one day to ten years—the crime of perjury was practically removed from the benefit of the law on probation. He believed that the increase in penalty should deter a person from perjuring himself. Thus, he expressed

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support for the proposed amendment of Senator Gordon.

Asked by Senator Zubiri why he was objecting to the proposal of the Senator Gordon, Senator Lacson agreed to Senator Zubiri's suggestion to discuss more thoroughly the amendments before they vote on it as he indicated that he would introduce another amendment that lying before Congress should carry an even higher penalty. He said that even in the United States, lying is a federal offense.

SUSPENSION OF SESSION

Upon motion of Senator Zubiri, the session was suspended.

It was 4:03 p.m.

RESUMPTION OF SESSION

At 4:11 p.m., the session was resumed.

SUSPENSION OF CONSIDERATION OF SENATE BILL NO. 1354

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

COMMITTEE REPORT NO. 69 ON SENATE BILL NO. 1411

(Continuation)

Upon motion of Senator Zubiri, there being no objection, the Body resumed consideration, on Second Reading, of Senate Bill No. 1411 (Committee Report No. 69), entitled

AN ACT AMENDING REPUBLIC ACT NO. 8972 OTHERWISE KNOWN AS AN ACT PROVIDING FOR BENEFITS AND PRIVILEGES TO SOLO PARENTS AND THEIR CHILDREN, APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.

Senator Zubiri stated that the parliamentary status was the period of interpellations.

Thereupon, the Chair recognized Senator Hontiveros, sponsor of the measure, and Senator Gordon for his interpellation.

INTERPELLATION OF SENATOR GORDON

At the outset, Senator Gordon stated that in 2018 alone, there seemed to be a pandemic of what used to be termed as babies "born out of wedlock" as they constituted about 50% of the total live births; live-in relationships became acceptable, causing marriage to slow down as a social institution. He added that the overseas Filipino workers' situation has also resulted in more babies born out of wedlock, creating a lot of deadbeat fathers. He then asked whether the proposed measure was really about the vulnerability of women or solo parents, noting that in the presentation of the objectives of the bill, the first consideration was to promote the family as the foundation of the nation which is good because the solidarity of families is currently cracking, given the many adulterous relationships resulting in childbirths. He also noted the second objective which was about the obligation of the State to adhere to international agreements and national laws on families.

To the claim that 50% of total live births were babies born to unwed mothers, Senator Hontiveros said that based on the latest data from the Philippines Statistics Authority (PSA), it was only 38%, or about one-third of the babies born in the Philippines were born to unwed mothers. She thanked Senator Gordon for considering the plight of the many OFW families who are paying a high social cost for the continued export or migration of labor. She pointed out that one of the remedies that the proposed bill seeks to provide is to include in the definition of the *de facto* solo parents the spouses of the OFWs, especially the middle and low-skilled, who have been away for a continuous period of 12 months. She said that the measure is one of the legislative initiatives of the Senate to strengthen the rights and welfare of the Filipino family in order to put women, men, as well as their children on a stronger footing for the future.

Senator Gordon explained that he emphasized the term "vulnerability" in the objectives of the proposed bill because when a single woman becomes pregnant, she is very susceptible to social stigma and exploitation, considering the economic cost of pregnancy and child raising which she has to undergo by herself. He then asked if Senator Hontiveros would accept an amendment later on to emphasize "vulnerability" in the Declaration of Policy.

Senator Hontiveros replied that she would gladly accept the amendment as a description of the situation

of solo parents, majority of whom are solo women parents, citing a 2015 report of the PSA that out of three million household heads without a spouse, two million or two-thirds were female, and that the Federation of Solo Parents alone has a membership base of 80,000. She added that the amendment would also be an affirmation of her desire to empower women solo parents especially in properly raising their children.

Senator Gordon stressed that recognizing the vulnerability of solo parents would mean a higher sense of urgency on the part of the bureaucracy to help them out.

Senator Hontiveros agreed with Senator Gordon that under the Constitution, the present laws and even international agreements on family, the State has the obligation to support families and the parents in a family.

On the issue of women getting pregnant, Senator Gordon observed that the rate of babies born out of wedlock is large in highly urbanized areas: 146,366 births in the Calabarzon area; 142,702 births in the National Capital Region; and 102,766 births in the Central Luzon. And he attributed such a large number to women, especially solo mothers, who, in their desperation, enter a relationship and have a child so that there would be somebody—the father who, in his absence, would be replaced by the government—to support them. He further surmised that the cases are high in areas where there is high employment rate and the cases are low in areas with low employment rate.

Senator Hontiveros affirmed that the three regions — Central Luzon (Region III), National Capital Region, and Calabarzon (Region IV-A) — account for the highest numbers of solo parents, adding that across all regions in the country, women solo parents account for the greater majority of solo parents except in the province of Tawi-Tawi where there are more solo fathers than solo mothers. She stated that solo parents are at a quantifiably higher risk of financial hardship aside from the different culture constraints which they, particularly women solo parents, labor under. She said that whatever the reason may be, the purpose of the bill is to reduce the vulnerability of solo parents, especially solo women parents, by providing additional benefits and additional exemptions to enable them to raise their family to a good standard of living.

On the matter of rape, Senator Gordon stated that under Section 3(a)(1), the definition of a solo parent refers to a female who gives birth as a result of rape and other crimes against person. He then asked why there was a change between births resulting from other crimes against chastity and births resulting from crimes against persons. Actually, he noted, there were only few cases of pregnancy resulting from rape and that most of the cases were still due to casual, irresponsible and liberal sex. However, he pointed out that most women who were raped do not get the chance to be married because of what happened to them and the stigma associated with it which is much worse. He then asked if it would be better to retain “other crimes against chastity” like adultery, concubinage, acts of lasciviousness, seduction, corruption of minors and white slave trade rather than to stick with just “crimes against persons.”

Senator Hontiveros stated that what was reflected in the bill is the positive evolution in the law that rape is no longer considered as a crime against chastity but a crime against persons. She opined that rape is a form of violence against women, an unwanted sex that could result in pregnancy, making a woman a solo parent entitled to the additional benefits and exemptions offered under proposed bill.

Senator Gordon pointed out that crimes against persons include parricide, murder, homicide, rape, infanticide, abortion and physical injury, and except rape, they do not involve a child as a consequence. However, he said that there would be an issue with children in crimes against chastity such as adultery, concubinage, acts of lasciviousness, seduction, corruption of minors and white slave trade. Thus, he maintained that rape should be retained as a crime against chastity because there is a wider net with the crimes against chastity than the crimes against persons.

Saying that she is one of the many women and feminists who celebrated the evolution of the law that rape is not only a crime against chastity but a crime against persons, Senator Hontiveros believed that the language should be retained.

But Senator Gordon pointed out that rape being a crime against a person is only a superficial position and that it is not totally suited to the intention of the bill. He explained that the bill is not an assertion of women or respect for women but an assertion that children can come out as an issue in the crime

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against chastity. Hence, he said that he would try come up with an amendment to put it under crime against chastity. Senator Hontiveros stated that at the proper time, she would accept an amendment regarding rape and crimes against chastity.

As regards children born out of wedlock, Senator Hontiveros pointed out that not all parents of these children would be considered solo parents as there are parents who live and raise the children together, and as such, they would not fall under the purview of the bill. Senator Gordon agreed, saying that it is clear in the coverage of the measure that only those on a certain economic level are included.

Senator Gordon stated that there are also cases of battered husbands who are left with the child because some women, for instance, do not come back from abroad. Asked if they are covered by the bill, Senator Hontiveros replied in the affirmative, noting that according to the 2015 PSA data, there were, in fact, one million men household heads without spouse.

On the definition of solo parent, Senator Gordon cited Section 3(a)(4) which refers to the "spouse of an overseas Filipino worker; provided that the said OFW belongs to the low/semi-skilled worker category who is away from the Philippines for an unbroken period of twelve (12) months." But he pointed out there were also cases of the remaining parent still receiving support. Thus, he suggested to add the proviso "must not be receiving remittances or support for the same period."

Asked if they would still be included in the coverage of the measure, Senator Hontiveros replied that she would have to think about it because even if the spouse is able to remit to his wife and children or common law partner back in the Philippines, he still belongs to the semi-skilled worker category whose salary is not high enough. In fact, she said that the amendment to include the OFW addresses the appeal of those whom they consulted about the bill whose spouses are abroad but do not receive enough to sustain the needs of their family. She then asked Senator Gordon to likewise consider supporting the said portion of the bill benefiting low/semi-skilled OFWs.

Senator Gordon agreed, saying that if the remittance is not enough, a woman should be entitled to support from the government especially if she has

more children than she can handle. He believed that it is also in accordance with the Constitution particularly on the promotion of the family as a social institution and one of the basic foundations of the society that must have the support of the State.

As to who are considered "children," Senator Gordon noted that the bill refers to "those living with and dependent upon the solo parent for support, who are unmarried, unemployed and not more than twenty-two (22) years of age, or even twenty-two (22) years but are incapable of self-support because of mental and/or physical defect/disability." Relative thereto, he asked if the provision is not tantamount to amending Republic Act No. 6809 which lowered the age of maturity from 21 to 18 years.

Senator Hontiveros replied that the rationale for making it 22 years is to align it to the K to 12 program, as a consequence of which they would possibly graduate from college at 21 or 22 years. She pointed out that the bill proposes to give additional benefits to solo parents for their children in terms of discounts on their tuition fees—in addition to any scholarships in both public and private learning institutions.

Senator Gordon then proposed to rephrase the amendment to "Children who are still trying to finish college within the regular route." Senator Hontiveros said that she would consider the suggestion.

On the criteria for additional financial assistance, Senator Gordon asked whether the assistance is an entitlement or by reason of the government exercising its duty to support people who are left behind by society. He expressed the view that the objective should be to aid, and to nurture children to finish school and not to reward things that happened because of one's bad judgment, and that the philosophy for additional support by the State should be due to the importance of the child being raised by a solo parent. He added that the discretion on who should be entitled to financial assistance or subsidy must be made clear so that there would be equal opportunity and equal treatment rather than creating a social stigma of inequality, unequal treatment and abuse of solo parents that could happen from one local government to another.

Senator Hontiveros pointed out that there were few local governments that have pioneered to offer various discounts to solo parents such as Quezon

City, and that the bill aims to institutionalize this practice on a national level. She explained that the bill does not make any allusion as to how one became a solo parent; it only recognizes the support needed by any solo parent who endeavors to provide good quality of life for his/her children. She believed that the benefits and exemptions/discounts offered by the bill may spell a difference to near-poor families compared to those belonging above the poverty line. Through the bill, she said that the State would be proactive in expanding solo parent benefits which, in a way, would lighten the load of other poverty alleviation measures and programs like the 4Ps.

Senator Gordon stated that since it is the duty and obligation of the State to ensure that all citizens are raised properly, giving benefits to solo parents without setting a standard such as the capability to pay or the level of income to qualify as a solo parent is susceptible to discrimination and disparity. He asked how the gaps in funding could be bridged if it is taxpayers' money that would be used to discriminate somebody of a lesser position because he/she lives in a small community with a small population vis-à-vis someone who gets more from the fund because he/she lives in a big but under-populated area.

Senator Hontiveros said that if the bill is passed, the IRRs could level off among LGUs so that the solo parent discounts would be eventually implemented throughout the country.

Senator Gordon questioned the wisdom of offering 20% discount for all purchases of infant formula when they should promote breastfeeding over infant milk. Senator Hontiveros qualified that the 20% discount on infant formula could only be availed of if the solo parent is not the mother. She said that she too supports exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months and continued breastfeeding for two years or more.

To the statement that women who could not produce breastmilk could seek a surrogate mother who could breastfeed their children, Senator Hontiveros affirmed that the bill contemplates a support system for breastfeeding mothers, i.e., surrogate breastfeeding women in evacuation centers, milkbanks, and breastfeeding-friendly workplaces. Senator Gordon noted that he would try to come out with the appropriate amendment at a later time.

Referring to Section 15(I), Senator Gordon recalled that the basic personal exemption was removed under the TRAIN Law. Asked if there was a pressure to restore the same in the bill for the benefit of solo parents notwithstanding the fact that it is a surplusage, Senator Hontiveros said that she would accept an amendment at the proper time.

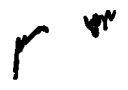
Citing Section 3(6), Senator Gordon asked if the one giving support would still continue to support even if he/she gets married, or if the solo parent who seemingly no longer gets support from the other partner is entitled to get support from the government. In reply, Senator Hontiveros stated that once the solo parent is no longer a solo parent as defined under the Act, the benefits and exemptions for solo parents would cease to exist.

Asked if a woman is entitled to the benefits of the law in case she was totally abandoned by her former partner or husband for support but finally gets support from the co-parent, Senator Hontiveros stated that under Section 3(3), an unmarried mother/father who has actual custody, support, care and exercising sole parental authority over his or her child or children, instead of having others to care for them, or giving them up to a welfare institution is considered a solo parent and will be able to avail of the exemption under this Act.

Regarding social protection services under Section 2, Senator Gordon hoped that the livelihood development services consisting of livelihood skills, seed capital, and job placement would be mandated on the part of the government and the beneficiaries to guarantee that the skills which they learned would enable them to stand on their feet; and to ensure that the government would only terminate the training once the beneficiary learns the skills and graduates.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR CAYETANO

Senator Cayetano requested a copy of the data mentioned earlier by Senator Gordon regarding the high number of solo parents in NCR and Calabarzon and other related materials so that she would be more prepared when she interpellates on the measure on the next session day. Senator Hontiveros acceded.



SUSPENSION OF CONSIDERATION OF SENATE BILL NO. 1411

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

MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR ZUBIRI

Senator Zubiri put on record the presence of Senator Pimentel who might not have been recognized during the roll call. Senate President Sotto confirmed that Senators Pimentel and Pacquiao were listed present in the roll call; hence, a complete attendance of 23 senators.

CONFERENCE COMMITTEE REPORT ON SENATE BILL NO. 1086 AND HOUSE BILL NO. 6312

Upon motion of Senator Zubiri, there being no objection, the Body considered the Conference Committee Report on the disagreeing provisions of Senate Bill No. 1086, entitled

THE PHILIPPINE HIGH SCHOOL FOR
SPORTS ACT OF 2019,

and House Bill No. 6312, entitled

AN ACT ESTABLISHING THE NATIONAL
ACADEMY OF SPORTS SYSTEM
AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS
THEREFOR.

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

REPORT OF SENATOR GATCHALIAN

Senator Gatchalian submitted for plenary consideration and approval the Bicameral Conference Committee Report on the Disagreeing Provisions of Senate Bill No. 1086 and House Bill No. 6312 creating and establishing the National Academy of Sports and the reconciled version attached thereto that will create and establish a National Academy of Sports which shall be attached to the Department of Education in coordination with the Philippine Sports Commission, to train and develop future generations of world champion Filipino athletes. He explained that the Academy is a high school that will give the students a quality and enhanced secondary education

program, integrated with a special curriculum on sports. He stated that in the Academy, the students would be housed and trained in world-class sports facilities which are at par with international standards.

He then moved for the ratification of the Conference Committee Report that would finally provide the financial, infrastructural, and policy support from the government that other countries have bestowed upon their athletes for a long time, to Filipino athletes and aspiring world champions the education, training, and opportunity to bring home the gold, honor and pride to the country.

For those who will decide to pursue other paths and careers after graduation from the sports academy, Senator Gatchalian stated that the bill was crafted to ensure that the curriculum shall provide the student-athletes with a holistic quality education to enable them to excel in their respective sports, as well as pursue their chosen profession or career.

He stated that Filipinos have always been the greatest sports fans in the world; thus, it was time to provide solid support to Filipinos athletes and give them the opportunity to be the sports icons and world champions that Filipino fans will cheer for, be proud of, and respect. He hoped that this bill would be the crucial first step towards that goal.

Finally, Senator Gatchalian expressed his gratitude to his colleagues and coauthors – Senator Angara, Senator Cayetano, and Senator Go – whose staunch passion and advocacy for this legislation inspired the Senate and the House committees to take this measure to the finish line. He also thanked Senator Tolentino for his invaluable contribution as conferee when they threshed out several issues during the bicameral conference, and to Senators Gordon and Binay who contributed to refine the bill during the interpellations and period of amendments.

He then moved that the Joint Explanatory Statement on the Disagreeing Provisions of Senate Bill No. 1086 and House Bill No. 6312 be deemed read *in toto* into the record, and that the Bicameral Conference Committee Report be ratified.

JOINT EXPLANATION OF THE CONFERENCE COMMITTEE

Acting on the request of Senator Gatchalian, upon motion of Senator Zubiri, there being no

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objection, the Body approved the insertion of the Joint Explanatory Statement of the Conference Committee on the disagreeing provisions of Senate Bill No. 1086 and House Bill No. 6312 into the Journal and Record of the Senate.

The following is the full text of the Joint Explanation:

1. The proposed reconciled version provided in the matrix of the differing provisions of Senate Bill No. 1086 and House Bill No. 6312 was adopted as the working draft;
2. Section 1 of the House version was adopted as Section 1 of the reconciled version, with amendment, to read:

“Section 1. Short Title. – This Act shall be known as “The National Academy of Sports.”

3. Section 2 of both the Senate and House versions was consolidated and adopted as Section 2 of the reconciled version, subject to style, to read:

“Sec. 2. Declaration of Principles. – The State recognizes its role to protect and promote the right of all citizens to quality education at all levels and to take appropriate steps to make such education accessible to all. The State also recognizes the vital role of the youth in nation-building and shall promote and protect their physical, moral, spiritual, intellectual, and social well-being. Towards this end, the State shall establish a national sports program which shall promote physical education and encourage sports programs, intramurals, league competitions, and amateur sports, including training for international competitions; foster self-discipline, teamwork, and excellence for the development of a healthy and alert citizenry; and develop athletes with a strong sense of patriotism and love of country. It shall institutionalize an educational system within the framework of this national sustainable sports program and provide excellent training to produce world-class athletes. Such system shall ensure that measures are in place for the admission of qualified students from all sectors, including indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities, and other marginalized groups.”

4. Section 3 of both the Senate and House versions was consolidated and adopted as the reconciled version, with amendments, subject to style, to read:

“Sec. 3. Creation and Establishment of the National Academy of Sports System. – There is hereby created and established a National Academy of Sports System (NAS System) to develop the athletic skills and talents of students in world class sports facilities which are at par with international standards.

“The NAS System is hereby mandated to implement a quality and enhanced secondary education program, integrated with a special curriculum on sports. It shall be geared to the early recognition and development of highly talented and exceptionally gifted students and those who have demonstrated the potential of excelling in the field of sports.

“The NAS System shall be attached to the Department of Education (DepEd), in close coordination with the Philippine Sports Commission (PSC).”

5. Section 4 of both the Senate and House versions was consolidated and adopted as Section 4 of the reconciled version, with amendments, to read:

“Sec. 4. Purpose of the NAS System. – The NAS System shall offer, on full scholarship basis, a secondary education to natural-born Filipino citizens with considerable potential in sports. The curriculum shall be designed to take into consideration the education and special training needs of the student-athletes and provide them with a holistic quality education to enable them to excel in their respective sports and likewise pursue their chosen profession or career.”

6. Section 5 of both the Senate and House versions was consolidated and adopted as Section 5 of the reconciled version, with amendments, subject to style, to read:

“Sec. 5. Construction and Site of the NAS Main Campus. – After a period of planning not exceeding one (1) year upon the effectivity of this Act, the main campus of the NAS System shall be established at the existing New Clark City Sports Complex, Capas, Tarlac, and shall be equipped with the necessary sports facilities, housing, and other amenities according to current international standards. School buildings with sufficient number of classrooms and facilities shall be constructed at the complex.

“The Bases Conversion and Development Authority (BCDA) shall provide the land for the site by way of usufruct in perpetuity,

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subject to its utilization as provided for in the preceding paragraph.

“The BCDA shall also be in charge of the construction of classrooms, dormitories, and other sports facilities, and related amenities as may be determined by the Board of Trustees at the New Clark City campus.

“The NAS System shall at all times be given utmost priority in the use of these existing sports facilities, dormitories, and infrastructure which shall be free of charge as long as utilized to carry out the purposes and functions of the NAS System, without prejudice to national and international sports events which will be hosted in the New Clark City and coordinated with the NAS System management.”

7. Section 10 of the House version was adopted as Section 6 of the reconciled version, with amendments, to read:

“Sec. 6. Executive Director of the NAS System. – The NAS System shall be headed by an Executive Director who shall serve for a period of five (5) years. The Executive Director shall be elected by the members of the Board, based on the guidelines and qualifications set forth in the implementing rules and regulations of this Act, preferably with a Master’s degree in the field of sports education, sports science, education, management, and substantial experience in managing an educational institution.

“The Board shall likewise fix the compensation of the Executive Director subject to existing Compensation and Position Classification System.

“The Executive Director shall be responsible for the administration and operation of the NAS System, and shall coordinate the implementation of policies and guidelines set by the Board, in addition to those specifically provided for in this Act.”

8. Section 7 of the Senate version and Section 6 of the House version was consolidated and adopted as Section 7 of the reconciled version, subject to style, to read:

“Sec. 7. Board of Trustees. – The NAS System shall be governed by a Board of Trustees, hereinafter referred to as the Board, which shall be composed of the DepEd Secretary as the Chairperson, the Chairperson of the PSC as Vice Chairperson, and the following as members: (a) the Executive Director of the NAS System; (b) the President

of the Philippine Olympic Committee; (c) the Chairperson of the Commission on Higher Education (CHED); and (d) two (2) representatives from the private sector of known expertise in the field of sports, education or both, elected by the members of the Board.

“The representatives from the private sector shall be appointed for a term of two (2) years, renewable for another two (2) years, without reappointment.”

9. Section 8 of the Senate version and Section 7 of the House version was consolidated and adopted as Section 8 of the reconciled version, with amendments, subject to style, to read:

“Sec. 8. Powers and Functions of the Board of Trustees. – The exercise of the powers of the NAS System is hereby vested exclusively in the Board of Trustees. The Board shall have the following specific powers and duties, in addition to its general powers of administration and the exercise of all the powers granted to the board of directors of a corporation under Section 35 of Republic Act No. 11232, otherwise known as the “Revised Corporation Code of the Philippines”:

- (a) To formulate policies, guidelines and criteria in order to rationalize the establishment, administration and operation of the sports high schools under the NAS System in accordance with a national sports program;
- (b) To identify the satellite branches and regional campuses of the NAS System for later expansion after the establishment of the main campus of the NAS System as provided in Section 5 hereof;
- (c) To approve the curricula, course of study, and rules of discipline drawn up by the Executive Committee as herein-after provided. The curriculum shall be designed to address the specific training needs of a student-athlete while delivering a holistic and quality education;
- (d) To formulate policies on personnel organization, appointment, promotion, retention or renewal of contracts, compensation, removal for just cause, rewards, incentives, and other conditions of employment for administrators, faculty, and staff of the NAS System;
- (e) To approve appointments made and

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- contracts entered into by the Executive Director in connection with the employment of administrative officers, teachers, lecturers, and other employees of the school;
- (f) To determine the conditions of the acceptance of paying students for special programs and trainings, such as sports camps and clinics, and establish the qualifications and criteria thereof;
 - (g) To provide and approve fellowships and trainings for administrators, faculty members, and staff;
 - (h) To approve the grant of scholarships, stipends, and such other allowances to deserving students based on the guidelines and implementing rules and regulations of this Act;
 - (i) To establish the criteria for the selection and admission of students which shall include, among others, national competitive trials and examinations;
 - (j) To recruit the best student athletes from the different regions of the Philippines to be enrolled in the NAS System to better hone their skills and talents;
 - (k) To develop the athletic potential of every student together with a sound and strong academic base;
 - (l) To provide a training program for students with the end goal of producing athletes who can compete in international competitions;
 - (m) To approve the issuance of certificates or diplomas to successful candidates for graduation;
 - (n) To receive and appropriate for the ends herein specified such sums as may be provided by law for the support of the NAS System;
 - (o) To receive, in trust, legacies, gifts, and donations of real and personal properties of all kinds and to administer the same for the benefit of the NAS System or for aid to any of its students;
 - (p) To enact rules and regulations, not contrary to law, as may be necessary to carry out the purposes and functions of the NAS System; and
 - (q) To perform any and all other acts incident to or required by virtue of its creation."

- 10. Section 8 of the House version was adopted as Section 9 of the reconciled version.
- 11. Section 9 of both the Senate and House versions was consolidated and adopted as Section 10 of the reconciled version, with amendments, subject to style, to read:

"Sec. 10. Meetings of the Board. – The Board shall regularly convene at least once every quarter of the NAS System school calendar: *Provided*, That upon the effectivity of this Act, the Board shall immediately convene and conduct monthly meetings for purposes of choosing and appointing the Executive Director, the members from the academe and sports community, and an organization plan for the NAS System.

"The Chairperson of the Board may call a special meeting whenever necessary: *Provided*, That members are notified in writing at least three (3) calendar days before said meeting.

"A majority of all members holding office at the time the meeting is called shall constitute a quorum for Board meetings: *Provided*, That the Chairperson and the Vice Chairperson of the Board are among those present in the meeting. In the absence of the Chairperson, an Undersecretary of the DepEd shall be duly designated by the Chairperson as alternate to sit in the meeting.

"All members who are not receiving regular compensation from the government shall receive reasonable per diem to be determined by the Board for every meeting of the Board, subject to existing rules and regulations observed by the boards of similar specialized institutions."

- 12. Section 10 of the Senate version was adopted as Section 11 of the reconciled version, with amendments, to read:

"Sec. 11. Reporting Requirements and Auditing of Accounts. – The Board shall submit to the Commission on Audit (COA), Department of Budget and Management (DBM), and Congress a detailed report on the progress, condition, and needs of the NAS System containing, among others, the financial statements, statement of assets and liabilities, other revenue sources and program for expenditures, physical and financial accountability reports, and other similar reportorial requirements on or before the fourteenth (14th) day of February of each year. All accounts and expenses of the NAS System shall be audited by the COA or its duly authorized representative."

13. Section 11 of both the Senate and House versions was consolidated and adopted as Section 12 of the reconciled version, with amendments, subject to style, to read:

“Sec. 12. Executive Committee. – There shall be an Executive Committee consisting of the Executive Director, the Deputy Executive Director, as created in Section 13 of this Act, the heads of departments of the NAS System, and such other ranking faculty members or officials of the NAS System, as may be determined by the Board.

“The Committee shall have the power to screen and select the students for admission and the recipients of scholarships, stipends, and other allowances as well as to develop the curricula, course of study, and rules of discipline. It shall be responsible for the development of the athletic potential of students by providing training programs to train athletes who can compete in international competitions. It shall also implement and execute policies laid down by the Board and exercise such other functions, powers and duties as the Board may prescribe.”

14. Section 12 of the House version was adopted as Section 13 of the reconciled version.
15. Section 13 of both the Senate and House versions was adopted as Section 14 of the reconciled version, subject to style, to read:

“Sec. 14. Registrar of the NAS System. – There shall be a Registrar of the NAS System who shall act as the Board Secretary and keep all the records of the NAS System.

“The Registrar shall be appointed by the Executive Director, with the approval of the Board.”

16. Section 14 of both the Senate and House versions was consolidated and adopted as Section 15 of the reconciled version, subject to style, to read:

“Sec. 15. Treasurer of the NAS System. – There shall be a Treasurer of the PHSS System who shall keep custody of its funds and properties.

“The Treasurer shall be appointed by the Executive Director, with the approval of the Board.

“All accounts and expenses of the PHSS System shall be audited by the COA or its duly authorized representative.”

17. Section 15 of both the Senate and House versions was consolidated and adopted as

Section 16 of the reconciled version, with amendments, subject to style, to read:

“Sec. 16. Personnel of the NAS System.

– The Executive Director shall, upon approval of the Board, employ professional and highly skilled managers, educators, teachers, coaches, trainers, sports and medical professionals, who are experts in the field, and other personnel with long and vast experience in sports education and administration to ensure the proper operation and maintenance of the NAS System, subject to existing Compensation and Position Classification System.

“Officers or employees of the government engaged as lecturers in the NAS System may receive compensation in addition to their salary at a rate to be fixed by the Board subject to existing rules and regulations: *Provided*, That their duties as lecturers are performed outside of the regular office hours.”

18. Section 16 of the Senate version was adopted as Section 17 of the reconciled version, with amendments, to read:

“Sec. 17. Payment of National Taxes and Customs Duties. – The payment of national

taxes, including customs duties, of the NAS System shall be charged against the Tax Expenditure Fund (TEF) provided for in the annual General Appropriations Act.

“The NAS System shall be exempt from withholding taxes on the honoraria or fees paid by the NAS System to visiting lecturers or professors from abroad, subject and pursuant to existing Philippine tax treaties.”

19. Section 17 of both the Senate and House versions was consolidated and adopted as Section 18 of the reconciled version, with amendment, subject to style, to read:

“Sec. 18. Tax Deduction and Exemption of Donations and Contributions. – All grants, legacies, bequests or devises, gifts and donations for the benefit of the NAS System, its support and/or maintenance, or for aid to any of its students shall be tax-exempt and fully deductible from the gross income of the donors in accordance with the National Internal Revenue Code (NIRC) of 1997, as amended.”

20. Section 18 of the House version was adopted as Section 19 of the reconciled version, with amendments, to read:

“Sec. 19. Campuses. – The Board shall provide for policies for the organization of

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future regional nationally-funded high schools for sports. The Board shall also provide for policies to enter into a memorandum of agreement with existing locally funded high schools for sports for consideration as extension campuses or branches of the NAS System. The extension campuses shall be organized in coordination with the concerned local government unit, the DepEd, and the PSC, and in consultation with the DBM.”

21. Section 18 of the Senate version was deleted.
22. Section 20 of the House version was adopted as Section 20 of the reconciled version, with amendments, to read:

“Sec. 20. Joint Congressional Oversight Committee on the NAS System. – There is hereby created a Joint Congressional Oversight Committee to oversee, monitor, and evaluate the implementation of this Act.

“The Oversight Committee shall be composed of five (5) members each from the Senate and the House of Representatives, including the Chairpersons of the Committees on Basic Education, Arts and Culture in the Senate and Basic Education and Culture in the House of Representatives, Youth and Sports Development, and Finance in the Senate and Appropriations in the House of Representatives. The membership of the Committee for each House shall have at least one (1) minority member.”

23. Section 19 of the Senate version and Section 21 of the House version was consolidated and adopted as Section 21 of the reconciled version, with amendments, subject to style, to read:

“Sec. 21. Appropriations. – The Secretary of the DepEd shall immediately include in the department’s budget the amount necessary for the effective implementation of this Act which shall be included in the annual General Appropriations Act.

“Upon the effectivity of this Act, the BCDA shall likewise immediately include in its procurement plan the construction of classrooms, dormitories, and other sports facilities and related amenities for the NAS main campus whose funding shall also be included in the General Appropriations Act.”

24. Section 20 of the Senate version and Section 22 of the House version was consolidated and adopted as Section 22 of the reconciled version, subject to style, to read:

“Sec. 22. Implementing Rules and Regulations. – The DepEd and the PSC, in consultation and coordination with the DBM, the CHED, the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH), the BCDA, and other relevant stakeholders shall promulgate, not later than thirty (30) days upon the effectivity of this Act, the necessary rules and regulations for its effective implementation: *Provided*, That the failure to promulgate such rules and regulations shall not prevent the implementation of this Act upon its effectivity.”

25. Section 21 of the Senate version and Section 23 of the House version was consolidated and adopted as Section 23 of the reconciled version, subject to style, to read:

“Sec. 23. Separability Clause. – If any part or provision of this Act is declared unconstitutional or invalid, the remainder of this Act or any provision not affected thereby shall remain to be in full force and effect.”

26. Section 22 of the Senate version and Section 24 of the House version was consolidated and adopted as Section 24 of the reconciled version, subject to style, to read:

“Sec. 24. Repealing Clause. – All other laws, presidential decrees, executive orders, and other administrative issuances, rules, regulations or parts thereof which are inconsistent with the provisions of this Act are hereby modified, superseded or repealed accordingly.”

27. Section 23 of the Senate version and Section 25 of the House version was consolidated and adopted as Section 25 of the reconciled version, subject to style, to read:

“Sec. 25. Effectivity. – This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days following its publication in the Official Gazette or in a major daily newspaper of national circulation in the Philippines.”

28. The title of the House version was adopted as the title of the reconciled version, with amendments, to read:

“AN ACT CREATING AND ESTABLISHING THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SPORTS AND PROVIDING FUNDS THEREFOR”

In case of conflict between the statements/amendments stated in this Joint Explanatory Statement and that of the provisions of the reconciled bill in the accompanying Conference Committee Report, the provisions of the latter shall prevail.

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MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR CAYETANO

Senator Cayetano said that Senate Bill No. 1086 or The Philippine High School Sports Act of 2019 was about 10 years in the making, recalling that she first filed it many years ago. She then thanked the Sponsor for leading them to the final steps to seeing the proposed measure become a law. She pointed out that the significance of the bill cannot be overemphasized, saying that without the national training center where the country's athletes can constantly consider their training grounds with the best coaches in the country and with the best facilities, their full potential would be limited. She said that Senator Zubiri was very much aware of the importance of the bill after having produced the most bemedalled national sports association (NSA) in the last Southeast Asian Games.

Stating that sports undeniably unite countries, Senator Cayetano added that if the COVID-19 pandemic, in a way, has united the Philippines with countries all over the world, sports did it too. She mentioned Senator Pacquiao as a living example of someone who can unite the country through boxing. She asked: Who would not want to constantly be cheering for a Filipino athlete that is making waves all over the world? Thus, she said that the bill is so important for everyone for it would be tantamount to literally producing more inspiring athletes in the future.

MANIFESTATION SPEECH OF SENATOR ANGARA

Senator Angara thanked and gave tribute to the diligence and hard work of Senator Gatchalian, as chairman of the Committee on Basic Education, Arts and Culture, for steering the bill to the finish line. Following on what Senator Cayetano said, he added that the bill that initially intended to establish a Philippine High School for Sports was filed when he was still a congressman in the Fifteenth Congress. Crediting the term and idea to Father Tito Caluag, he said that the idea was to have a school for sports in the likeness of the Philippine High School for Arts in Makiling which has produced some of the country's most outstanding artists in different fields of endeavor. He said that Senate Bill No. 1086 turned out much better with the creation of the National Academy of Sports. He also hoped that the country could have a system that will permeate the grassroots rather than having a single entity as a National High School for

Sports. He said the country seemed to be lacking in total grassroots immersion outside of the school system.

MANIFESTATION SPEECH OF SENATOR GO

Senator Go, chairman of the Committee on Sports, expressed his gratitude to his colleagues for supporting the measure for the benefit of the Filipino youth and Philippine sports as he believed that through this legislation the Philippines would hopefully be able to catch up with the rest of the world in terms of sports development. He thanked Senator Gatchalian for showing equal passion and dedication for the development of Philippine sports and for earnestly pushing for its passage, saying the measure was, in fact, included in the 2019 State-of-the-Nation address of President Rodrigo Duterte.

He then thanked the members of the Senate and House panels in bicameral conference committee, the Philippine Sports Commission, the Department of Education, Culture and Sports, the Department of Budget and Management, and the Bases Conversion Development Authority (BCDA) for their commitment that allowed the measure to hit the ground running. He said that once President Duterte signs the measure, the country would have a National Academy of Sports where education and training would go hand in hand.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR ZUBIRI

Senator Zubiri manifested his support for the proposed measure as it has been his desire to have such an academy ever since he became an athlete. He said that other countries, particularly early socialist countries such as Yugoslavia and Romania, have sports academies that produced for them several Olympic gold medalists. He added that many of the Warsaw Pact countries that have since become democratic governments, have sports academies that truly focus on training and education. He recalled that during those times, they produced numerous Olympic gold medal winners. He said that learning from the experience of such countries in the past and of the Philippines in the last Southeast Asian Games, the country would have to focus on establishing the sports academy in producing future champions. On the other hand, he also hoped that the country would not need to wait for a graduate from the academy to develop future gold medalists before winning in the Olympics. He added that if the country could not get the gold sooner, the academy

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would eventually have graduates that are future gold medalists in the Olympics.

APPROVAL OF THE CONFERENCE COMMITTEE REPORT

Upon motion of Senator Zubiri, there being no objection, the Body approved and ratifying the Conference Committee Report on the disagreeing provisions of Senate Bill No. 1086 and House Bill No. 6312.

ADDITIONAL REFERENCE OF BUSINESS

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

BILLS ON FIRST READING

Senate Bill No. 1519, entitled

AN ACT INSTITUTIONALIZING THE IMMEDIATE DISPOSITION OF GOVERNMENT ASSETS AND PROPERTIES TO AUGMENT PUBLIC FUNDS DURING THE NATIONAL EMERGENCY ARISING FROM THE CORONAVIRUS DISEASE 2019 (COVID-19)"

Introduced by Senator Tolentino

To the Committees on Government Corporations and Public Enterprises; and Finance

Senate Bill No. 1521, entitled

AN ACT GRANTING THE ABS-CBN BROADCASTING CORPORATION A PROVISIONAL FRANCHISE TO CONSTRUCT, INSTALL, OPERATE, AND MAINTAIN TELEVISION AND RADIO BROADCASTING STATIONS IN THE PHILIPPINES, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

Introduced by Senators Lapid, Drilon, Recto, Gordon, Gatchalian, Villanueva, Zubiri, Angara, Binay, Revilla, Jr., Hontiveros, Pangilinan and Pacquiao

To the Committee on Rules

COMMITTEE REPORT

Committee Report No. 86, prepared and submitted jointly by the Committees on Higher, Technical and Vocational Education; Health and Demography; and Finance, on Senate Bill No. 1520, with Senators Sotto III, Recto and Villanueva as authors thereof, entitled

AN ACT ESTABLISHING A MEDICAL SCHOLARSHIP AND RETURN SERVICE PROGRAM FOR DESERVING STUDENTS AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES,

recommending its approval in substitution of Senate Bill Nos. 1, 1130 and 1283

Sponsor: Senator Villanueva

To the Calendar for Ordinary Business

MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR DRILON

Senator Drilon requested Senator Zubiri to provide electronic copies of the Journal that the Body was going to approve, and that the said Journal be electronically transmitted the following morning to the senators and their chiefs-of-staff for review before its approval in the next session in the afternoon.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR ZUBIRI

Senator Zubiri reminded the Body of their decision to postpone the hearings of the Committee of the Whole for the week and that it would instead proceed on Monday the following week. Senate President Sotto confirmed, saying that the postponement was a request by the Executive Secretary on behalf of the executive department.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR DRILON

Senator Drilon reiterated his request that before the different Cabinet secretaries appear before the Committee of the Whole, they should provide the Members with copies of their presentations not later than Friday to enable them to read the said presentations and to ask pertinent questions when they constitute the Committee of the Whole on Monday.

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Senate President Sotto said that as requested by his office, the Executive department would send the documents on Thursday.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR PANGILINAN

Senator Pangilinan said that he read from the newspapers the previous week that some of the Senate employees have tested positive in the COVID-19 rapid testing conducted in the Senate. He requested the Office of the Senate Secretary to provide them with updates on the developments since then and if contact tracing was conducted. He said that he was just concerned for some of their staff who physically report to the Senate. He said that a confidential update or report on the findings and what has been done to protect the Senate employees and Senators' staff would suffice.

Senate President Sotto said that the Secretariat was almost done with the report and would be ready to submit it within the day or the next day.

SUSPENSION OF SESSION

Upon motion of Senator Zubiri, the session was suspended until three o'clock in the afternoon of the following day.

It was 5:15 p.m.

RESUMPTION OF SESSION

At 3:00 p.m. of Tuesday, May 12, 2020, the session was resumed.

SECOND ADDITIONAL REFERENCE OF BUSINESS

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

MESSAGE FROM THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Letter from the House of Representatives, informing the Senate that on 6 May 2020, the House of Representatives passed the following House Bills, in which it requested the concurrence of the Senate:

House Bill No. 6323, entitled

AN ACT CREATING ONE (1) ADDITIONAL BRANCH OF THE REGIONAL TRIAL COURT IN THE FIRST JUDICIAL REGION TO BE STATIONED IN THE MUNICIPALITY OF LA PAZ, PROVINCE OF ABRA, AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR, AMENDING FOR THE PURPOSE SECTION 14(A) OF BATAS PAMBANSA BLG. 129, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS "THE JUDICIARY REORGANIZATION ACT OF 1980," AS AMENDED;

House Bill No. 6324, entitled

AN ACT CREATING TWO (2) ADDITIONAL BRANCHES OF THE REGIONAL TRIAL COURT IN THE FIFTH JUDICIAL REGION TO BE STATIONED IN THE MUNICIPALITIES OF DAET AND LABO, PROVINCE OF CAMARINES NORTE, AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR, AMENDING FOR THE PURPOSE SECTION 14(F) OF BATAS PAMBANSA BLG. 129, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS "THE JUDICIARY REORGANIZATION ACT OF 1980," AS AMENDED;

House Bill No. 6325, entitled

AN ACT CREATING EIGHT (8) ADDITIONAL BRANCHES OF THE REGIONAL TRIAL COURT IN THE NATIONAL CAPITAL JUDICIAL REGION TO BE STATIONED IN THE CITY OF CALOOCAN AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR, AMENDING FOR THE PURPOSE SECTION 14(D) OF BATAS PAMBANSA BLG. 129, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS "THE JUDICIARY REORGANIZATION ACT OF 1980," AS AMENDED;

House Bill No. 6326, entitled

AN ACT CREATING ONE (1) ADDITIONAL BRANCH OF THE REGIONAL TRIAL COURT IN THE SEVENTH

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JUDICIAL REGION TO BE STATIONED IN THE MUNICIPALITY OF MOALBOAL, PROVINCE OF CEBU, AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR, AMENDING FOR THE PURPOSE SECTION 14(H) OF BATAS PAMBANSA BLG. 129, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS "THE JUDICIARY REORGANIZATION ACT OF 1980," AS AMENDED;

House Bill No. 6327, entitled

AN ACT CREATING TWO (2) ADDITIONAL BRANCHES OF THE REGIONAL TRIAL COURT AND FIVE (5) ADDITIONAL BRANCHES OF THE MUNICIPAL TRIAL COURT IN CITIES IN THE NINTH JUDICIAL REGION TO BE STATIONED IN THE PROVINCE OF ZAMBOANGA DEL NORTE, AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR, AMENDING FOR THE PURPOSE SECTIONS 14(J) AND 29 OF BATAS PAMBANSA BLG. 129, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS "THE JUDICIARY REORGANIZATION ACT OF 1980," AS AMENDED;

House Bill No. 6328, entitled

AN ACT CREATING ONE (1) ADDITIONAL BRANCH OF THE REGIONAL TRIAL COURT IN THE SIXTH JUDICIAL REGION TO BE STATIONED IN THE CITY OF VICTORIAS, PROVINCE OF NEGROS OCCIDENTAL, AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR, AMENDING FOR THE PURPOSE SECTION 14(G) OF BATAS PAMBANSA BLG. 129, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS "THE JUDICIARY REORGANIZATION ACT OF 1980," AS AMENDED";

House Bill No. 6329, entitled

AN ACT CREATING FOUR (4) ADDITIONAL BRANCHES OF THE REGIONAL TRIAL COURT IN THE FOURTH JUDICIAL REGION TO BE STATIONED IN THE MUNICIPALITIES OF ROSARIO AND SAN JUAN,

PROVINCE OF BATANGAS, AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR, AMENDING FOR THE PURPOSE SECTION 14(E) OF BATAS PAMBANSA BLG. 129, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS "THE JUDICIARY REORGANIZATION ACT OF 1980," AS AMENDED; and

House Bill No. 6330, entitled

AN ACT CREATING FIVE (5) ADDITIONAL BRANCHES OF THE REGIONAL TRIAL COURT IN THE SIXTH JUDICIAL REGION TO BE STATIONED IN THE CITY OF KABANKALAN, PROVINCE OF NEGROS OCCIDENTAL, AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR, AMENDING FOR THE PURPOSE SECTION 14(G) OF BATAS PAMBANSA BLG. 129, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS "THE JUDICIARY REORGANIZATION ACT OF 1980," AS AMENDED.

To the Committees on Justice and Human Rights; and Finance

House Bill No. 6498, entitled

AN ACT INCREASING THE BED CAPACITY OF THE NAGUILIAN DISTRICT HOSPITAL IN THE MUNICIPALITY OF NAGUILIAN, PROVINCE OF LA UNION FROM TWENTY-FIVE (25) BEDS TO FIFTY (50) BEDS AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR; and

House Bill No. 6499, entitled

AN ACT INCREASING THE BED CAPACITY OF THE QUIRINO MEMORIAL MEDICAL CENTER IN QUEZON CITY, METRO MANILA FROM FIVE HUNDRED (500) BEDS TO ONE THOUSAND (1,000) BEDS, UPGRADING ITS PROFESSIONAL HEALTH CARE SERVICES AND FACILITIES, AUTHORIZING THE INCREASE OF ITS MEDICAL PERSONNEL COMPLEMENT AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR

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To the Committees on Health and Demography; and Finance

BILL ON FIRST READING

Senate Bill No. 1522, entitled

AN ACT PROVIDING FOR PROVISIONAL LICENSES TO RADIO STATIONS WITH PENDING FRANCHISE RENEWAL APPLICATIONS AMENDING FOR THAT PURPOSE SECTION 1 OF ACT NO. 3846 OTHERWISE KNOWN AS AN ACT PROVIDING FOR THE REGULATION OF RADIO STATIONS AND RADIO COMMUNICATIONS IN THE PHILIPPINE ISLANDS, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

Introduced by Senator Lapid

To the Committees on Public Services; and Constitutional Amendments and Revision of Codes

RESOLUTIONS

Proposed Senate Resolution No. 399, entitled

RESOLUTION HONORING THE LATE COMMUNICATIONS LUMINARY AND FORMER SECRETARY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF TOURISM RAMON A. JIMENEZ, JR. FOR HIS REMARKABLE CONTRIBUTIONS TO PHILIPPINE TOURISM, THE ADVERTISING AND COMMUNICATIONS INDUSTRY, NATION-BUILDING, AND OUR PARTICIPATIVE DEMOCRACY

Introduced by Senator Pangilinan

To the Committee on Rules

Proposed Senate Resolution No. 400, entitled

RESOLUTION DIRECTING THE SENATE COMMITTEES ON LABOR, EMPLOYMENT AND HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT, AND CIVIL SERVICE, GOVERNMENT REORGANIZATION AND PROFESSIONAL

REGULATION TO CONDUCT AN INQUIRY, IN AID OF LEGISLATION, WITH THE INTENT OF DETERMINING THE COMPLIANCE OF EMPLOYERS WITH REPUBLIC ACT NO. 11058, OR "AN ACT STRENGTHENING COMPLIANCE WITH OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH STANDARDS AND PROVIDING PENALTIES FOR VIOLATIONS THEREOF" AND OTHER OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH MEASURES IMPLEMENTED IN THE CONTEXT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THESE STANDARDS AND MEASURES IN RESPONDING TO RISKS AND HAZARDS OF THE PANDEMIC

Introduced by Senator Lapid

To the Committees on Labor, Employment and Human Resources Development; and Civil Service, Government Reorganization and Professional Regulation

**THIRD ADDITIONAL
REFERENCE OF BUSINESS**

BILLS ON FIRST READING

Senate Bill No. 1523, entitled

AN ACT PROVIDING FOR MANDATORY INSURANCE COVERAGE AND BENEFITS AND HAZARD PAY FOR JOURNALISTS, EMPLOYEES OF MEDIA ENTITIES ON FIELD ASSIGNMENTS AND FREELANCE JOURNALISTS, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES"

Introduced by Senator De Lima

To the Committees on Public Information and Mass Media; and Ways and Means

Senate Bill No. 1524, entitled

AN ACT UPHOLDING AND PROMOTING CAMPUS JOURNALISM AND CAMPUS PRESS FREEDOM, REPEAL-

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ING FOR THE PURPOSE, REPUBLIC ACT NO. 7079, ENTITLED "AN ACT PROVIDING FOR THE DEVELOPMENT AND PROMOTION OF CAMPUS JOURNALISM," PENALIZING VIOLATIONS AGAINST CAMPUS PRESS FREEDOM, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

Introduced by Senator De Lima

To the Committees on Higher, Technical and Vocational Education; and Public Information and Mass Media

Senate Bill No. 1525, entitled

AN ACT PROVIDING FOR A MORATORIUM ON RENTAL PAYMENT AND EVICTION DURING DISASTERS AND OTHER EMERGENCIES

Introduced by Senator Lapid

To the Committees on Trade, Commerce and Entrepreneurship; and Urban Planning, Housing and Resettlement

RESOLUTIONS

Proposed Senate Resolution No. 401, entitled

RESOLUTION DIRECTING THE APPROPRIATE SENATE COMMITTEE TO CONDUCT AN INQUIRY, IN AID OF LEGISLATION, INTO THE REPORTS OF PUBLIC FUNDS BEING SPENT TO PAY AND MAINTAIN ONLINE TROLLS TO DISTORT AND MANIPULATE ONLINE INFORMATION IN VARIOUS SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS IN ORDER TO INFLUENCE PUBLIC OPINION AND POLITICAL OUTCOMES

Introduced by Senator De Lima

To the Committee on Accountability of Public Officers and Investigations

Proposed Senate Resolution No. 402, entitled

RESOLUTION HONORING THE LATE TOURISM SECRETARY RAMON

"MON" JIMENEZ, JR. FOR HIS IMMEASURABLE CONTRIBUTIONS TO PHILIPPINE ADVERTISING, HIS ENDURING LEGACY TOWARDS REVOLUTIONIZING THE PHILIPPINE TOURISM INDUSTRY, AND HIS LASTING IMPACT TOWARDS NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

Introduced by Senator De Lima

To the Committee on Rules

BIRTHDAY GREETINGS

Senator Zubiri informed the Body that it was Senator Binay's birthday. Thereupon, the Senators greeted her a happy birthday.

CHANGE OF COMMITTEE REFERRAL

Upon motion of Senator Zubiri, there being no objection, the Body approved the change of committee referral of Senate Bill No. 41 (One Town: One Doctor Act); Senate Bill No. 751, (Medical Scholarship and Return Service for Primary Care Act of 2019), and Senate Bill No. 1487 (Medical Scholarship and Return Service Program Act) to the Committee on Higher, Technical and Vocational Education as the primary committee, and the Committee on Health and Demography as the secondary committee.

PROPOSED SENATE RESOLUTION NO. 399

Upon motion of Senator Zubiri, there being no objection, the Body considered Proposed Senate Resolution No. 399, entitled

RESOLUTION HONORING THE LATE COMMUNICATIONS LUMINARY AND FORMER SECRETARY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF TOURISM RAMON R. JIMENEZ, JR. FOR HIS REMARKABLE CONTRIBUTIONS TO PHILIPPINE TOURISM, THE ADVERTISING AND COMMUNICATIONS INDUSTRY, NATION-BUILDING, AND OUR PARTICIPATIVE DEMOCRACY,

taking into consideration Proposed Senate Resolution No. 402.

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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.

SPONSORSHIP SPEECH OF SENATOR PANGILINAN

Senator Pangilinan submitted for the adoption of the Body Proposed Senate Resolution No. 399, taking into consideration Proposed Senate Resolution No. 402, "Honoring Former Secretary of the Department of Tourism Ramon R. Jimenez, Jr."

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

Today, this Representation wishes to honor Secretary "MonJ" R. Jimenez Jr., the man who put a "Fun Philippines" on the world map.

Nakasama po natin si Secretary MonJ sa Executive department noong nakaraang administrasyon. Siya po bilang Tourism Secretary at ako naman bilang Presidential Assistant for Food Security and Agricultural Modernization.

Noong mamatay ang asawa ni Ginoong MonJ na si Abby, ito ang madalas kong marinig sa kanya: "We report to a collective consciousness that is a big part of what we can call our conscience. The 'little voice inside our head' is actually a chorus. A chorus composed of the good people in our lives as they say, 'Be good. We can see you.'

"The good people in our lives are the same people we report to in our hearts and minds. We anticipate their approval and their blessing even when they are not around because we worry, almost automatically, that whenever we do wrong, we are less deserving of their love and respect."

Sino ang gabay at konsiyensiya natin sa ating mga ginagawa lalo na sa public service? Sabi ni MonJ, iyong munting tinig, iyong chorus daw iyon ng mga mahal natin sa buhay na nagsasabing "Magpakabuti ka at nakikita ka naming. Pinapanood ka namin.

Sa puso at isip natin, nagre-report tayo sa mga taong pinahahalagahan natin. Inaasam ang kanilang "ok" at "good job" kahit wala na sila. Kasi automatic na nag-aalala tayo na kung gumawa tayo ng mali, magiging hindi tayo karapat-dapat sa kanilang pagtingin, sa kanilang pagmamahal.

Maraming golden nuggets of wisdom si Sec MonJ pero isa ito sa mga tumatak sa akin lalo na nang mawala na rin ang aking ama noong Enero 2016. Tama si MonJ, iyong mga mahal natin sa buhay, sila ang check natin, ika nga, kumbaga sa branches of government.

Ang mga ginintuang aral ni Secretary Mon ay malinaw at matalas; nakaangkla sa demokrasya; sa boses ng maliliit.

During the social media boom after 2010, particularly iyong microblogging site Twitter, the words "fun" and the "Philippines" were frequently seen tweeted together. Sec MonJ took advantage of this social media insight, and eight years ago on January 6, 2012, the "It's More Fun in the Philippines" tourism campaign was launched.

As many have fondly called him the "Yoda of Advertising," Sec MonJ described the campaign as one that is "people-powered." True enough, after a few hours, the slogan became a meme that thousands of Filipinos started personalizing in various social media platforms.

Many laughed remembering fond memories and outdoing each other trying to prove which Filipino experience was more fun. Eventually, it became viral all over the world showing how, indeed, it is more fun in the Philippines.

Sikat na sikat ang kampanya kasi iyon ang puso sa bawat Pilipino—masayahin. And it brought about the unprecedented achievements for the Philippine tourism industry, almost doubling tourism arrivals and revenue, and creating the jobs and businesses we are now trying to save in this time of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sec MonJ's leadership imbued Philippine tourism with a lasting strategic direction. *Ang layo ng narating natin bilang Pilipino dahil napakasimple at napaka-eleganteng kampanya tungkol sa "Kung sino tayo."*

Sec MonJ was also a mentor to countless young talents in advertising, communications, and public service, teaching them by his life's examples how to uphold values, especially love of country.

Buong buhay niya, tinaguyod ni Sec MonJ ang ideyang ang komunikasyon ay isang kasangkapan ng katotohanan, pagbubuklod at pakikinig—mahahalagang pundasyon ng ating demokrasya.

Sabi niya, “Truth is the most powerful instrument of persuasion—the antidote to the hate, lies, and anger of social media strategies that exploit big data, microtargeting, and algorithm bias.”

It was truly an honor and a privilege to have dared, inspired and to have risked alongside Sec MonJ, and even if we ended up—to borrow the term—“bloodied but unbowed.” His passing left many of us heart-broken and in deep grief. I will always remember him as the man who loved and served his country well.

He remains loved and respected by those whom he engaged not only for his formidable talents as a communicator, but also for his integrity, incorruptibility, humility, fairness, and, above all, love.

He will be missed. We express our sincerest condolences to his daughters Nina and Sassa, and his many colleagues and adopted children in advertising, communications, and public service.

Na-imagine ko ngayon si Sec MonJ with his wife Abby by his side, looking down from heaven and telling all of us he left behind, “It is even more fun in heaven.”

Paalam, Sec MonJ, at maraming salamat sa iyong sakripisyo at pagmamahal sa bayan.

COSPONSORSHIP SPEECH OF SENATOR HONTIVEROS

Senator Hontiveros delivered her cosponsorship speech, as follows:

I join my colleagues, Senators Kiko Pangilinan and Leila De Lima, in this resolution honoring the visionary and public servant, former Tourism Secretary Mon Jimenez. With his brilliant mind, Sec Mon captured the Filipino spirit—our resilience, our levity, our love of family and commitment to community—and shared it to the world.

His wit is also inimitable. Actually, *kaninang umaga, habang may pinapakinggan akong* public address, *naalala ko si Sec Mon, at ang kanyang* quote *na* “The worst form of corruption is stealing people’s time.” My *kasama* in Akbayan remember him as someone who listened to all voices around the table, and who ensured diversity and inclusiveness in public service.

Paalam, Sec Mon! It is certainly a less fun Philippines without you.

COSPONSORSHIP SPEECH OF SENATOR VILLANUEVA

Pursuant to the manifestation of Senator Zubiri, the following is the cosponsorship speech of Senator Villanueva on Senate Resolution No. 399 which was deemed read into the Journal and Record of the Senate:

Words are not enough to express our heartfelt sorrow on the death of a public servant, pillar of Philippine advertising industry, a marketing communications expert, and a mentor – former Tourism Secretary Ramon R. Jimenez, Jr.

As a public servant – he made tourism the shortest path to inclusive growth.

As pillar of our nation’s advertising industry – he spent more than three decades in helping our home-grown brands break into the global arena.

As a marketing expert – he was responsible for the famed Philippine tourism tagline, “It’s More Fun in the Philippines.”

As a mentor – he inspired many people, including myself, to take on bold missions to make a difference.

I am blessed to have had the opportunity of working with “MonJ”/Secretary Mon Jimenez as Cabinet members of former President Benigno C. Aquino III. I will be forever grateful to him for influencing my thoughts on what it means to be in public service.

Indeed, the life and works of Sec. Mon Jimenez is an inspiration to the Filipino people and a source of hope and courage especially in uncertain and difficult times like these.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR ANGARA

Senator Angara stated that it was rare for a person’s brilliance to be matched by modesty and kindness as in the case of Secretary Mon. He said that in the five years that Secretary Jimenez presided in the Department of Tourism, there was massive rise in domestic tourism from a few million tourists to almost a hundred million tourists. Regretfully, he said that the government was not able to take advantage

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of Sec Mon's marketing wizardry by building international infrastructure in the country.

COAUTHORS

Upon motion of Senator Zubiri, there being no objection, all the Members were made coauthors of Proposed Senate Resolution No. 399.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR PANGILINAN

Senator Pangilinan stated that the middle initial of Secretary Jimenez should "R" rather than "A," and he asked that it be corrected accordingly.

ADOPTION OF PROPOSED SENATE RESOLUTION NO. 399

Upon motion of Senator Zubiri, there being no objection, Proposed Senate Resolution No. 399 was adopted by the Body.

PRIVILEGE SPEECH OF SENATOR GORDON

Availing himself of the privilege hour, Senator Gordon said he would speak on the victims of criminals riding-in-tandem as he had done numerous times. He noted that in 2019, 1,234 people were killed, which means there were more victims of criminals riding-in-tandem than the current number of COVID-19 fatalities.

Senator Gordon said that if a person is killed and nothing is done about it, the criminals are emboldened to perpetrate their ill will upon the people. He disclosed the latest incident involving Cornelio Pepino, a radio journalist in Dumaguete, the third one to be killed in the last several years, but the first to be killed within the year. He said the journalist stood strongly on issues involving illegal mining, good governance, and graft and corruption, and that the journalist was shot with his wife, and, fortunately, the latter survived. He lamented, however, that two children had been orphaned.

Senator Gordon stated that Congress should not stand idly by as more people are killed. He recalled that a few months ago, Attorney Santos of the Bureau of Prisons was killed while he was fetching his child from school near Muntinlupa. He said that there have been so many other people from Muntinlupa who have been killed by assassins riding-in-tandem.

Senator Gordon also mentioned Judge Mario Anacleto Bañez, presiding judge of Regional Trial Court Branch 25 in Tagudin, Ilocos Sur, who was recently killed while driving his Hyundai Accent on his way home when two motorcycle-riding men fired shots at him in Brgy. Mameltac, San Fernando City on November 5, 2019.

Senator Gordon reiterated that such crimes should not and cannot be tolerated forever as it makes the government look very weak. He lamented that despite the enactment of the Motorcycle Act, a crime prevention measure that he sponsored and which was signed into law on March 8, 2019, the Department of Transportation, in particular the Land Transportation Authority, has failed to implement it, and sadly, he said, it showed the ineffectiveness of Congress as the laws they pass are not being followed, similar to the resolution which the Senate passed regarding the ABS-CBN franchise.

Senator Gordon stated with the sheer number of cases of journalists and other people being killed in the country, the Philippines ranks fifth in the world. He stressed the importance of enforcing the law, noting that 14 months have passed since the passage of the law, but the LTO has done nothing to implement it in violation of Article 2 of the Civil Code which provides that laws shall take effect after fifteen days following the completion of their publication either in the Official Gazette or newspaper of general circulation in the Philippines, unless otherwise provided. He said that if the Executive department does not enforce the law, it would violate the Constitution. He also pointed out that there had hardly been any people who were put to jail for riding-in-tandem crimes because the PNP and LTO are not doing their jobs. Thus, he stressed the importance of sending a strong signal to all law enforcement authorities that there is a pandemic of motorcycle riding-in-tandem killings.

Relative thereto, Senator Gordon said that in 2019, 1,234 were killed, 742 were wounded, 1,866 were hurt. He said that crimes committed by criminals riding-in-tandem have been going on for years spanning several administrations; thus, it is time to act, and the people involved in LTO and PNP should be asked to resign if they cannot implement even a simple law.

Senator Gordon reiterated the need for the Senate to act and call for an investigation to be conducted by the Committee on Peace and Order or the Committee

on Accountability of Public Officers and Investigations (Blue Ribbon). He hoped that something could finally be done for all the victims of riding-in-tandems.

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY OF SENATOR LACSON

Senator Lacson asked if Members are only allowed to deliver a privilege speech when they are on the floor. Senate President Sotto replied that during their first meeting about teleconferencing, there was a suggestion that a Member must be on the floor when delivering a privilege speech. He said that before Senator Gordon was recognized earlier and allowed to speak, he asked if there were any objections, and that when there was none, Senator Gordon was allowed to deliver his privilege speech via teleconference.

Senate President Sotto stated that the chairman of the Committee on Rules would be asked to finalize the rule if there is need to do it. Senator Zubiri said that while there had been an internal arrangement among the Members regarding the matter, delivering a privilege speech via teleconference would be on a case-to-case basis. He further recalled that the issue was discussed regarding interpellations where the interpellator is on the floor. Senator Gordon said that he would be ready to answer any interpellations.

INQUIRY OF SENATOR ANGARA

Senator Angara asked on the distinction between a sponsorship speech and a privilege speech, noting that sponsorship speeches are allowed to be delivered via teleconferencing. He said that a privilege speech is about a pressing issue or matter important to a senator that it impels him to deliver.

Senate President Sotto recalled that in their discussions, there was mention of the word "pressing," and with more reason, they thought that the sponsor should be present in the hall. At present, he said that the agreement was in a form of a request.

Senator Zubiri confirmed the statement that privilege speeches on the floor was more of a request than a rule. He believed that there are other Members who wish to deliver privilege speeches but are careful not to catch the virus, the very reason why they opted to do via teleconferencing.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR VILLAR

Senator Villar suggested that the Body allow the senators to deliver their speeches at home.

Senate President Sotto said that he saw no problem with the two options, whether a senator delivers his speech via teleconference or on the floor.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR LACSON

Since a precedent has been set, and in fairness to the other Members who would like to deliver their speech at their homes, Senator Lacson likewise suggested allowing speeches delivered via teleconference.

REFERRAL OF SPEECH TO COMMITTEE

Upon motion of Senator Zubiri, there being no objection, the Chair referred the privilege speech of Senator Gordon to the Committee on Public Order and Dangerous Drugs.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR ZUBIRI

Senator Zubiri stated that Senator Villanueva would submit his cosponsorship speech on Senate Resolution No. 399 on the death of former Tourism Secretary Jimenez, for insertion into the Journal and Record of the Senate.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR GORDON

Regarding the issue of where to deliver a privilege speech, Senator Gordon stated that he would have delivered his speech on the floor but that due to the current circumstances, and since they have agreed to have electronic sessions in the Senate, delivering a speech via teleconferencing does not mean that their power to speak, or the message of their speech, is curtailed.

Senate President Sotto clarified that there was no curtailment as it was merely a request; however, they have already resolved the issue as they have allowed privilege speeches via teleconferencing.

Senator Gordon added that a senator avails of the privilege hour because an issue requires concern or immediate action and they need to deliver their

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point across. He clarified that he has nothing against Senator Lacson's statement as he agreed with him about doing things right, but that rules should be laid down so that everyone could abide by them.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR CAYETANO

On the same topic, Senator Cayetano shared what she learned in their hearing on future's thinking as she pointed that one of their resource persons is a Futures Thinker.

Senator Cayetano said that the Futures Thinkers had developed application that identifies different parts of life, such as wellness, health, and farming as well as indoor life which has hit a high level and has even likely accelerated because of COVID-19 to the point that so much of what used to be experienced outdoors are being done indoors. She surmised that her fellow senators might be missing the ambiance and the environment that the Senate session hall brings especially when they deliver privilege speeches, but she pointed out that in the interest of staying safe, many of their usual activities have to be done in their homes minus the glamour and the impact of being inside the session hall. She said that she would want to share such kind of futures thinking with the other senators.

SENATE BILL NOS. 41, 751, AND 1487 IN COMMITTEE REPORT NO. 86

Upon motion of Senator Zubiri, there being no objection, Senate Bill Nos. 41, 751, and 1487 were deemed considered in Committee Report No. 86 on Senate Bill No. 1520.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR ZUBIRI

Senator Zubiri informed the Body that due to an emergency, Senator Villanueva would not be able to push through with his scheduled sponsorship of Senate Bill Nos. 1216 and 1520 that afternoon,

Senate President Sotto expressed willingness to sponsor Senate Bill No. 1520, but he believed that it would be better to seek the permission of the Sponsor before doing so.

Senator Zubiri stated that the sponsorship could be made the first item in the agenda for the following day.

ANNOUNCEMENT OF SENATOR ZUBIRI

Senator Zubiri reminded the Members that a caucus would be held after the suspension of the session in order for them to test the new teleconference setup. He explained that the teleconference provider would email the link for the new "meeting room" for the caucus. He encouraged the Members to participate in the exercise as it would include discussions on some points raised by the modified enhanced community quarantine as well as the next steps on the list of priority measures that need to be taken up in the next three to four weeks before adjournment on June 3, 2020.

Senate President Sotto suggested that the Members leave the online meeting after the suspension so that they could receive the link for the online caucus which would be confined to the participants and would not be made available via live stream.

SUSPENSION OF SESSION

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

It was 4:46 p.m.

RESUMPTION OF SESSION

At 3:00 p.m. of Wednesday, May 13, 2020, the session resumed with Senate President Sotto presiding.

FOURTH ADDITIONAL REFERENCE OF BUSINESS

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

BILLS ON FIRST READING

Senate Bill No. 1526, entitled

AN ACT CREATING THE NATIONAL
EDUCATION COUNCIL, DEFINING
ITS POWERS AND FUNCTIONS,
APPROPRIATING FUNDS THERE-
FOR, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

Introduced by Senator Gatchalian

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To the Committees on Basic Education, Arts and Culture; Higher, Technical and Vocational Education; and Finance

Senate Bill No. 1527, entitled

AN ACT PROVIDING FOR THE DEVELOPMENT, ADMINISTRATION, ORGANIZATION, TRAINING, MAINTENANCE AND UTILIZATION OF THE MEDICAL RESERVE CORPS, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

Introduced by Senator Cayetano

To the Committees on Health and Demography; and Finance

Senate Bill No. 1528, entitled

AN ACT AMENDING REPUBLIC ACT NO. 11332, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS THE "MANDATORY REPORTING OF NOTIFIABLE DISEASES AND HEALTH EVENTS OF PUBLIC HEALTH CONCERN ACT"

Introduced by Senator Go

To the Committees on Health and Demography; and Justice and Human Rights

Senate Bill No. 1529, entitled

AN ACT REQUIRING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF QUARANTINE FACILITIES IN EVERY REGION IN THE COUNTRY, PROVIDING FUNDS THEREFOR, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

Introduced by Senator Go

To the Committees on Health and Demography; Public Works; and Finance

Senate Bill No. 1530, entitled

AN ACT AMENDING SECTION 18, BOOK VII, CHAPTER 3 OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE CODE OF THE PHILIPPINES

Introduced by Senator Drilon

To the Committees on Constitutional Amendments and Revision of Codes; and Public Services

RESOLUTIONS

Proposed Senate Resolution No. 403, entitled

RESOLUTION URGING THE APPROPRIATE COMMITTEE TO CONDUCT AN INQUIRY, IN AID OF LEGISLATION, ON THE RESPONSIVENESS OF THE COUNTRY'S PUBLIC HEALTH INFRASTRUCTURE AND THE ACCESSIBILITY OF VITAL MEDICAL EQUIPMENT AND SUPPLIES, WITH THE END GOAL OF IMPROVING THE COUNTRY'S RESPONSIVENESS TO THE CURRENT COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND PREPAREDNESS FOR FUTURE NATIONAL HEALTH EMERGENCIES

Introduced by Senator Cayetano

To the Committees on Health and Demography; and Public Works

Proposed Senate Resolution No. 404, entitled

RESOLUTION URGING THE COMMITTEE ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS, INNOVATION, AND FUTURES THINKING TO CONDUCT A HEARING, IN AID OF LEGISLATION, ON THE EFFECTS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON THE FUTURE OF HEALTH SERVICE DELIVERY IN THE COUNTRY FOR THE NEW NORMAL AND IN PREPARATION FOR FUTURE PANDEMICS AND OTHER HEALTH EMERGENCIES

Introduced by Senator Cayetano

To the Committees on Sustainable Development Goals, Innovation and Futures Thinking; and Health and Demography

COMMUNICATION

Letter from the Executive Secretary of the Office of the President, respectfully transmitting to the

Senate the 7th Report of the President to the Joint Congressional Oversight Committee, pursuant to Section 5 of Republic Act No. 11469, otherwise known as the Bayanihan to Heal as One Act.

To the Committee on Finance

SPECIAL ORDER

Upon motion of Senator Zubiri, there being no objection, the Body approved the transfer of Committee Report No. 86 on Senate Bill No. 1520 from the Calendar from Ordinary Business to the Calendar for Special Orders.

COMMITTEE REPORT NO. 86 ON SENATE BILL NO. 1520

Upon motion of Senator Zubiri, there being no objection, the Body considered, on Second Reading, Senate Bill No. 1520 (Committee Report No. 86), entitled

AN ACT ESTABLISHING A MEDICAL SCHOLARSHIP AND RETURN SERVICE PROGRAM FOR DESERVING STUDENTS AND 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 Zubiri, only the title of the bill was read without prejudice to the insertion of its full text in to the Record of the Senate.

The Chair recognized Senator Villanueva for the sponsorship.

At this juncture, Senate President Sotto relinquished the Chair to Senator Lacson.

SPONSORSHIP SPEECH OF SENATOR VILLANUEVA

Senator Villanueva, on behalf of the Committees on Higher Technical and Vocational Education; Health and Demography; and Finance, submitted for plenary consideration Senate Bill No. 1520, entitled "An Act Establishing A Medical Scholarship and Return Service Program for Deserving Students and Appropriating Funds Therefor and for Other Purposes," under Committee Report No. 86.

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

I cannot think of any other proof to show the significance of this measure other than the fact that this is the very first bill—Senate Bill No. 1—that was filed in the Eighteenth Congress and authored primarily by no less than the Senate President himself, Sen. Tito Sotto.

Today is also the death anniversary of the great Senator Edgardo J. Angara—known champion of education and Senate's great treasure. So, let me also put on record that this sponsorship speech is also dedicated to Sen. Ed Angara, the father of our colleague, Sen. Sonny Angara.

Senate Bill No. 1520 seeks to establish a medical scholarship and return service program for deserving Filipino students in state universities and colleges and in partner private higher educational institutions in regions where there are no SUCs offering medicine.

The passage of this measure is long overdue. No event in recent history has demonstrated with pristine clarity the urgent need to increase the number of medical professionals in the country. The time to establish a medical scholarship and return service program is now.

According to a 2017 report by the World Health Organization, in total, there are around 40,775 doctors in public and private health facilities, respectively. This means that there are only about 3.9 doctors for every 10,000 population in the country. This is very far from the ideal ratio of 10 doctors for every 10,000 population. Based on our calculation to fill this gap, we need an additional 66,350 doctors in the country.

Indeed, we have seen the devastating doctor shortage long before the COVID-19 pandemic. The lack of doctors in the country is even more aggravated by the fact that some doctors leave the country for greener pastures. Moreover, most of our physicians are in urban areas. For example, based on a 2017 WHO study, there are about 10.6 doctors for every 10,000 population in Metro Manila, while the Autonomous Region for Muslim Mindanao has only 0.9 doctor—less than 1% per 10,000 population. And yet even with a doctor density of 10.6 in Metro Manila, there is no assurance that a sick person can be attended immediately when he or she goes to a hospital in Metro Manila.

Last April 24, a woman who just gave birth died of blood loss in Caloocan City. One after another, six hospitals allegedly refused her

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admission for about six hours. One of the six hospitals that turned them away reportedly said that they did not have available obstetrician at that time.

San Jose Del Monte General Hospital, the only hospital that did not turn them away, declared the woman dead on arrival because of blood loss.

A doctor is the only hope for a dying person. But how many more people will die on the streets wandering to find a hospital or a physician? According to the Coalition for Primary Care, six out of every 10 Filipinos die without seeing a doctor. Most of them are poor and vulnerable.

Bakit nga po ba kulang na kulang ang mga doktor sa ating bansa? One certain answer is the prohibitive cost of going to medical school. According to Dr. Gerardo D. Legaspi, the medical director of Philippine General Hospital, the cost of a PGH medical education for five years is about P1.8 million, excluding living and other school expenses.

The high cost of tuition fees in medical schools is even aggravated by the fact that more than half of the regions in the country do not have a state university or college that offers medical programs. Worse, four regions which are MIMAROPA, Region XII, Caraga, and BARMM, do not even have any private or public higher education institution that offers medical programs. Thus, aspiring medical students in these regions will not only have to think about paying for their tuition fees, but also where to get their lodging and living expenses.

Surely, an average Filipino family earning P313,000 annually, which is the average income of a Filipino family based on the 2018 Family Income and Expenditure Survey, will hardly be able to afford this, and still support an average Filipino size of four to five members.

This piece of legislation seeks to help young talented and yet financially strapped people like so many of our *kababayans* to enroll in a school of medicine. The proposed medical scholarship will cover tuition fees and all other school fees, including board and lodging, transportation, and other miscellaneous expenses. Also included will be the internship, medical board review, and licensure fees.

In exchange for education at the expense of the taxpayers, the bill requires a return service of one year per year of inclusion into the program. The mandatory return service will allow beneficiaries to serve an underserved public health

office or government hospital. The DOH will determine the priority areas, but the recipient hometown will be first in the order of priority.

In the long run, we hope to see to it that the medical profession is accessible to the masses. In so doing, we hope to make medical doctors and health services available to every Filipino across the country.

Finally, it is not for nothing that our national hero, Dr. Jose Rizal, is a physician. Heroism runs in the blood of medical doctors. Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, our physicians faced the accompanying risks and inconveniences of serving at the front lines. Their heroic sense of duty found honor and glory. They found fulfillment in serving the country during this public health emergency.

Indeed, I believe that the passage of this law will be a milestone, not only for the medical profession in the Philippines but also for the whole Filipino nation.

Before we end, allow me again to reiterate our thanks and appreciation to all our colleagues for their interest and support to this measure, most especially the original author of this measure since time immemorial, our Senate President, Sen. Vicente C. Sotto III, coauthors Senate President Pro Tempore, Sen. Ralph G. Recto, Sen. Nancy Binay, Sen. Grace Poe, Sen. Bato dela Rosa, Sen. Bong Go, and other members of the committee who have actively participated during the deliberations of this bill.

On the above merits and as a way of honoring our fallen heroes, the medical frontliners who risk their lives to save ours, I urge my distinguished colleagues to support the immediate passage of this measure.

COSPONSORSHIP SPEECH OF SENATOR SOTTO

Senate President Sotto stated that Senate Bill No. 1520 is a significant initiative to address both the issue of scarcity and maldistribution of physicians by the granting of scholarships to deserving medical students to aid in the increase of the number of physicians in the country.

Following is the full text of Senate President Sotto's cosponsorship speech:

I purposely chose the Medical Scholarship Act as my number one priority bill. As such, my bill was recorded as Senate Bill No. 1 not

because I predicted the coming of the COVID-19 outbreak, but because the shortage of doctors has always been an ongoing concern of the country among other health care problems.

Mahatma Gandhi once said: "It is health which is real wealth and not pieces of gold and silver."

It is that important that it has been a declared policy of the State and enshrined in the law of the land to protect and promote the right to health of the people and instill health consciousness among them. However, even though the government is allotting so much of our limited resources for the country's healthcare, with an increasing budget and spending trend every year, it seems that there are still a lot of areas for improvement.

One of the areas that has to be addressed is the worsening shortage of doctors. And this has been an alarming concern even prior to this COVID-19 crisis. In a 2016 data mentioned earlier also by Senator Villanueva, our principal sponsor, the doctor-to-patient ratio in the Philippines is 1:33,000. It is way, way below the World Health Organization's desirable doctor-population ratio of 1:1,000. Thus, there is undeniably a problem that needs to be remedied.

In addition to the scarcity in the number of doctors, another issue that has to be addressed in relation thereto is the severe maldistribution of physicians in the country caused by most doctors preferring to practice in the urban areas than in the rural. According to the article published by the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism on September 11, 2019, 65% of the total physicians in the public sector are working in Luzon, 32% of which are in Metro Manila alone. Only 18% of government physicians are in the Visayas and in even smaller number of 16% in Mindanao.

This proposed measure seeks to address both issues of scarcity and maldistribution of physicians because the granting of scholarships to deserving medical students would aid in the increase of the number of physicians in the country. At the same time, this proposed bill would require the scholar to serve in a government public health office or government hospital in his/her hometown, province, or region. Such a situation would hopefully put a sense of balance in the distribution of doctors particularly in the government sector which takes care of nearly 70% of the healthcare needs of the population.

Alam na alam ng mga kababayan natin na marami ang gustong maging doktor bata pa

lamang. Ang nakakapigil ay dahil walang pambayad. Ito na po ang sagot.

The immediate passage of this measure does not need to be emphasized. If we are not bound by any rules I would have immediately moved for its approval. But since we are, I sincerely hope for the expeditious approval of the Medical Scholarship Act.

SUSPENSION OF SESSION

Upon motion of Senator Lacson, the session was suspended.

It was 3:19 p.m.

RESUMPTION OF SESSION

At 3:19 p.m., the session was resumed with Senate President Sotto presiding.

COSPONSORSHIP SPEECH OF SENATOR GO

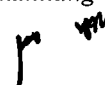
A coauthor and cosponsor of Senate Bill No. 1520, Senator Go delivered the following speech:

As chairman of the Committee on Health and Demography, I express my support to the Medical Scholarship and Return Service Program for deserving Filipino students who want to serve the country in the field of medicine.

Before I became a senator, I was a long-time personal aide of President Rodrigo Duterte during his time as mayor of Davao City. I was with him, performing what we can also call as "public service." We visited the sick, we helped the poor, and Mayor Duterte did his best to address the healthcare situation in Davao City, which is why you can see how progressive and responsive our healthcare is in the South. My duty came with many realizations, one of which is that addressing healthcare must be taken through a holistic approach.

Isa sa dapat sikapin nating itaguyod ay ang pagpapadami ng ating mga healthcare workers sa bansa. Aminado tayo na kulang tayo sa mga doktor lalong-lalo na po sa mga probinsya. Ang ating doctor-patient ratio ay hindi makakasustento sa tugon ng kalusugan sa ating bansa sa ngayon.

Higit pa sa krisis na kinakaharap natin ngayon, maraming doktor at medical professionals ang naisakripisyo ang kanilang buhay. Nabawasan pa tayo.



Alam natin na hindi mura ang pag-aaral ng medisina ngunit maraming Pilipino ang gustong kumuha ng kursong ito. Through the Medical Scholarship bill, the student will be assisted financially, covering their tuition and other school fees, allowance for prescribed books, supplies and equipment, clothing and uniform allowance, among others. This scholarship will cater to deserving Filipino students in state universities and colleges and in partner private higher education institutions in regions that there are no state universities and colleges offering the medicine course.

Once medical students pass the licensure examination, they must provide a return service equivalent to the years that they have also been assisted by the medical scholarship program. This will pave the way for us to substantially support the number of doctors in the country and particularly increase the number of doctors in the provinces or regions to which they belong or as has been identified by Department of Health.

This vision is also in line with the “*Balik-Probinsya*” program that I have proposed and was already approved by the Executive department. Once we have more doctors in the provinces, we can assure Filipinos that better life is waiting for them in the rural community.

Kapag natapos natin ang laban sa COVID-19, malaki ang papel na dapat gampanan ng ating gobyerno sa pagpapataas ng bilang ng mga doktor sa bansa lalong-lalo na po sa mga probinsya. Sabi nila, “Edukasyon ang sagot sa kahirapan.” Para sa akin, “Edukasyon ang daan natin para sa kaunlaran.”

Maraming Pilipino ang gustong tumulong at mag-serbisyo para sa isang malusog na Pilipinas. Bigyan natin ng pagkakataon ang kabataang Pilipino na makapag-aral ng kursong ito at makapaglingkod bilang doktor sa bansa. I believe that the passage of this bill will significantly improve the healthcare system in our country.

Hinihimok ko ang lahat ng mga naririto na suportahan po natin ito — ang medical scholarship and return service program. I would like to commend the good sponsor for pushing for this measure, and I also wish to convey my intention to be a coauthor of this significant legislation. Better healthcare requires a strong backbone of doctors and health professionals. If we do this, we can establish a better healthcare system and, ultimately, a better Philippines.

COSPONSORSHIP SPEECH OF SENATOR DELA ROSA

Also a coauthor and cosponsor of Senate Bill No. 1520, Senator Dela Rosa delivered the following speech:

“Cure sometimes, treat often, and comfort always,” that is according to Hippocrates. As known by everyone, Hippocrates is an ancient Greek physician who is traditionally regarded as the “Father of Medicine.” He is respected as such that the guiding obligations and proper conduct of doctors, which may or may not have been written by him, was named after him—The Hippocratic Oath—a tall ethical order to any physician who wishes to practice his profession.

This noble responsibility may be one of the reasons that there is a scarcity of doctors or physicians in the world, or is it just the lack of opportunity, especially to Filipinos, to study and be licensed to heal the sick?

For this reason, it is my privilege to cosponsor Senate Bill No. 1520 or the “Medical Scholarship Act,” principally authored by our Senate President and principally sponsored by our hardworking Chairman of the Committee on Higher Technical and Vocational Education, Senator Joel Villanueva.

Recent data from the Professional Regulation Commission will show that there are 84,783 licensed Filipino physicians. Out of that, only 28,428 doctors are practicing in the country. For a population of more than 100 million, clearly, 28,428 doctors are not enough to attend to everyone’s medical needs. In fact, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority, six out of 10 Filipinos die without seeing a doctor.

Nailantad ng COVID-19 ang masakit na katotohanan—kulang ang ating mga doktor. Sa kasamaang palad pa ay nabawasan pa ang kakaunti nang bilang ng ating mga doktor dulot ng kabayanihan ng mga ito na labanan ang COVID-19. Maraming salamat po sa inyong serbisyo! Sa kasalukuyan, 628 doctors ang kumpirmadong may COVID-19.

Hindi maipagkakaila na hindi lahat ay nabibigyan ng oportunidad na makapag-aral ng medisina. Ang pagiging doktor marahil ang isa sa mga propesyon na tanging mayayaman at matatalino lamang ang may kakayahang makapagtapos ng kursong ito.

Bukod sa daan-daang libong tuition fee, napakaraming kailangang gastusin bago

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makapagtapos ng medisina. Maraming libro na kailangang bilhin at basahin, mga laboratory fees at medical equipment na kailangang bayaran. May balita pa nga na kailangan pa nilang bumili ng katawan ng namatay para mapag-aralan.

Kaya naman ang panukalang Senate Bill No. 1520 o "Medical Scholarship Act" ay magbibigay ng oportunidad sa mga may gustong mag-aral ng medisina. Wala na silang kailangang intindihin na bayarin. Maaari nang matupad ang pangarap ng marami sa ating mga kabataan na maging doktor at makapanggamot ng maysakit.

Ang panukalang ito ay makapagbibigay din ng continuous supply ng mga doktor lalo na para sa mga lugar na hindi naaabot o walang permanenteng doktor. Kakayanin na nating magkaroon ng isang doktor kada isang bayan.

Kailangan natin ng doktor. Kailangan natin ng maraming doktor. Ang pagsasabatas ng panukalang ito ay magbibigay daan para makamit natin ang ideal doctor-to-population ratio.

Hinihikayat ko ang lahat na suportahan ang panukalang ito upang mapabilis ang pagkakaroon natin ng sapat na doktor sa bansa.

COSPONSORSHIP SPEECH OF SENATOR RECTO

Also a coauthor and cosponsor of Senate Bill No. 1520, Senator Recto delivered his cosponsorship speech, as follows:

A medical diploma carries a hefty price tag in this country. Tuition is so high and other fees so prohibitive that the joke is that medical schools should put a recovery room beside the school cashier, or deploy cash cards all over the campus during registration time. This leads to the parents remaining in financial ICU while their child is in school. This is probably the reason why some parents retain custody of the medical diploma of their child because while it is indeed a "*katunayan ng pagtatapos*" for the graduate, it is more of a "*resibo ng gastos*" for them.

As a friend once proudly told me, the medical diploma which hangs on a sala wall is worth as much as the Manansala beside it. But because medical education goes beyond receiving that parchment or passing the Board, what follows are years of training and specialization.

Medicine is a profession which has more fellowships than the Lord of the Rings.

The bottom line is that medical education in this country remains largely a privilege—only the sons and daughters on the top of the economic pyramid can afford. It is against this inconvenient truth that this bill comes to light.

In a nutshell, this bill allows the best and the brightest from the lower social rungs to become doctors. It is founded on the egalitarian proposition that becoming a physician should be a function of intellect, not of tax returns nor of postal zip codes.

Today, there are reportedly 130,000 licensed doctors in the country but only about 70,000 of them are in active practice. This translates into one doctor for every 33,000 Filipinos. In rural areas, the doctor-to-the-people ratio is very low. Often, the only doctor in this town is deployed by the Doctor to the Barrios program of the Department of Health. These are often unmarried new graduates who are willing to weave the vow of poverty and the pledge of single blissfulness with the Hippocratic Oath. But we should not be relying on missionary doctors to attend to the last, the least, and the lost. That important public service should not be dependent on the altruism of selfless individuals.

This is the reason why I have filed, for several Congresses now, two bills which will provide medical scholarships to the young people who have the head and the heart to serve their countrymen.

The first is the One Town, One Doctor bill. This proposed law requires government to choose one medical student scholar per town. To qualify, an applicant must belong to the upper 30% of a graduating class of any pre-Medical course and has been accepted to medical school. Thus, it is not an unconditional entitlement. The quota is linked to merit. The scholarship is linked to the condition that when the scholar becomes a doctor, he will go back to his town to serve for four years. In short, this is a "*galing sa bayan, tungo sa bayan*" scheme of producing doctors.

The second one is the Medical Scholarship Bill. This bill creates another window to finance the training of doctors. You know, our spending for tertiary education will breach P100 billion this year— P112.6 billion to be exact—P38.9 billion for the free college program, and P73.7 billion for the operation of SUCs. And if we are spending this much which, by the way, does not include DOST scholarships, then we might as well

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identify priority courses of which medicine is undoubtedly one. We have a surfeit of political science students but a shortage on medical science enrollees.

For this year, the DOH medical scholarship program has a measly budget of P167 million for less than 2,000 students in eight SUCs.

I do not know how much the bill we are discussing today will eventually cost. But this I am sure of: The two bills and the one we are finalizing today will have, cost-wise, a far smaller cost footprint than the hundreds of frivolous and unessential items that annually inhabit the national budget. It is certainly lower than this year's P9.6 billion Intelligence and Confidential Fund; a fraction of the P20.1 billion Travel Fund; and a drop in the bucket of the P1.2 trillion Personal Services budget for 2020.

For those who think the cost is too big, here's a point to ponder: The most recent figures show that the Philippine Military Academy spends P4.2 million to produce one graduate. In contrast, we will be spending half that amount to produce one graduate of what would virtually become the "Philippine Medical Academy."

If there is one unassailable truth that this pandemic has revealed for all of us to come to grips with, it is that doctors are vital for humanity's continued existence. This bill, in essence, seeks to produce more frontliners that we love to lionize and valorize today. The best way to honor them is to create a scholarship on their collective behalf.

Pandemic or not, this bill is the required companion measure to the Universal Health Care Law. We may give every Filipino a PhilHealth card but it will be useless if the facility he can present that card to for treatment has no doctor to attend to him. We may erect hospitals, but if there are no physicians who will staff them, then what we have built are white elephants.

Coronavirus taught us one lesson: We have to future-proof our country. Not only are emerging diseases wreaking havoc, but our graying population requires greater medical care and this bill will ensure that there are enough doctors for our people, and that the next time a bat flies from a forest and unleashes a lethal pathogen that will bring civilization to a standstill, we have an army of white coats ready to confront it.

I urge the immediate passage of this bill. I also congratulate the sponsor of this measure, and all the authors and coauthors of this measure.

COSPONSORSHIP SPEECH OF SENATOR BINAY

Senator Maria Lourdes Nancy S. Binay submitted her cosponsorship speech, to wit:

As the child of a medical doctor, I have seen firsthand how having a doctor in the family changes the mindset not only of that family but also of its immediate community. *Dahil doktor ang aking ina, naikintal sa aming pamilya ang halaga ng kalusugan.*

Hindi lang naging doktor ng pamilya ang aking ina, kundi naging doktor na rin ng aming mga kapitbahay—dulugan ng payong medikal at kalusugan mula sa pagpapabakuna ng mga bata at sa simpleng usapin ng gatas, maging sa mura at masustansiyang pagkain para sa mga pamilyang may limitadong kakayahan.

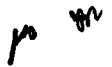
One of the harshest lessons we are learning amid the current public health crisis we are facing is the need to invest, and invest heavily — to ensure we have a fully working healthcare system that has not only the proper infrastructure but also a proper number of healthcare personnel who would attend to the needs of our people.

The numbers are glaring, especially with regard to our doctors. Current estimates place our country's doctor-to-patient ratio at one doctor per 33,000 patients. The World Health Organization's recommended doctor-to-patient ratio is 1:1,000.

We need more doctors, particularly in our underserved countryside. Yet, the cost of medical education is prohibitive for the average Filipino family, to say the least. Tuition in the country's top private medical schools can go as high as P150,000, and that is discounting the day-to-day costs and other fees that medical students have to shell out over the years. Meanwhile, even tuition at public medical schools are nothing to scoff at, with costs ranging from P24,000 to almost P90,000 per year.

Even for the 10.6 million middle income families in the Philippines, such soaring costs of matriculation could mean that the path towards having a doctor in the family is closed off, or would entail massive sacrifice, and most probably debt, if they push through with medical school.

And with government subsidy for medical students continuing to decrease, the urgency of passing this measure is only all the more



emphasized. Our current doctors are already overtaxed by our burgeoning population.

The people need its healers and the State must do its part so that such a vital need is met. During this pandemic we are seeing how the medical field is fraught with danger. Our doctors go to the frontlines of their own accord, knowing fully well the various risks they face, unafraid that in their attempt to save lives their own might be sacrificed. We must provide ample support for such a noble profession.

Sa aking mga kapwa mambabatas, we must help those who dream to become doctors despite all the risks the profession entails, yet cannot make their dream a reality because of the lack of money. Huwag po nating hayaang maging hadlang ang kahirapan sa pagtamo ng pangarap, lalo pa kung may potensiyal at karapat-dapat ang estudyante na tumanggap ng suporta.

Imagine our nation getting closer towards the recommended doctor-to-patient ratio, where the average Filipino family has easier access to medical advice, and harmful myths and misconceptions about health and well-being are dispelled.

Mas mapapadali po ang pagtamo natin sa target na ito kung ipapasa natin ang Medical Scholarship Act.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR ANGARA

Senator Angara congratulated Senator Villanueva for his hard work, and Senate President Sotto for his prescience in filing the historic Senate Bill No. 1. He then requested that he be made coauthor of the measure, as he recalled that he has authored and filed a similar measure in the past but that for some reason—it could be that the Universal Health Care has provisions which require the TESDA, CHED, and PRC to encourage or to fund medical scholarships—his office was not able to file it in the Eighteenth Congress.

He also mentioned that the Senate has led the initiative to have medical scholarships every year by allocating P317 million in 2017; P250 million in 2018; P167 million in 2019; and P167 million in 2020, for the eight state universities and colleges, namely, UP Manila, UP Manila School of Health Sciences in Palo, Leyte, West Visayas State University in Iloilo, University of Northern Philippines in Ilocos Sur, Mindanao State University, Cagayan State University, Mariano Marcos State University, and Bicol University.

He hoped that in a few years, the Senate would be proud of the doctors who benefited from its initiative.

COSPONSORSHIP SPEECH OF SENATOR REVILLA

Senator Revilla asked that he be made cosponsor and coauthor of the Medical Scholarship Act, and thereafter submitted his cosponsorship speech for insertion into the record, to wit:

Una po sa lahat, tayo ay nagpapasalamat sa mga may-akda at pangunahing sponsor ng Senate Bill No. 1520 na nagsusulong na madagdagan ang bilang ng ating mga doktor sa pamamagitan ng pagpapalayog ng medical scholarship.

During this time of public health emergency, a global crisis at that, the importance of medical practitioners especially doctors, cannot be overemphasized. At *sa panahon ding ito natin mas nabatid ang malaking kakulangan sa bilang ng mga doktor sa ating bansa, lalo na sa ating mga pampublikong pagamutan. Hindi ba madalas na nating naririnig noon ang hinaing na may ilang ospital sa mga probinsiya na minsan lamang napupuntahan ng doktor dahil sa dami ng pagamutan na kailangan nitong ikutan? Marami din sa ating mga kababayan ang namamatay sa kanilang karamdaman nang hindi man lamang nakakakonsulta sa isang espesyalista.*

Paano natin mapupunan ang kakulangan kung alam nating lahat na ang halaga ng pagdodoktor sa Pilipinas ay hindi biro. Mahal na nga ang magpaaral sa kolehiyo, lalong mas mahal pa kung gusto mong magdoktor. This profession is crucial to national development, and yet it is hard for any student who would want to pursue the profession if what he has is only motivation, and not enough financial resources. Sabi nga, ang pagdodoktor daw ay para lamang sa mga mayayaman. Kahit matalino ka, kulang ang may alam lang—kailangan mo ng pera.

This proposed measure therefore, seeks to address just that. This bill seeks to open the profession to more students who wish to become doctors. The State will assist them in attaining their dream. In exchange, these qualified scholars will have to serve the country by working in public hospitals and medical institutions. This offers a double-bladed solution to our public health concerns since we helped our students in becoming the professional that they would want

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to be, and on the other hand, adding to the pool of medical practitioners who is ready to serve our countrymen.

Tayo ay umaasa na sa ilalim ng panukang ito—ang Medical Scholarship Act—ay marami sa ating mga kabataan ang hindi na magdadalang isip na abutin ang kanilang pangarap na maging doktor at makapaglingkod sa ating mga kababayan. Ako ay nani-niwala na magiging mahalagang pundasyon ang panukalang ito upang mas lalo pang tumatag ang public health system sa ating bansa, kasabay ng modernisasyon ng ating mga ospital at pagpapalawig ng health insurance coverage ng ating mamamayan.

May I also put into record that this Representation has filed a bill, Senate Bill No. 446, that also seeks to provide scholarship and stipends, among others, for rural health doctors.

Again, may I commend the good sponsor for this very laudable bill and our very own Senate President who made this bill his pet bill.

COAUTHORS

Upon their request, Senators Lapid and Pacquiao were made coauthors of Senate Bill No. 1520.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR PACQUIAO

Senator Pacquiao said the Body should support all proposed measures that would improve the country's healthcare system, especially citing Senate Bill No. 1520.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR CAYETANO

Senator Cayetano placed on record that in 2015, the Body passed the bill which became law establishing Unified Financial Assistance System for Tertiary Education (UniFAST) with the objective of reconciling, improving, strengthening, expanding, and putting under one body all government-funded modalities of student financial assistance programs that would include grants, financial assistance, loans, and others. She recalled that the bill was initially filed by the late Sen. Edgardo Angara and that it was a good day to remember him since it was his death anniversary. She added that Sen. Sonny Angara, a colleague and the late legislator's son, was still in the House of

Representatives when the first version of the UniFAST was filed.

As the chairperson of the Committee on Education at that time, she said that she was of the view that medical scholarships would be covered by that law. She expressed full support and desire to be made cosponsor of the measure, saying that it requires a legislative push to bring something to the attention of the nation. She added that even though the authority is already there, the bill would give the needed push to prioritize medical scholarships.

COSPONSOR

Upon her request, Senator Cayetano was made cosponsor of Senate Bill No. 1520.

COAUTHORS

Upon their request, Senators Villar, Gatchalian, and Lacson were made coauthors of Senate Bill No. 1520.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR LACSON

Senator Lacson said that Senate Bill No. 1520 once it is passed into law would be the second Sotto Law of the land—one law from the grandfather of Senator Tito Sotto, and one from him, the grandson.

COAUTHOR

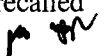
Upon his request, Senator Tolentino was made coauthor of Senate Bill No. 1520.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR TOLENTINO

Senator Tolentino said that during the early stages of the ongoing pandemic, he was the one who called for the immediate issuance of temporary licenses for new medical graduates which was delayed by the Department of Health. He said that during the period of amendments, he would reiterate his call to the DOH, and would push for it to be part of the bill's modern version.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATE PRESIDENT SOTTO

Senate President Sotto confirmed Senator Angara's statement that the initiative on free tertiary education in the country emanated from the Senate, as he recalled



that some years ago, Senator Lacson discovered and brought to the attention of the Body an P8.3 billion funding in the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) that was floating, and it was proposed that it be used to fund tertiary education because at that time it was not yet free. He said that the fund became the seed money that was used and infused by the Senate into the Tertiary Education Act, after which tertiary education became free in the country.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR LACSON

Senator Lacson stated that it was Senator Drilon who proposed that the money be used for tertiary education and that it was during the term of Senator Koko Pimentel as Senate President and already under the administration of President Duterte.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR ZUBIRI

Senator Zubiri requested that he made coauthor/cosponsor of Senate Bill No. 1520, saying that not too many people know that while his father's side is a family of politicians, his mother's side is a family of doctors. He disclosed that his grandfather, Dr. Manuel Fernandez, was one of the founders of Makati Medical Center and was also considered the father of Philippine Dermatology, the reason the Dermatology Wing at the third floor of Makati Medical Center was named after him. He said that his grandfather, who came from Libon in Albay, was a scholar of the University of the Philippines (UP) from his pre-med to his medical years and that if not for the fact that he was a scholar of the state university, he would not have become a doctor. He added that his uncles—brothers of her mother—are all doctors and that they would be very, very happy to know of the scholarship program for medical students.

SUSPENSION OF CONSIDERATION OF SENATE BILL NO. 1520

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

SPECIAL ORDER

Upon motion of Senator Zubiri, there being no objection, the Body approved the transfer of Committee Report No. 85 on Senate Bill No. 1216 from the Calendar for Ordinary Business to the Calendar for Special Orders.

COMMITTEE REPORT NO. 85 ON SENATE BILL NO. 1216

Upon motion of Senator Zubiri, there being no objection, the Body considered, on Second Reading, Senate Bill No. 1216 (Committee Report No. 85), entitled:

AN ACT DECLARING MAY 18 OF EVERY YEAR AS THE NATIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION DAY.

Pursuant to Section 67, Rule XXIII of the Rules of the Senate, with the permission of the Body, upon motion of Senator Zubiri, only the title of the bill 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, on behalf of the Committee on Higher, Technical and Vocational Education, presented for plenary consideration Senate Bill No. 1216 under Committee Report No. 85, entitled "An Act Declaring May 18 of Every Year as The National Higher Education Day."

Following is the full text of Senator Villanueva's speech:

Today, we are sponsoring a measure that seeks to recognize the role of higher education in national development by designating every 18th day of May every year as the National Higher Education Day.

Please do not get me wrong. While we cannot take for granted the fact that the second-class status of Technical Vocational Education and Training is a by-product of the Filipinos penchant for a college diploma, we are neither against higher education nor we perceive higher education as a competitor to TVET.

When considering TVET versus higher education, it is not a question of which is more important but the key is in understanding the relationship of the two in the socio-economic life of the nation as always mentioned by the late Sen. Edgardo Angara.

Both the importance and the relationship between TVET and higher education are reflected

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in various legislations that we passed since 2016. Designed to provide quality and affordable education in both TVET and higher education, the Free Tuition Law is among the primary examples as was extensively explained by no less than the Senate President himself a while ago.

In 2018, we successfully passed the National Tech-Voc Day Law to uplift the status of Tech-Voc. And today, we are pushing for the National Higher Education Bill to recognize the contributions of our universities and colleges in national development and the advancement of our society.

We are witnesses to how institutions of higher learning here in the Philippines play what the World Bank describes as a “critical role in supporting knowledge-driven economic growth and the construction of democratic socially-cohesive societies.”

More so, we have seen the importance of higher education institutions in addressing regional and global challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic. We contend that higher education institutions will play even greater roles in shaping the post-COVID-19 Filipino society.

And so, at this juncture, we urge your support for the passage of our National Higher Education Day Act Bill. This legislation designates every 18th day of May of every year as a special working holiday—and let me emphasize the word “working holiday”—to be known as the National Higher Education Day. The date coincides with the founding of the Commission on Higher Education on May 18, 1994. It is to recognize the valuable role that the commission has played for now over 25 years in the country’s national development as the policy-making body for institutions of higher learning in the country. Given all the above reasons, we seek the immediate passage of this bill.

Maraming salamat po at pagpalain tayong lahat ng ating Panginoong Diyos.

SUSPENSION OF CONSIDERATION OF SENATE BILL NO. 1216

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

COMMITTEE REPORT NO. 35 ON SENATE BILL NO. 1318

(Continuation)

Upon motion of Senator Zubiri, there being no objection, the Body resumed consideration, on Second

Reading, of Senate Bill No. 1318 (Committee Report No. 35), entitled

AN ACT AMENDING REPUBLIC ACT NO. 10068 OR THE ORGANIC AGRICULTURE ACT OF 2010.

Senator Zubiri stated that the parliamentary status was still the period of individual amendments.

Thereupon, the Chair recognized Senator Villar, sponsor of the measure, for the amendments using the approved amendments’ copy as of February 20, 2020.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR VILLAR

Senator Villar asked that she be allowed to finish the presentation of her individual amendments and, thereafter, the other members of the Senate could do the same. She informed the Body that before the start of the session she received in writing 29 proposed amendments of Senator Pangilinan, of which 16 were accepted while 13 were denied.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATE PRESIDENT SOTTO

Senate President Sotto manifested that he too has 19 amendments, and he asked how many amendments Senator Villar has before Senator Pangilinan gives his own amendments. Senator Villar replied that she would submit her amendments first before discussing those of Senator Pangilinan and of Senate President Sotto.

VILLAR AMENDMENTS

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

Page 4

- On line 32, replace the phrase “CONTAIN A PERIOD FOR ITS VALIDITY, AS SET BY THE BAFS” with the phrase HAVE A VALIDITY OF ONE YEAR.

Page 6

- On line 30, after the word “THEMSELVES,” replace the semicolon (;) with a colon (:);
- On the same line, after the colon (:), insert the proviso *PROVIDED, THAT THEIR REPRESENTATIVE IS A SMALL FARMER.*

Page 7

- On line 16, after the word "RESPECTIVELY," insert a new paragraph to read as follows:

AN APPOINTED/ELECTED MEMBER OF THE BOARD SHALL ONLY SERVE FOR A SINGLE TERM OF THREE (3) YEARS, WITHOUT REAPPOINTMENT. SHOULD THE MEMBER FAIL TO COMPLETE HIS/HER TERM, THE REPLACEMENT OR SUCCESSOR SHALL ONLY SERVE THE UNEXPIRED PORTION OF THE TERM.

Page 8

- On line 8, replace the phrase "STRENGTHEN AND EMPOWER" with BE STRENGTHENED AND EMPOWERED TO SUPPORT;
- On line 26, replace the phrase "MUNICIPALITY/CITY PGS GROUPS" with the phrase ORGANIC CERTIFYING BODIES (OCBs);

Page 11

- On line 1, replace the word "EXISTS" with the word OPERATES;
- Delete lines 8 and 9;
- On line 10, before the word "SHALL," delete the word "ORGANIZATION";
- On the same line, after the word "ALSO," replace the word "ACQUIRE" with the words SECURE A;
- On line 11, and whenever found in the bill, replace the word "RECOGNITION" with ACCREDITATION;
- On line 27, after the word "BE," delete the phrase "SUBJECT TO APPEAL" and in lieu thereof, insert following phrase and proviso:

APPEALABLE TO THE BAFS; *PROVIDED*, THAT THE BAFS SHALL RULE ON THE APPEAL WITHIN THIRTY (30) DAYS FROM ITS RECEIPT, OTHERWISE THE APPEALED DECISION SHALL BE CONSIDERED REVERSED;

- On the same line, after the word "PROVIDED," insert the word FURTHER;

Page 12

- On lines 12 to 13, after the word "WITHIN," replace the phrase "FIFTEEN WORKING (15)" with SIXTY (60);

Page 14

- Delete lines 21 to 32;

Page 15

- Delete lines 1 to 6;

Page 16

- On lines 24 to 25, after the word "BY," replace the phrase "A RECOGNIZED" with AN ACCREDITED CORE;
- On line 29, before the word "FURTHER," replace the word "ACCREDITATION" with the phrase FOR ONE YEAR; *PROVIDED*, THAT THEY SHALL EXPORT THEIR PRODUCTS;

Page 19

- On line 27, replace the figure "25" with 24;
- On line 29, insert a new section, to read as follows:

SEC. 16. SECTION 25 OF REPUBLIC ACT NO. 10068 IS HEREBY AMENDED AND RENUMBERED, TO READ AS FOLLOWS:

"SEC. [25] 26. Appropriations. - xxx

THE DEPARTMENT OF BUDGET AND MANAGEMENT SHALL INCLUDE ANNUALLY IN THE PRESIDENT'S PROGRAM OF EXPENDITURE FOR SUBMISSION TO AND APPROVAL BY CONGRESS ONE BILLION PESOS (P1,000,000,000.00) FOR THE PROMOTION AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE NATIONAL ORGANIC AGRICULTURE PROGRAM, ALLOCATED AS FOLLOWS:

- THIRTY-FIVE PERCENT (35%) FOR SHARED FACILITIES;
- TWENTY-FIVE PERCENT (25%) FOR SEEDS DEVELOPMENT/PLANTING MATERIALS AND ANIMALS DISTRIBUTION AND FEEDS FOR AQUACULTURE, SOIL AMENDMENTS AND BIO CONTROL AGENTS;
- TWENTY PERCENT (20%) FOR EXTENSION AND TRAINING;
- FIVE PERCENT (5%) FOR SOCIALIZED CREDIT;
- FIVE PERCENT (5%) FOR SMALL SCALE IRRIGATION SYSTEM.
- FIVE PERCENT (5%) FOR RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT; AND
- FIVE PERCENT (5%) FOR MARKETING AND PROMOTION."
- Renumber the succeeding sections accordingly; and

Page 20

- On line 15, after the word "ANY," delete the words "PGS GROUP."

MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR VILLAR

Senator Villar said that Senator Pangilinan had provided her a list of his amendments, of which 16 out of the 29 she would accept.

Senate President Sotto said that the amendments could be taken one at a time.

Senator Zubiri suggested that Senator Villar read all the amendments that she accepted, and then Senator Pangilinan could discuss the other proposals.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR PANGILINAN

Senator Pangilinan recognized the limitations of teleconferencing, saying that they would be unable to proceed as they normally would in terms of the period of amendments. Senate President Sotto affirmed that they would have done it page by page.

Senator Pangilinan stated that it was the first time he heard the proposed amendments of Senator Villar and that he would want to review them first. He said that under normal procedures, they would have been able to vote on each amendment, but due to the limitations and constraints, he did not intervene and object. He requested for a clean copy of the bill so that he would be able to review it and make additional amendments if necessary.

Senate President Sotto agreed, stating that there might have been some amendments that had been touched already.

As he was unable to see the provisions word for word, Senator Pangilinan expressed the difficulty of appreciating the bill holistically. He said that he would need more time during the weekend to review the amendments that had been introduced so he could raise concerns or additional amendments if necessary.

Senator Zubiri agreed, but he pointed out that the Body would be convening as a Committee of the Whole next week. He said that if the Members would allow, they could first tackle the amendments to Senate Bill No. 1318 and approve it on Second Reading before they convene as a Committee of the Whole.

Senator Villar said that she could ask her chief of staff to furnish Senator Pangilinan with a copy of the amendments as well as the proposed amendments that she would be accepting so that they could further talk about it. Senator Pangilinan agreed, stating that they could meet via teleconferencing to compare the proposed amendments so that they would have a good sense on how to move forward.

Senator Pangilinan gave assurance that he was committed to pass the bill as he saw the need to support it, particularly the critical role of organic agriculture in the long run. He also assured the Sponsor and the Body that he would like to get it done as quickly as possible, but that there was just the matter of reconciling some of the proposed amendments.

Senate President Sotto said that the decision lies with the Body if they would allow to call the bill first before constituting themselves as a Committee of the Whole when they convene on May 18, 2020, or they could just tackle it the week after.

Senator Zubiri said that Senators Villar and Pangilinan could fine-tune the list of amendments so that the Body could consider the proposals immediately. He disclosed that he was the principal author of the measure in 2008, and he noted that Senator Villar has made several improvements on the measure, one of which is making it more available to smaller farmers, not just to richer organic farmers.

SUSPENSION OF CONSIDERATION OF SENATE BILL NO. 1318

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

COMMITTEE REPORT NO. 49 ON SENATE BILL NO. 1354

(Continuation)

Upon motion of Senator Zubiri, there being no objection, the Body resumed consideration, on Second Reading, of Senate Bill No. 1354 (Committee Report No. 49), entitled

AN ACT AMENDING ARTICLES 183 AND 184 OF ACT NO. 3815, AS AMENDED, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS THE REVISED PENAL CODE.

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Senator Zubiri stated that the parliamentary status was the still period of individual amendments.

Thereupon, the Chair recognized Senator Gordon, Sponsor of the measure.

SUSPENSION OF SESSION

Upon motion of Senator Zubiri, the session was suspended.

It was 4:19 p.m.

RESUMPTION OF SESSION

At 4:18 p.m., the session was resumed.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR GORDON

Senator Gordon stated that he already sponsored the amendment in the previous session, the thrust of which was to make sure that they would not give a harsher penalty for perjury committed outside the court. He pointed out that the Revised Penal Code provides a graduated penalty system, and if he were to accept some proposals by the other senators, they would end up imposing a heavier penalty on perjury committed outside the court and a lighter penalty when committed in court.

Senator Gordon believed that the purpose of the bill to punish perjurious statements has been attained with the increase of the penalties by two degrees such that the perjurer would no longer be entitled to probation and could even be imprisoned for as long as 10 years.

GORDON AMENDMENTS

As proposed by Senator Gordon, there being no objection, the Body approved the following committee amendments:

1. On page 2, delete lines 7 to 16; and
2. On the same page, line 17, delete the word "FURTHER."

PROPOSED AMENDMENT OF SENATOR LACSON

On page 2, line 6, Senator Lacson proposed to insert the following proviso after the period (.): PROVIDED, THAT THE PERSON WHO SHALL

COMMIT ANY OF THE ACTS MENTIONED IN THIS ARTICLE DURING THE CONDUCT OF AN INQUIRY IN AID OF LEGISLATION BY ANY OF THE COMMITTEES OR THE COMMISSION ON APPOINTMENTS SHALL SUFFER THE PENALTY OF *RECLUSION TEMPORAL*.

However, Senator Gordon believed that the penalty of 12 years to 20 years imprisonment is quite severe, maintaining that the suggested penalty of imprisonment from six years and one day to 10 years is already a very serious deterrent that would take away many years from the life of the offender.

Senate President Sotto clarified that Senator Lacson's amendment seeks to impose a harsher penalty on people who lie in a legislative inquiry or before the Committee on Appointments.

Senator Gordon pointed out that the courts have a graduated list of penalties that they could impose. For instance, he said that for making a perjurious statement in court, the perjurer would be penalized with *reclusion temporal* if the defendant in the said case had been sentenced to death; *prision mayor* or imprisonment from six years and one day to 12 years if the defendant had been sentenced to *reclusion temporal* to *reclusion perpetua*; *prision correccional* which is six months and one day to six years if the defendant had been sentenced to any other afflictive penalty; while the penalty of *arresto mayor* equivalent to one month and one day to six months if the defendant had been sentenced to a correctional penalty or a fine or shall have been acquitted in the cases provided, for which the offender shall further suffer a fine not to exceed P200,000. He added that the measure also proposes a fine of P1,000,000 for a public officer and employee who makes a false testimony.

Asked by Senate President Sotto whether a fine would be imposed on a person who lies to the Senate and to the Commission on Appointments, Senator Gordon replied that the offender would be imprisoned anywhere from six years and one day to 10 years and would have to pay a fine of P1,000,000.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR DRILON

Senator Drilon pointed out that the Lacson amendment proposes to make a special class of those who commit perjury in legislative proceedings. In general, he explained that those who perjure

themselves outside of the court are penalized by a minimum of six years and one day to a maximum of 10 years; however, if the testimony is given in a congressional hearing, the offense is proposed to be elevated to a higher scale and imposed a heavier penalty. He said that he could not see the basis for distinguishing a false testimony made during congressional hearings from a false testimony made before the police, NBI or Comelec or any other quasi-judicial body outside of the judicial system. He warned that making such a distinction could be attacked of being violative of the equal protection clause of the Constitution. He appealed to Senator Lacson to reconsider his proposed amendment, pointing out that the penalty for perjury proposed in the bill has not only been increased by two degrees but that it would also no longer entitle the perjurer to the benefits of the Probation Law. He said that he subscribes to the theory that it is not so much the penalty but how effectively the law is enforced. Besides, he noted that the Senate has sent people to jail for false testimony not because of the Revised Penal Code but because of its authority to cite them in contempt. He reiterated that he did not see any valid distinction between a false testimony given for instance, in a quasi-judicial body and one that is made in congressional hearings.

As a possible compromise, Senator Angara suggested that instead of the proposed penalty of *reclusion temporal* in the Lacson amendment, the act of perjury could be considered an aggravating circumstance which is one degree higher than the existing penalty. The rationale, he explained, is that lying in a legislative inquiry is tantamount to lying to the representatives of the people and, as such, has more of a criminal culpability and is more reprehensible than making a false testimony in a judicial proceeding.

In response, Senator Lacson said that he was willing to support Senator Angara's view, but he sought clarification on whether the objection to his own proposal was only on the penalty and not the amendment itself which would involve a legislative inquiry and a committee hearing by the Commission on Appointments.

Senator Gordon feared that the proposal would create a class of penalties which are totally different in terms of the penalties that are prescribed by the court; thus, it might be regarded as violative of the equal protection clause of the Constitution. He also pointed out that the Senate has already the power to cite a witness in contempt. He expressed concern

that imposing a very harsh penalty would make witnesses extremely reticent or deter them from attending Senate hearings.

Senator Drilon noted that the bill as presently worded already covers false testimony in legislative proceedings which is proposed to be imposed a penalty of six years and one day to 10 years. He expressed his reservation on the proposed amendment of Senator Lacson because it makes a distinction between the penalty that is imposed on ordinary perjury before other institutions and perjury committed in legislative bodies.

Given Senator Drilon's explanation that perjury committed in legislative proceedings was already covered in the bill. Senator Lacson said that he was withdrawing his proposed amendment as he clarified that his proposal only sought to elevate the penalty to a higher degree.

Senator Gordon said that while he respects the view and suggestion of Senator Angara, it was already sufficiently covered by the 10-year imprisonment as punishment for such an offense. He likewise lauded Senator Lacson for his crusade to encourage a culture of truthsayers than liars, but he stressed that he did not want to run smack into a constitutional issue or discourage people from testifying particularly since the Senate is not shy about using its power to cite in contempt false witnesses.

Senator Lacson pointed out that before the Supreme Court's decision on the Balag case, there was no limit to the period wherein the Senate could hold a person in contempt and keep them in detention.

In view of the withdrawal of the Lacson amendment, Senator Angara said that he was likewise withdrawing his own proposed amendment to the amendment.

TERMINATION OF THE PERIOD OF INDIVIDUAL AMENDMENTS

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

APPROVAL OF SENATE BILL NO. 1354 ON SECOND READING

Submitted to a vote, there being no objection,

Senate Bill No. 1354 was approved on Second Reading.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR LACSON

As one of the authors of Senator Bill No. 1354, Senator Lacson stated that he would explain his reason for voting in favor of the measure at the proper time.

Senate President Sotto said that Senator Lacson could do so when the bill is considered on Third Reading.

SUSPENSION OF CONSIDERATION OF SENATE BILL NO. 1354

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

MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR GORDON

Senator Gordon manifested that he was also a coauthor of the bill because he also filed a bill on the subject matter. He thanked Senator Lacson for his liberality and his drive to ensure that people pay the fine. He expressed hope that the same swiftness could be extended to those who had been killed by people onboard motorcycles.

COAUTHOR

Upon his request, Senator Zubiri was made coauthor of Senate Bill No. 1354.

COMMITTEE REPORT NO. 69 ON SENATE BILL NO. 1411 (Continuation)

Upon motion of Senator Zubiri, there being no objection, the Body resumed consideration, on Second Reading, of Senate Bill No. 1411 (Committee Report No. 69), entitled,

AN ACT AMENDING REPUBLIC ACT NO. 8972 OTHERWISE KNOWN AS AN ACT PROVIDING FOR BENEFITS AND PRIVILEGES TO SOLO PARENTS AND THEIR CHILDREN, APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.

Senator Zubiri stated that the parliamentary status was the period of interpellations.

Thereupon, the Chair recognized Senator Hontiveros, Sponsor of the measure, and Senator Cayetano for her interpellation.

INTERPELLATION OF SENATOR CAYETANO

At the outset, Senator Cayetano expressed her support for the bill, saying that she is technically a solo parent because while her children have their own relationship with their father, ever since she became a senator, she has been raising them alone.

Asked by Senator Cayetano whether the objective of the bill was to support financially needy parents or just to support solo parents, Senator Hontiveros said that in the broader sense, the bill seeks to provide additional support to solo parents in raising their children, but as earlier pointed out by Senator Gordon, there may be concerns on how to focus or prioritize the bill within the whole population of solo parents. She committed to listen with an open mind during the period of interpellations and also during the period of amendments, preferably returning to the original intention of supporting the welfare of all solo parents, as far as possible, as top concern.

Senator Cayetano expressed appreciation to Senator Hontiveros, saying that at the end of the day, especially in the time of COVID-19 and having just sponsored the Bayanihan To Heal As One Act, everyone is conscious of the fact that there is limited funding and that it is really a question of how best to help those in need. She said that if the Body could agree on how to go about the bill, it would be easier for all, since no one could deny that the solo parents need support.

Senator Hontiveros said that the optimal scenario would be to mobilize as much resources as reasonably possible given the current context of the COVID-19 and the pressures that are brought on the budgets of government, and to bring such reasonable amount of resources to as large a number of solo parents as possible, giving priority to those who most urgently need help, especially those who are most economically disadvantaged and most economically vulnerable at the time of pandemic and quarantine.

Senator Cayetano said that at a later time, she would go into the definition of who may be qualified

as a solo parent and who could benefit from the measure in order to filter those who would truly be the most in need from those who may still be in need but not as perilously situated as the others.

Asked by Senator Cayetano whether she has come across studies that present the unintended consequences of singling out solo parents as beneficiaries, Senator Hontiveros replied that in coming up with the committee report, she relied not so much on the unintended consequences which would be presented as unintentionally negative, but more on the extensive studies on the benefits of supporting solo parents, and their children both in terms of providing immediate relief in the present, as well as in terms of preventing further economic and social damage to them which would tend to exacerbate their already quite wide vulnerabilities especially in terms of health and education and which would in turn tend to perpetuate rather than cut the inter-generational cycle of poverty.

Senator Cayetano said that she was familiar with the benefits that have been given, but she believed that it was only fair especially to the other senators who may not have studied as extensively as they have, to also hear other studies. She recalled coming across some of the studies a few years ago and again as chairperson of the Committee on Ways and Means, particularly studies done in France and The Netherlands, that providing support for solo mothers has unintended benefits over the long run that would show over time; for instance, there were studies showing that people resisted getting married because there were more benefits to staying unmarried. She said that for a country like the Philippines, this unintended consequence on the nation, in particular on the family as a social institution on its own, would have to be discussed. She believed that a single-parent-run family is still a family.

Senator Hontiveros said that according to the Philippine Statistical Authority, there are three million widowed Filipinos alone and they account for a significant proportion of the total number of solo parents.

Senator Cayetano said that the bill provides for some serious benefits which a solo parent would be happy about. However, she expressed concern that those with financial needs may choose to perpetuate their status to continue receiving such kinds of benefit.

Senator Hontiveros said that not all unmarried persons or even unmarried couples who still share or co-share the parenting responsibilities of the children would qualify or be considered as solo parent. As regards the financial aspect, she opined that it was quite modest, as the proposed various discounts are within the range of 20%. She believed that the discounts provided by the bill would in no way offset or even equal the economic benefit that the two-person household or a two-spouse household would provide. Besides, she said that the LGUs would have an important role in doing stringent checks on who would qualify to be defined as solo parents under the Act.

Moreover, Senator Hontiveros said that the dominant religious cultures in the Philippines would prevent people from wanting to remain unmarried if there was no strong positive reason for wanting to remain in such civil status. She said that the Philippines would be in a far different context from France and Netherlands because when looking at the possibility of expanding benefits for solo parents, both countries have not only 10 years but decades of institutionalizing social protection programs, with the Netherlands known to be the healthiest population in the world where solo parents would not need the nutrition and other health supports that the bill contemplates for Filipino solo parents.

Senator Hontiveros explained that Filipino solo parents live in a country where, compared to France or Netherlands, there is still need to institutionalize social protection programs for all citizens regardless of civil status or parenting status. She said that the bill contemplates to provide more support to Filipino solo parents in health and education.

Senator Cayetano said that just because the Netherlands and France are more economically developed does not mean that there would be those who would not take advantage of the benefits. She pointed out that some people there have a higher economic level, yet they chose to take advantage of the law and the benefits provided to them as single parents, and that even those who are not as financially distressed have found ways to circumvent the law. For example, she recalled that in a book she read some years ago, she learned that in one of the northern countries, a tax incentive was given precisely to support solo parents, and the government found out later on that there was a decline in marriages because people wanted to stay solo so that they

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could continue receiving the benefits. She said that what the government did was to not consider people who are “cohabiting parents,” even if they were not married but living together, as solo parents. She reiterated that they have also found ways to circumvent the law by establishing two residences in the same house, like a boarding house.

Senator Cayetano said that it was necessary to just learn from the experiences of countries that are considered more economically better off than the Philippines and that she was merely sharing such experiences, keeping in mind the solo parents who need it. She said that she does not intend to stand in the way of passing the bill, but she cautioned that there are consequences that are needed to be thought about. She said that despite the deeply strong religious beliefs of the Filipinos, there are those who do not care about getting pregnant out of wedlock and it would all depend on how a person was raised and the values they have. She suggested that Senator Hontiveros consult with some family law experts on the wording of “cohabiting” and to provide a provision stating that a person who would seek to avail of the benefits of the bill should provide under oath that he or she is “not cohabiting with a coparent.”

Senator Hontiveros said that as she mentioned earlier, the LGUs would be crucial in verifying who would be qualified as solo parents to avail of the benefits under different criteria. She emphasized that even common law partners, who are unmarried but cohabiting and who share parenting responsibilities, would not be qualified to avail of the benefits under the bill.

She likewise pointed out how Sweden implemented their solo parents act and how the Philippines might implement the proposed Expanded Solo Parents Act which could not be solely attributed to only a single factor or a certain social behavior within a population. She believed that in the Philippine context, she would expect the interaction of the different religious cultures, the actual economic or financial status of the solo parents and their children and, perhaps, even the behavior of the LGUs that would be called upon to implement the bill to ensure that those who would benefit from the social protection programs are actually those who qualify according to the definition set by the law.

Senator Cayetano said that while she shared the Sponsor’s objective, she was more concerned on the

consequences and the future effects of the proposed measure and that she wanted to ensure that the implementation of the law could be monitored. She said that, at the proper time, she would be proposing a provision that would ensure that the services of PSA are put into place so that the government could monitor the consequences and avoid circumstances where some people would take advantage of the social protection benefits. She cited the Bayanihan to Heal As One Act which was not specific on how the SAP could be used and did not say that it cannot be used for drinking alcoholic beverages. She stated that while some were not able to receive the benefit, one recipient used the money for binge drinking every night. She lamented that it was a sad consequence that other people do not care about their responsibility by not using the subsidy wisely.

Agreeing with Senator Cayetano, Senator Hontiveros believed that while others would use the subsidy for drinking spree, it is not enough reason to limit the distribution of the social amelioration program. She said that the LGUs and the proposed inter-agency body would be on the lookout for the minority who would abuse the law and at the same time make sure that the greater majority who are qualified as solo parents would get the support that they need. She said that Congress would have an oversight function on the implementation of the law and that every five years, they could introduce amendments to the law, if needed, to make the program even better and more effective to empower solo parents and their children.

Senator Cayetano stated that she would rather give a certain amount to a small number of deserving solo parents instead of spreading out the assistance to the small number that would include so-called solo parents, or solo parents who have the ability to purchase. She then proposed that the Committee consider her proposal requiring the solo parent to declare under oath that they have the sole obligation so that it would develop a culture of honesty.

Senator Hontiveros gave the assurance that the proposed measure imposes certain requirements that solo parents have to comply with before they can avail of the solo parent ID. She said that at the proper time, the Committee would look into the proposal of Senator Cayetano.

Adverting to the points raised by Senator Gordon, Senator Cayetano expressed similar concern on the definition of those who qualify, particularly the OFWs.

She stated that like many of the Members of the Chamber, she is constantly in touch with the OFWs and she believed that being separated from their family and seeing their children grow up through the internet are incomparable sacrifices.

Senator Hontiveros stated that the pain is twice as much if the OFW is taking care of other family's children.

Senator Cayetano suggested to filter who among them would be beneficiaries. Similar to Senator Gordon's questions, she inquired who among the OFWs belong to low or semi-skilled category. She cited a research by her staff that a mid-level staff in Singapore earns SG\$2,300 or P81,000; a domestic worker in Saudi Arabia, US\$400 or P20,000, and in Hong Kong HK\$4,600 or P30,000. She stressed that while she does not want the sacrifices of being away from their family to be equated with the government's support in terms of dollars, the OFW may not need the support to be given to solo parents, as she opined that the single-parent OFW's plight is different from those who are earning very little. She said that the Committee has to find other ways, like negotiating for better terms and conditions of their employment and not just lump them with solo parents' amelioration program if they are earning P81,000.

Senator Cayetano recalled that during the discussion, Senator Hontiveros clarified with Senator Gordon that some OFWs are still married and are simply physically separated. She underscored that while their sacrifices are incomparable, their category is not the same with the single mother who works at a restaurant and earns P10,000 and would have no means to pay for somebody to look after his/her child while working.

Senator Hontiveros admitted that she has not read the details of the mid-level workers in Singapore, but she believed that the domestic workers in Saudi Arabia or in Hong Kong should be covered under the bill. She said that the provision to include low and semi-skilled OFWs who have been away for at least one-year of continuous work should qualify was requested by the OFW groups. She explained that although they work abroad, their pay is practically the same as what they would have earned in the Philippines, and that despite earning above P20,000, the amount would not be enough to be considered a living wage as what the labor sector has been demanding. She added that although they may not fall under the official poverty line, they could be

classified by the NEDA as near-poor. She said that at the proper time, the Committee would be open to amendments that would seek an optimal, reasonable amount for solo parents.

Senator Cayetano stated that while she shares Senator Hontiveros' view that the OFWs, especially those who are near-poor, need assistance, and that any OFW who has to live their lives away from their families is a martyr, she doubted whether Senate Bill No. 1411 is the proper bill that would give them support that they deserve. She said that if, without a doubt, a solo parent is raising a child alone, then he/she is qualified; however, if the child is being raised with help and would have the emotional support of the spouse of the OFW, no matter how strained the care may be due to the distance, then it is another matter. Thus, she underscored the importance of categorizing the OFW carefully and properly as some may not fall under the purview of a solo parent. She supposed that it could be a support package for all OFWs who have sacrificed their lives, but maybe not as solo parents.

Agreeing with Senator Cayetano, Senator Hontiveros suggested that they consider looking into the salary as well as the classification of low-skilled or semi-skilled OFW-solo parents who would avail of the benefits. She pointed out that there are three million solo parents, or less than 3% of the country's total population, as reported by the Philippine Statistical Authority, a small portion of which are OFW solo-parents. She stated that the benefits for solo parents, OFW or otherwise, are time bound and will only be given to them while the dependents are still children. She said that the age qualification of dependents would be amended at the proper time as suggested by Senator Gordon, so that instead of the age of 22, the benefits would be until the dependent graduates from college. She said that she would work with Senator Cayetano and the other Members so that in the period of amendments the bill would be further reinforced to make it an effective law for Filipino solo parents within the country and abroad.

On whether the statistical data mentioned earlier pertained to families or individuals, Senator Hontiveros clarified that there are three million families of solo parents out of the 24 million Filipino families, or 12.5% of the total population.

As regards the provision for grandparents, Senator Cayetano noted that there are many cases in the

Philippines when grandparents act as foster parents to children whose parents are away, perhaps either working abroad or in the city; however, they cannot be considered solo parents. She then suggested changing the title of the bill since grandparents are not parents per se. She cautioned that the Body should be conscious about what to include in the bill since it could be another social amelioration package to be given to substitute parents and not just to solo parents. She emphasized the need for a precise definition of solo parents.

Responding thereto, Senator Hontiveros clarified that the bill does not refer to grandparents couples but to single grandparents—a single grandmother or a single grandfather—who are senior citizens who have the sole parental responsibility over their minor or physically or mentally incapacitated children or grandchildren. She said that the bill contemplates the single grandparent as the one nurturing his/her grandchild.

Senator Cayetano thanked Senator Hontiveros for the clarification, saying that she mistook it to mean that it was the grandparents as a couple. She said that at the proper time, the proviso needs to be clarified.

As regards benefits, Senator Cayetano stated that since she chaired the Committee on Basic Education, Arts and Culture, she had talked to private schools and they have been complaining of low enrolment rate which could lead to many of them closing down, and since the proposed bill would entitle solo parents to 20% discount for sending their children to private schools, she feared that this would cause additional burden to the school.

As regards healthcare, Senator Cayetano noted that the bill provides for additional 20% discount in the hospital bill of the solo parent's child if admitted for medical care and attention either in private or public hospitals, and 20% discount on consultation and laboratory diagnostic fees and purchase of medicines for solo parents and their children which, she noted, are over and beyond the coverage of PhilHealth. She cautioned that the proposed measure is granting too much benefits to solo parents and giving them undue advantage over the ordinary couple-parents.

Senator Hontiveros explained that solo parents are certainly at a quantifiably higher risk of financial

hardship. She said that two-parent households or two-incomes stream family are even challenged in balancing the budget, twice so are solo parents. She stated that although PhilHealth provides coverage, currently for in-patient or hospital confinement, the full package for out-patient primary care services is yet to be rolled out. She said that together with the Universal Health Care Law, the bill intends to give additional benefits to solo parents, among which are 20% discount from all purchases of medicines, vaccines, and other medical supplements, supplies, accessories and equipment for the child; 20% discount from hospital bill of the solo parent's child if admitted for medical care and attention—an additional benefit above the possible PhilHealth case rate when the child is confined in a hospital; and 20% discount on consultation and laboratory diagnostic fees and purchase of medicines. She said that the bill contemplates on the future full rollout for outpatient primary care benefit packages under the Universal Health Care. Also, she said that the bill grants children of solo parents 20% discount on tuition fees from kindergarten to college level in both private and public schools on top of other scholarship grants.

Anent the concern of the education sector, Senator Hontiveros said that she would be willing to work with Senator Cayetano on possible amendments such as how to assist the schools in supporting the solo parents, particularly on changing the percentage discounts on tuition fees. She said that the Executive department could also look at ways on how the school could support the solo parents when they draft the implementing rules and regulation (IRR) of the law.

Senator Cayetano said that she does not want to leave such concern in the implementing rules because she believed that the law should be tight enough not to leave any room for confusion given that it is a serious matter. She asked whether the Committee had asked for the recommendations of the schools on to how they could support the solo parents, as she believed that they might already have the solutions to the problem on education, like the 10% allocation for their scholarship programs. Having worked with solo parents and schools, she said that she was aware of the plight of both sectors and she would not be comfortable with dumping the problem to the education sector as she feared that a lot of private schools might close down because of the stiff competition from the public schools, with public school teachers receiving better pay than what private school teacher

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receive, making the reason why she does not want to put additional strain on the country's education system.

Senator Hontiveros said that there was no intention to dump any sector as she believed that the burden is actually on the solo parents; thus, the Committee was looking for reasonable ways to work things out without waiting for the IRR. She reiterated that at the proper time during the period of amendments, with the help of all sectors, including the education sector, she would work on helping solo parents carry their solo burdens and make a sustainable endeavor.

Senator Cayetano explained that even during the period of amendments, she would try to find ways on how to support the solo parents, unless the government or any private sector would come up with the money to help alleviate them. She said that she wanted to see the proposed measure push through considering that there are also public schools that might be able to help the solo parents, and that if there is preference to public schools over private schools, she asked how private schools could be helped. She said that for every solo parent that would be helped in a private school, there are more of them in public schools that would not be helped. She clarified that she just wanted to consider the source of funds to support the solo parents.

Senator Hontiveros said that she would furnish Senator Cayetano with more information on the matter as soon as possible. She assured that she had no intention of favoring the public sector over the private sector or the other way around. She said that like the health system of the country, the government would want to make the public health system as well as the public education system to be as good, if not much better, than the private health system and private education system. She disclosed that in the creation of the Solo Parent Inter-Agency Review Committee, all the educational institutions of the government – the DepEd, CHED and TESDA — are involved, as they would be the partners of Congress in the implementation of the law in a sustainable way, especially for parents, and equally sustainable for both public and private education.

Senator Cayetano said, however, that the implementation comes only after the passage of the law. She said that if the 20% discount on tuition fee would push through, the schools would have no choice but to implement it, and she feared that they might cease their operations and close. She stressed that before the implementation of the law, the schools

should be asked to come up with some recommendations that are doable.

Senator Cayetano said that there was also the issue of the establishment of Day Care Centers, which give priority to solo parents and which she also supports. Adverting to the provision requiring day care centers to be in the workplace, she asked if the intention is for the parents to carry their child by any means to get to their workplace. She believed that it would really be hard to bring kids to work and that it should instead be near the place of residence of the parent and child. She said that she had grappled and tried to find solution to the issue but would leave the matter to Senator Hontiveros.

Senator Hontiveros said that even in the hearing of Senator Poe in the Committee on Public Services, safety in transit was on top of the mind of the parents, especially the breastfeeding mothers, and whether they would take their babies to day care centers where they would be taken care of while at work. She said that the Committee on Public Services was still trying to put in place the mechanisms for safety in public transport and the bill was worded to the effect that the day care services would be provided in the workplace as much as possible in a nearby accessible location. Similarly, aside from the advocacy of the labor sector in providing safe transportation, she hoped that dormitories would also be built near the workplace of the parents, although the issue of how to transport the children to day care centers has yet to be resolved. She said that she would like to work with Senator Cayetano on the language of the bill on the matter.

Senator Cayetano said that she could only recommend that a survey be done to determine if there is a need for day care centers because she only knew that breastfeeding rooms were still being used, while the day care centers have been closed. She added that Senator Hontiveros should confirm whether the centers were just closed against their will or because they were not utilized anymore so that they could determine whether to make day care centers recommendatory, particularly in private companies. She said that even as she would like to support the putting up of the day care centers in the workplace using some very valuable space, they might end up with nobody benefitting from it. In addition, she said that there might be companies that have 200 or more employees that are scattered over different locations.

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Senator Cayetano said that she was just being practical in pointing out the issues, and she called the attention of the Body to the standing position of the DOF with regard to rationalizing all the incentives that the government was giving out. She said that inasmuch as she wanted to support the solo parents bill, as chair of the Committee on Ways and Means, she must be cognizant that the DOF would not support the proposed bill and would even veto it.

Senator Hontiveros said that since the Body would still have to go through the period of amendments on the bill, they could still make it beneficial for the solo parents and acceptable to the economic team who would be implementing it. She reminded the DOF of the seven to eight million senior citizens which the government could not have been able to sustainably support through the social pension but it did. She said that since there were only three million solo parents, not even half the number of the senior citizen pensioners, they could amend the bill to make it more acceptable to the DOF with the thought that it would result in less dependent but more economically empowered solo parents because their children would be healthier and better educated.

As chairman of the Committee on Ways and Means, Senator Cayetano said that in the spirit of fairness, they should also consider all the other personal exemptions, which would then put the bill in a precarious position because all the members of the Body would have to vote on whether to approve the proposed bill or to reconsider the TRAIN Law which was just passed. She warned that singling out one group would put all the other groups in a difficult situation.

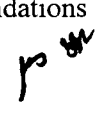
Senator Hontiveros clarified that the Expanded Solo Parents Welfare bill would not put any law in a precarious situation in terms of rationalizing incentives or exemptions in the country's taxation system, and neither would any vulnerable sector of the society be placed at a disadvantage. She said that she saw the bill as a unifying one because it would make them work together for possible amendments to make it more acceptable. She disclosed that she had already accepted the certainty of a veto on the bill. However, she hoped that when the bill is considered during the period of amendments, they could come up with a law that would still be beneficial to solo parents, especially during the current COVID-19 pandemic.

Senator Hontiveros explained that the proposed measure would not be a zero-sum game that would take away from the other sectors the benefits currently granted to them by the government; in fact, it would empower one of the vulnerable sectors in the society by making them less dependent and more productive, in the process redounding to the welfare of the other vulnerable sectors that would, in turn, be empowered and become more productive members of society and participants in the economy.

Senator Cayetano maintained that the measure would technically amend the TRAIN Law, as it would have the effect of changing how other vulnerable sectors, by way of personal exemptions which the solo parents would have but which the others would not have. She said that while she supports benefits for solo parents, there are also other sectors that want the same benefits. She stated that as the chairperson of the Committee on Ways and Means, it is her job to remind the Body that everything they do has an effect such as if they provide tax exemptions to one and not to another, given that they only have one source.

At this juncture, she thanked Senator Hontiveros and hoped that all her points were able to add clarity on the measure. She then asked for the thoughts of Senator Zubiri whom she recalled had raised the same point a few times when tax exemptions were being discussed.

Senator Hontiveros said that the same issue, in fact, came up during the interpellation of Senator Gordon when he, for one, pointed out that minimum wage earners are already exempt from income tax. Relative thereto, she put on record that at the proper time, she would be open to considering amendments on some of the proposed tax exemptions. She said that she has always sought the wisdom of the Body on how they could continue to at least consider bills that may include some proposed tax exemptions. She feared that if they do not at least consider future proposals, then they would not be able to continue to improve the welfare of the different sectors. She believed that although it was being done piecemeal, it was how legislation happens; like a jigsaw puzzle, they are putting pieces together to improve the society and that, sometimes, there are good pieces of the puzzle that come along the way that could further build the good foundations already laid by the comprehensive laws.



MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR ZUBIRI

At this juncture, Senator Zubiri confirmed that in one of his initial meetings in Malacañang together with Senator Drilon, he met with the Finance Secretary Dominguez, who adamantly said that they would no longer approve bills that would push for fiscal incentives of particular sectors. In fact, he said that in the Seventeenth Congress, there were about six or seven measures vetoed by the administration that had been quite painful for the sponsors and the authors because most of them were requesting fiscal incentives for a particular sector. Although he supports financial incentives for certain sectors like solo parents, he feared that all the work that they do might go to waste if vetoed by the President upon the recommendation of the Department of Finance.

INTERPELLATION OF SENATOR GATCHALIAN

At the outset, Senator Gatchalian said that during his time as mayor, one of his favorite pastimes was solemnizing weddings every Friday and that in those occasions, he learned that many of the couples decided to get married only later in their lives because according to them, they opted to cohabit to avoid the cost of wedding or marriage. He added that because of the need for some documentary requirements, the couples only decided to get married to avail of the *Libreng Kasal* Program.

Adverting to his presentation, Senator Gatchalian noted that based on the data from PSA, the number of individuals who are “living-in” has been slowly going up over the last 15 years, while the number of marriages has been going down, and he cited a statement of PSA that “In a span of 10 years, the reported marriages decreased by 20.1% from 2005 to 2015.” Having the same observation, he said that what concerns him the most was that the primary reason why couples are living-in was really for financial and pragmatic purposes which is to avoid costs. Relative to the proposed measure, he shared Senator Cayetano’s observation that one of the unintended consequences of giving additional benefits might lead to an increase in the number of live-in relationships. He believed that marriage should be promoted for the right reason and that the law should not be used to circumvent and just reap benefits therefrom. Instead, he stressed the need to formalize the type of marriages to strengthen the family which is the basic unit of society.

For her part, Senator Hontiveros believed that the matter of getting married, whether the factor leading to its decision is cultural, interpersonal or spiritual, could actually be looked at as separate from the bill. She clarified that even common-law partners, in fact, might not qualify in the purview of the solo parents bill although they are living together and are not married if they are raising their children in their domicile. She also believed that Senator Gatchalian, who was a local government official himself, would agree that the LGUs have a crucial role in identifying those qualified solo parents and those who are not.

Senator Gatchalian recalled a recent experience during the distribution of SAP wherein they caught a cohabiting couple who got two SAP forms to take advantage of the P8,000 being given out by the government. He said that because their names and addresses were different, both of them got P8,000 each. He added that if not because of their neighbors, they would never be able to find out that the couple got a total of P16,000. Thus, he feared that practicality, pragmatism and financial necessity would drive people to circumvent the law and take advantage of the financial rewards and the other breaks that they would be getting as evidenced by what was recently experience in the giving out of the SAP allowance.

As regards the role of the local governments as mentioned by Senator Hontiveros, Senator Gatchalian said that although there is an identification card which is a very good mechanism to regulate who would be entitled to the discounts, there would be complications when a lot of power is given to local governments and the barangay captains in determining whether a person is cohabiting or living in with someone. He cautioned that it would become a very difficult and discretionary task especially for the barangay captains as it could also become a root cause of disagreement in the community. He recalled another instance when the government of Valezuela was giving out some benefits and there were reports on the modus of couples “living-in” wherein one of the couple would leave because they know that the barangay captain or the social workers were coming in and would come back again afterwards. Reiterating that some cohabiting couples might try to circumvent the law, he feared that there could be a probable loophole of giving the barangay captains a lot of discretion causing disagreements in the community.

Senator Hontiveros replied that while the bill might not address all the possible conflicts in the

community, it provides penalties to those who claim benefits but do not fall under the purview of the measure. She also pointed out that even if the solo parent avails of all the proposed discounts in the bill, married couples still have greater economic benefits like the SSS and GSIS benefits, and inheritance, among others.

Referring to the tax amnesty under Section 15(g), Senator Gatchalian expressed the difficulty of determining who the real solo parents are, as he also pointed out possible revenue leakages as they could simply apply for tax amnesty or seek reduction of real estate taxes—a hefty penalty for the local government considering that its revenue comes from real estate taxes. Senator Hontiveros expressed willingness to consider proposed amendments regarding the matter at the proper time.

To Senator Gatchalian's observation that the bill does not give a distinction between a person coming from a high-income family and one coming from a low-income family, Senator Hontiveros replied that the bill seeks to support all solo parents regardless of socio-economic status. Recognizing the government's limited resources, she said that she would be open to any reasonable amount in terms of supporting the poor and near-poor solo parents.

Senator Gatchalian believed that in applying the same spirit of equity during the TRAIN law deliberation regarding senior citizens' discount, when an inequitable phenomenon was uncovered between the quintile of poor senior citizens and of the rich senior citizens since the latter have more purchasing capacity, solo parents from higher income quintiles will take better advantage of the discount when the target of the bill should be the solo parents who need assistance from the government.

Senator Hontiveros stated that she filed another bill pushing for a universal social pension for senior citizens. She explained that the original intent of the bill was to cover all solo parents, but because of the country's challenging situation, she would just find better ways to further empower the more economically disadvantaged poor and near-poor by availing of social protection and by increasing their financial liquidity.

Senator Gatchalian admitted that while social inequality is not as far reaching in the country, they must still strive for equity so that the limited resources

could directly target those who are definitely in need, like the solo parents who are in grave need of support from government.

Thereupon, Senator Gatchalian said that he would propose some amendments on the measure at the proper time.

INTERPELLATION OF SENATOR ANGARA

Preliminarily, Senator Angara asked on the revenue impact of the bill so that it would not end up as an unfunded mandate, and if the Committee on Women, Children, Family Relations and Gender Equality has an estimate of the cost to the government and the private sector in case the bill would be passed. Senator Hontiveros said that she does not have the exact computation on potential loss to government yet, but she estimated that if the discount for 7.5 million senior citizens resulted in roughly P2.8 billion in annual losses and since there are about three million solo parents who would be covered by the bill, the potential loss could be P1.4 billion.

Asked if the benefits for solo parents match the senior citizens' benefits, Senator Hontiveros replied in the negative. She said that the proposed measure grants more benefits in terms of healthcare and educational benefits to the children of solo parents.

Senator Angara stated that he does not want the bill to end up like in the Local Government Code that has a non-observed and unfunded special mandate for the children of barangay officials to study for free until the government has implemented the free tuition program in SUCs.

SUSPENSION OF CONSIDERATION OF SENATE BILL NO. 1411

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

COMMITTEE REPORT NO. 53 (Continuation)

Upon motion of Senator Zubiri, there being no objection, the Body resumed consideration, Committee Report No. 53 Re Proposed Senate Resolution No. 297, RESOLUTION DIRECTING THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON URBAN PLANNING, HOUSING AND RESETTLEMENT, IN AID OF

LEGISLATION AND IN THE EXERCISE OF THE SENATE'S OVERSIGHT FUNCTIONS, TO URGENTLY CALL UPON THE DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SETTLEMENTS AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT AND OTHER RELEVANT AGENCIES TO FORMULATE A SUSTAINABLE TAAL VOLCANO RESETTLEMENT AND REHABILITATION PROGRAM.

Thereupon, the Chair recognized Senator Tolentino for some clarification.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR TOLENTINO

Senator Tolentino stated that the purpose of Proposed Senate Resolution No. 297, a simple resolution authored by Senator dela Rosa, was to trigger some hortatory guidelines, aspirational guidelines, and conceptual structures to enable the various government agencies such as the Department of Human Settlements and Urban Development, and the NEDA to formulate action plans relative to the Taal Volcano eruption last January 12, 2020. He said that lately, he was informed by the vice mayor of Talisay, Batangas that there were 900 families still residing and stranded due to the COVID-19 pandemic in the evacuation centers of five barangays in Talisay, Batangas, namely, Barangay Tumaway, Barangay Aya, Barangay Central, Barangay Munisipyo, and Barangay Tranca.

He then urged the Body to approve Committee Report No. 53 as he already addressed Senator Drilon's concern over one of the recommendations of the Committee which is the creation of the Department of Disaster Management as a lead agency. He said that the proposal contained in Section A of page 74 of the committee report was already deleted and that, in fact, he already informed the Office of Senator Drilon of the deletion.

Assuring that there would be no funding inclusion, he said that its adoption would show the Senate's compassion to the people of Calabarzon and would assure them that the damages from the Taal Volcano eruption are not forgotten especially since per PHILVOLCS advisory, the Taal Volcano Island is still on Alert Level 1.

He added that the committee report endeavors to formulate post-disaster housing programs since most of the affected families rely on tourism-related

activities and fisheries in Taal Volcano Island which has been declared a "no man's land." He said that it behooves upon the government to provide assistance and livelihood programs to them.

Senator Tolentino appealed to the Body to adopt a resolution to recognize the efforts done by the government, the local government of Batangas and Cavite, as well as the continuing struggle felt by the *Batangueños* especially in Talisay and Tanauan with the series of unfortunate events that they have confronted—the Taal volcano eruption and then the COVID-19 pandemic. He said that it is a simple resolution, a response to the Taal volcano crisis, a compassionate piece of legislation, and a resolution that would show that the Senate is truly touching the hearts of the suffering countrymen in Batangas and Cavite areas. He reiterated that it is a hortatory, admonitory resolution that seeks to provide a framework, a basic decision-making guide, or a conceptual structure that would enable the government in the days ahead to provide for the housing needs of those affected by the Taal volcano eruption. He urged the Senate to adopt the resolution.

INTERPELLATION OF SENATOR DRILON

At the outset, Senator Drilon appreciated that Senator Tolentino took note of his reservation regarding the creation of a department which, he opined, was not really necessary as there is enough bureaucracy and structure in the government to be able to address the concerns of the victims of the eruption.

Asked if there is no fund to be disbursed as a consequence of the resolution, Senator Tolentino answered in the affirmative, saying that it is just a conceptual framework that would enable various government agencies, and even the LGU of Batangas, to respond to and help the people of Batangas. He mentioned Senator Recto who would also want to pass the resolution. He confirmed that the resolution suggests guidelines on the rehabilitation plan for Taal, with guidelines coming from NEDA and the Department of Agriculture relative to the fisheries industry, and DSHUD, principally the newly-created housing department that should be in charge of the resettlement program in the near future.

Senator Drilon noted that Senator Tolentino emphasized several times that it is a simple resolution. He asked if it could be likened to a sense of the Senate resolution, especially since it suggests guidelines

for the rehabilitation of an area and expresses the sense of the Senate as to how the rehabilitation could be done. Replying in the affirmative, Senator Tolentino said that it pertains to consultations that would have to be done, especially with the evacuees and the local government officials. As Congress progresses near the budget season, he said that it could also be a guide for the agencies involved on how to proceed with the Taal volcano rehabilitation. He reiterated that it is just a hortatory and conceptual resolution so that the people of Batangas would not say that they have been forgotten, especially with the onset of a new crisis. He said that 900 families have been evacuated since January 12, 2020 at exactly 2:30 p.m. during the first explosion but that they are still in the evacuation centers in deplorable state. He said that while the government had set protocols to be observed in light of the pandemic, the situation is quite miserable for the evacuees.

Senator Drilon asked if the resolution simply highlights the need for the pertinent government agencies to provide assistance to the 900 or so families who, at present, are still in evacuation centers. Senator Tolentino agreed, adding that it should also call for permanent solutions like relocation in case the area is declared as a no-man's-land.

With the responses of Senator Tolentino and the deletion of the portion which calls for a creation of a new department, Senator Drilon manifested that he has no objection to the passage of the resolution which expresses the sense of the Senate on the guidelines in the rehabilitation of the areas affected by the Taal Volcano eruption.

ADOPTION OF RESOLUTION

Upon motion of Senator Zubiri, there being no objection, the resolution put forward by Senator Tolentino was adopted by the Body, subject to style.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR ZUBIRI

Senator Zubiri informed the Body that the House of Representatives already approved on Second Reading House Bill No. 6732 (granting provisional franchise to ABS-CBN), and that they would pass it on Third Reading on Monday. With the permission of the Body, he said that he would move to transfer the referral of Senate Bill Nos. 981 and 1521 from the Committee on Rules to the Committee on Public Services.

Senate President Sotto suggested that the Senate wait instead for the official communication that the House of Representatives had passed the bill instead of relying on media reports.

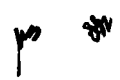
Senator Zubiri said that he has confirmed the status of House Bill No. 6732 with the Office of the Majority Leader of the House of Representatives and that for lack of material time since that there were only three session weeks left, there was need to transfer referral of the Senate bills. Should the House bill be approved on Third Reading on Monday, he said the Senate could schedule a hearing by Tuesday or Wednesday. Nonetheless, he said that the Body would still wait for the transmission of the bill from the House of Representatives to the Senate before they would tackle it on the floor. For the meantime, as they have previously done with the tax measures and the budget, he reiterated that the bills could already be at the committee level while withholding the committee report until the transmission of the House version.

Senate President Sotto asked if the House of Representatives indeed passed a provisional franchise that would last for only five months. Senator Zubiri answered in the affirmative, stating that it was the first time that such measure has been approved. Senate President Sotto expressed concern that the bill might have been done in haste and that on Monday, the other Members of the House of Representatives who were not present in the previous session might question it. He said that the Body should be cautious because somebody might bring the matter up to the Court.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR DRILON

Senator Drilon stated that Senator Zubiri could just change the referral of the Senate bills to the Committee on Public Services. He affirmed that the committee would not submit a committee report until the Senate receives the version of the House which would be the one reported on the floor, and only taking into consideration the Senate bills that were referred to the committee.

Regarding the conduct of the hearing, Senator Drilon pointed out that Senator Poe had mentioned that she would inhibit from hearing the measure as chair of the Committee on Public Services. He then asked who would chair the committee for purposes of hearing the House bill once it is transmitted to the



Senate. Senate President Sotto replied that it would be the vice chairman.

Senator Poe confirmed that she has manifested inhibiting from the deliberations of the ABS-CBN franchise and that she had designated Senator Gatchalian, one of the vice chairmen of the Committee on Public Services, to take over.

MANIFESTATION OF THE CHAIR

Senate President Sotto stated that he was just pointing out some issues that might be raised later on. Because of parliamentary courtesy, he said that the Body cannot question the procedures the House of Representatives would want to follow in the same way that the House of Representatives cannot question the procedures that the Senate would want to follow.

CHANGE OF COMMITTEE REFERRAL

Upon motion of Senator Zubiri, there being no objection, the Body approved the change of referral of Senate Bill No. 981 (renewing the franchise granted to ABS-CBN Broadcasting Corporation) and Senate Bill No. 1521 (granting provisional franchise to ABS-CBN Broadcasting Corp.) from the Committee on Rules to the Committee on Public Services.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR ZUBIRI

Senator Zubiri stated that he had already submitted to the Members the new list of issues to be discussed when the Body convenes as a Committee of the Whole the following week. He said that on the first day, they would tackle the general overview with the following invited agencies: Interagency Task Force (IATF), Department of Finance, Department of Budget and Management, NEDA, Department of Interior and Local Government, Department of Social

Welfare, the Union of Local Authorities of the Philippines, and the World Health Organization; on the second day, they would discuss the health situation and economic impact, and the invited agencies are the DOH and its attached agencies such as the RITM, Epidemiology Bureau, PhilHealth, Food and Drug Administration, Bureau of Quarantine and UPPGH as well as the Departments of Tourism, Transportation, Labor and Employment, Foreign Affairs, and Finance, the BIR, Bureau of Customs, Bureau of Treasury, and the *Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas*; and lastly, on the third day, they would discuss the state of the food, energy and education sectors, and the invited agencies are the Department of Agriculture, Department of Trade and Industry, Department of Energy, Department of Education, Commission on Higher Education, and TESDA.

Senator Zubiri said that if the senators would have any other suggestions, they could let his office know.

ADJOURNMENT OF SESSION

Upon motion of Senator Zubiri, there being no objection, the Chair declared the session adjourned until 1:30 in the afternoon of Monday, May 18, 2020.

It was 6:38 p.m.

I hereby certify to the correctness of the foregoing.


ATTY. MYRA MARIE D. VILLARICA
Secretary of the Senate

Approved on May 26, 2020