



Republic of the Philippines
SENATE
Pasay City

JOURNAL

SESSION NO. 72
MONDAY, 13 MAY 2024

NINETEENTH CONGRESS
SECOND REGULAR SESSION

PREPARED BY THE
LEGISLATIVE JOURNAL SERVICE
SENATE OF THE PHILIPPINES

SESSION NO. 72
Monday, May 13, 2024

CALL TO ORDER

At 3:13 p.m., the Senate President, Hon. Juan Miguel “Migz” F. Zubiri, called the session to order.

PRAYER

Sen. Ronald “Bato” M. Dela Rosa led the prayer, to wit:

A reading taken from the Holy Gospel according to St. John 15:26 16:1.

Jesus said to His disciples: “When the Advocate comes, whom I will send you from the Father – the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father – He will testify about me. And you also testify, because you have been with me from the beginning. I have told you this so that you may not fall away.”

Lord, as we reflect on Your word today, our hearts find rest. Our weary hearts find encouragement. At a time when we seem to be faced with every sort of threat, hurled at every possible direction, we find our hope in You. In the face of persecution, accusation, and misinformation, we thank You for bringing us through, for never allowing us to fall away.

As elected leaders, Lord, fill us with Your Spirit so that we may remain committed to our duty to the people, Your people, whom You love so dearly. Remind us always that today, more than ever, we are called upon to testify to Your truth, and to Your truth alone. Bless us, our minds and hearts, so that we may be channels of Your rest and encouragement to those who need them most. Bless us, so that others may find Your hope in us too.

You said so Yourself, O Lord, we have been with You from the beginning. We continue to hold onto You. We continue to place our trust in Your promise that You who began this work in us shall also finish it, when the time comes.

We also remember, in a special way, Sen. Edgardo Angara, who left the world on this day six years ago. May we, who follow in His humble footsteps, continue to be inspired by his example of believing steadfastly, that every Filipino deserves a fighting chance. Strengthen us, O Lord, to persist in this fight.

Amen.

NATIONAL ANTHEM

The Body sang the national anthem.

ROLL CALL

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

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

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

BIRTHDAY GREETINGS

At the instance of Senator Villanueva, the Members greeted Senator Binay on the occasion of her birth anniversary.

SUSPENSION OF SESSION

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, the session was suspended.

It was 3:18 p.m.

RESUMPTION OF SESSION

At 3:21 p.m., the session was resumed.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATE PRESIDENT ZUBIRI

Senate President Zubiri apologized to the Body, as well as guests from another country, for the warm temperature inside the Session Hall as two air conditioning units had broken down. He said the units were being repaired.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF THE PRESENCE OF GUESTS

At this juncture, Senator Villanueva acknowledged the presence in the gallery of the 64-member delegation comprising young public servants from various ministries of the Singapore government, who were visiting the Philippines, headed by Mr. Tan Wearn Haw of Singapore's Health Promotion Board and accompanied by Singapore's Ambassador to the Philippines, Her Excellency Constance See.

Senate President Zubiri welcomed the young Singaporean civil servants to the Senate, expressing his hope that their study-visit, aimed at understanding the Philippine Senate's role in Philippine democracy, would be fruitful. He also mentioned that earlier, Senator Angara had addressed the delegation about his role as a senator. He invited the delegates to visit Senator Angara's home province of Aurora, renowned as the birthplace of Philippine surfing.

The Senate President also commended the Civil Service College of Singapore for offering young leaders in Singapore the opportunity to deepen understanding of the broader regional context by visiting neighboring countries like the Philippines, with which Singapore maintains robust relations.

He also extended a warm welcome to Singapore's Ambassador to the Philippines, Hon. Constance See, and recalled having hosted Singapore's Foreign Minister, Hon. Vivian Balakrishnan. He expressed the Philippine Senate's gratitude for their efforts in maintaining the strong friendship between the Philippines and Singapore and expressed confidence that the delegation's visit would undoubtedly strengthen the bond of mutual trust and understanding between the two countries.

Senator Villanueva at this point also acknowledged the presence in the gallery of the following guests:

- Gov. Helen Tan of Quezon Province;
- LGU officials of Paoay, Ilocos Norte, led by Vice Mayor Ferdinand Ignacio; and
- Barangay officials of Baliwasan, Zamboanga City.

The Senate President welcomed the guests to the Senate.

INQUIRY OF SENATOR TOLENTINO

Senator Tolentino noted that Senator Revilla, who was undergoing physical rehabilitation, was attending plenary sessions with the aid of medical apparatus. He then inquired whether Senator Revilla was required to be physically present during the session.

In response, Senate President Zubiri explained that the *Rules of the Senate* had been explicitly amended during the time of COVID-19, wherein infected individuals with contagious diseases like COVID-19, TB, or the Ebola virus were permitted to attend sessions online. Given that Senator Revilla recently underwent surgery and was still unable to stand the previous week, he said that he was then allowed to attend online.

However, Senate President Zubiri pointed out that recently, Senator Revilla has been seen standing beside the President at a political rally at the Manila Polo Club, indicating his ability to attend plenary sessions. He also noted Senator Revilla's presence in the previous session.

REMARKS OF SENATOR REVILLA

In response, Senator Revilla stated that he would not mind attending sessions and emphasized that he did not seek pity for his situation. He stated that he had perfect attendance in the past two Congresses, never being late, which was why he requested consideration to attend online. He stated that despite his sore foot, he made it a point to attend the previous session.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATE PRESIDENT ZUBIRI

Senate President Zubiri likewise informed the Body that he has maintained perfect attendance since becoming a legislator in 1998, regardless of whether he was sick or not feeling well. He emphasized his dedication to fulfilling his duties as a lawmaker by always showing up. He then referred the matter of online attendance to the Committee on Rules to make the appropriate ruling.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR VILLANUEVA

Citing Section 41(b) Rule XIV of the *Rules of the Senate*, Senator Villanueva read the provision to the Body: “(b) Convene and hold the session through teleconference, video conference, or other reliable forms of remote or electronic means, using appropriate information and communications technology systems, due to force majeure or the occurrence of a national emergency as determined by the majority of all the members of the Senate which may prevent the convening of the Senate or the physical presence of its members in the session hall.”

Invoking Section 120 of the *Rules*, the Majority Leader stated that unanimous consent can be given expressly or impliedly, which was the basis for allowing Senator Revilla, who had experienced a severe accident, to participate online without amending the *Rules*, as no objections were raised. Expressing empathy for Senator Revilla’s plight, he emphasized that such decisions are made on a case-by-case basis.

REMARKS OF SENATOR MARCOS

Senator Marcos believed that given the term “bedridden” under the *Rules*, Senator Revilla’s inability to move should qualify him for online attendance.

However, Senate President Zubiri expressed concerns about the increasing requests for online participation, citing a recent incident where another colleague sought to join the session via Zoom while undergoing a medical checkup. He then questioned when such requests should be given consideration, and what leeway should be given.

Senator Villanueva clarified that there was no mention of “bedridden” in the *Rules*. Senator Marcos believed that Section 120 would allow such consideration if no Member would object to it.

SUSPENSION OF SESSION

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, the session was suspended.

It was 3:31 p.m.

RESUMPTION OF SESSION

At 3:41 p.m., the session was resumed.

MOTION OF SENATOR MARCOS

Senator Marcos then moved that the inquiry of Senator Tolentino be referred to the Committee on Rules for further study and immediate action.

There being no objection, the Chair referred the inquiry of Senator Tolentino to the Committee on Rules.

APPROVAL OF HOUSE BILL NO. 6582 ON THIRD READING

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body considered, on Third Reading, House Bill No. 6582, copies of which were electronically distributed to the senators on May 7, 2023.

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

AN ACT CREATING TWO (2) ADDITIONAL BRANCHES OF THE REGIONAL TRIAL COURT IN THE SECOND JUDICIAL REGION TO BE STATIONED IN THE MUNICIPALITY OF CABAGAN, PROVINCE OF ISABELA, AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR, AMENDING FOR THE PURPOSE SECTION 14 (B) OF BATAS PAMBANSA BLG. 129, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS "THE JUDICIARY REORGANIZATION ACT OF 1980," AS AMENDED.

Secretary Bantug called the roll for nominal voting.

RESULT OF THE VOTING

The result of the voting was as follows:

In favor

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

Against

None

Abstention

None

With 22 senators voting in favor, none against, and no abstention, the Chair declared House Bill No. 6582 approved on Third Reading.

APPROVAL OF HOUSE BILL NO. 6583 ON THIRD READING

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body considered, on Third Reading, House Bill No. 6583, copies of which were electronically distributed to the senators on May 7, 2023.

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

AN ACT CREATING THREE (3) ADDITIONAL BRANCHES OF THE REGIONAL TRIAL COURT IN THE TENTH JUDICIAL REGION TO BE STATIONED IN

THE MUNICIPALITY OF SAN JOSE, PROVINCE OF DINAGAT ISLANDS, AND TWO (2) ADDITIONAL BRANCHES OF THE MUNICIPAL TRIAL COURT IN THE TENTH JUDICIAL REGION TO BE STATIONED IN THE MUNICIPALITIES OF SAN JOSE AND BASILISA, PROVINCE OF DINAGAT ISLANDS, AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR, AMENDING FOR THE PURPOSE SECTION 14 (K) AND SECTION 30 OF BATAS PAMBANSA BLG. 129, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS "THE JUDICIARY REORGANIZATION ACT OF 1980," AS AMENDED.

Secretary Bantug called the roll for nominal voting.

RESULT OF THE VOTING

The result of the voting was as follows:

In favor

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

Against

None

Abstention

None

With 22 senators voting in favor, none against, and no abstention, the Chair declared House Bill No. 6583 approved on Third Reading.

APPROVAL OF HOUSE BILL NO. 6584 ON THIRD READING

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body considered, on Third Reading, House Bill No. 6584, copies of which were electronically distributed to the senators on May 7, 2023.

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

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

Secretary Bantug called the roll for nominal voting.

RESULT OF THE VOTING

The result of the voting was as follows:

In favor

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

Against

None

Abstention

None

With 22 senators voting in favor, none against, and no abstention, the Chair declared House Bill No. 6584 approved on Third Reading.

APPROVAL OF HOUSE BILL NO. 8247 ON THIRD READING

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body considered, on Third Reading, House Bill No. 8247, copies of which were electronically distributed to the senators on May 7, 2023.

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

AN ACT CREATING FOUR (4) ADDITIONAL BRANCHES OF THE REGIONAL TRIAL COURT IN THE FOURTH JUDICIAL REGION TO BE STATIONED IN THE MUNICIPALITY OF CALAUAG, PROVINCE OF QUEZON 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.

Secretary Bantug called the roll for nominal voting.

RESULT OF THE VOTING

The result of the voting was as follows:

In favor

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

Against

None

Abstention

None

With 22 senators voting in favor, none against, and no abstention, the Chair declared House Bill No. 8247 approved on Third Reading.

APPROVAL OF HOUSE BILL NO. 8248 ON THIRD READING

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body considered, on Third Reading, House Bill No. 8248, copies of which were electronically distributed to the senators on May 9, 2023.

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

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

Secretary Bantug called the roll for nominal voting.

RESULT OF THE VOTING

The result of the voting was as follows:

In favor

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

Against

None

Abstention

None

With 22 senators voting in favor, none against, and no abstention, the Chair declared House Bill No. 8248 approved on Third Reading.

APPROVAL OF HOUSE BILL NO. 8249 ON THIRD READING

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body considered, on Third Reading, House Bill No. 8249, copies of which were electronically distributed to the senators on May 9, 2023.

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

AN ACT CREATING TEN (10) ADDITIONAL BRANCHES OF THE REGIONAL TRIAL COURT AND EIGHT (8) ADDITIONAL BRANCHES OF THE MUNICIPAL TRIAL COURT IN CITIES IN THE FOURTH JUDICIAL REGION TO BE STATIONED IN THE CITY OF ANTIPOLO, PROVINCE OF RIZAL, AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR, AMENDING FOR THE PURPOSE SECTION 14 (E) AND SECTION 29 OF BATAS PAMBANSA BLG. 129, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS "THE JUDICIARY REORGANIZATION ACT OF 1980," AS AMENDED.

Secretary Bantug called the roll for nominal voting.

RESULT OF THE VOTING

The result of the voting was as follows:

In favor

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

Against

None

Abstention

None

With 22 senators voting in favor, none against, and no abstention, the Chair declared House Bill No. 8249 approved on Third Reading.

APPROVAL OF HOUSE BILL NO. 8250 ON THIRD READING

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body considered, on Third Reading, House Bill No. 8250, copies of which were electronically distributed to the senators on May 9, 2023.

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

AN ACT CREATING TWO (2) ADDITIONAL BRANCHES OF THE REGIONAL TRIAL COURT IN THE ELEVENTH JUDICIAL REGION TO BE STATIONED IN THE ISLAND GARDEN CITY OF SAMAL AND IN THE CITY OF PANABO, PROVINCE OF DAVAO DEL NORTE, AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR, AMENDING FOR THE PURPOSE SECTION 14 (L) OF BATAS PAMBANSA BLG. 129, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS "THE JUDICIARY REORGANIZATION ACT OF 1980," AS AMENDED.

Secretary Bantug called the roll for nominal voting.

RESULT OF THE VOTING

The result of the voting was as follows:

In favor

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

Against

None

Abstention

None

With 22 senators voting in favor, none against, and no abstention, the Chair declared House Bill No. 8250 approved on Third Reading.

APPROVAL OF HOUSE BILL NO. 8253 ON THIRD READING

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body considered, on Third Reading, House Bill No. 8253, copies of which were electronically distributed to the senators on May 9, 2023.

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

AN ACT CREATING ONE (1) ADDITIONAL BRANCH OF THE MUNICIPAL TRIAL COURT IN CITIES IN THE TENTH JUDICIAL REGION TO BE STATIONED IN THE CITY OF MALAYBALAY, PROVINCE OF BUKIDNON, AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR, AMENDING FOR THE PURPOSE SECTION 29 OF BATAS PAMBANSA BLG. 129, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS "THE JUDICIARY REORGANIZATION ACT OF 1980," AS AMENDED.

Secretary Bantug called the roll for nominal voting.

RESULT OF THE VOTING

The result of the voting was as follows:

In favor

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

Against

None

Abstention

None

With 22 senators voting in favor, none against, and no abstention, the Chair declared House Bill No. 8253 approved on Third Reading.

APPROVAL OF HOUSE BILL NO. 8254 ON THIRD READING

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body considered, on Third Reading, House Bill No. 8254, copies of which were electronically distributed to the senators on May 9, 2023.

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

AN ACT CREATING FIVE (5) 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.

Secretary Bantug called the roll for nominal voting.

RESULT OF THE VOTING

The result of the voting was as follows:

In favor

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

Against

None

Abstention

None

With 23 senators voting in favor, none against, and no abstention, the Chair declared House Bill No. 8254 approved on Third Reading.

APPROVAL OF HOUSE BILL NO. 8256 ON THIRD READING

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body considered, on Third Reading, House Bill No. 8256, copies of which were electronically distributed to the senators on May 9, 2023.

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

AN ACT CREATING THREE (3) ADDITIONAL BRANCHES OF THE REGIONAL TRIAL COURT AND TWO (2) ADDITIONAL BRANCHES OF THE METROPOLITAN TRIAL COURT IN THE NATIONAL CAPITAL JUDICIAL REGION TO BE STATIONED IN THE CITY OF NAVOTAS, AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR, AMENDING FOR THE PURPOSE SECTION 14(D) AND SECTION 27 OF BATAS PAMBANSA BLG. 129, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS "THE JUDICIARY REORGANIZATION ACT OF 1980," AS AMENDED.

Secretary Bantug called the roll for nominal voting.

RESULT OF THE VOTING

The result of the voting was as follows:

In favor

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

Against

None

Abstention

None

With 23 senators voting in favor, none against, and no abstention, the Chair declared House Bill No. 8256 approved on Third Reading.

APPROVAL OF HOUSE BILL NO. 8258 ON THIRD READING

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body considered, on Third Reading, House Bill No. 8258, copies of which were electronically distributed to the senators on May 9, 2024.

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

AN ACT CREATING THREE (3) ADDITIONAL BRANCHES OF THE MUNICIPAL TRIAL COURT IN CITIES IN THE FIRST JUDICIAL REGION TO BE STATIONED IN THE CITY OF SAN CARLOS, PROVINCE OF PANGASINAN, AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR, AMENDING FOR THE PURPOSE SECTION 29 OF BATAS PAMBANSA BLG. 129, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS "THE JUDICIARY REORGANIZATION ACT OF 1980," AS AMENDED.

Secretary Bantug called the roll for nominal voting.

RESULT OF THE VOTING

The result of the voting was as follows:

In favor

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

Against

None

Abstention

None

With 23 senators voting in favor, none against, and no abstention, the Chair declared House Bill No. 8258 approved on Third Reading.

APPROVAL OF HOUSE BILL NO. 8259 ON THIRD READING

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body considered, on Third Reading, House Bill No. 8259, copies of which were electronically distributed to the senators on May 9, 2024.

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

AN ACT CREATING ADDITIONAL BRANCHES OF THE REGIONAL TRIAL COURT AND METROPOLITAN TRIAL COURT IN THE NATIONAL CAPITAL JUDICIAL REGION TO BE STATIONED IN THE CITY OF SAN JUAN, CONVERTING FOUR (4) BRANCHES OF THE REGIONAL TRIAL COURT IN PASIG CITY INTO FOUR (4) BRANCHES OF THE REGIONAL TRIAL COURT IN CITY OF SAN JUAN, AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR, AMENDING FOR THE PURPOSE SECTION 14(E) AND 27 OF BATAS PAMBANSA BLG. 129, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS "THE JUDICIARY REORGANIZATION ACT OF 1980," AS AMENDED.

Secretary Bantug called the roll for nominal voting.

RESULT OF THE VOTING

The result of the voting was as follows:

In favor

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

Against

None

Abstention

None

With 23 senators voting in favor, none against, and no abstention, the Chair declared House Bill No. 8259 approved on Third Reading.

APPROVAL OF HOUSE BILL NO. 8260 ON THIRD READING

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body considered, on Third Reading, House Bill No. 8260, copies of which were electronically distributed to the senators on May 9, 2024.

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

AN ACT CREATING TWO (2) ADDITIONAL BRANCHES OF THE REGIONAL TRIAL COURT IN THE TENTH JUDICIAL REGION TO BE STATIONED IN THE CITY OF GINGOOG, PROVINCE OF MISAMIS ORIENTAL, AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR, AMENDING FOR THE PURPOSE SECTION 14(K) OF BATAS PAMBANSA BLG. 129, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS "THE JUDICIARY REORGANIZATION ACT OF 1980," AS AMENDED.

Secretary Bantug called the roll for nominal voting.

RESULT OF THE VOTING

The result of the voting was as follows:

In favor

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

Against

None

Abstention

None

With 22 senators voting in favor, none against, and no abstention, the Chair declared House Bill No. 8260 approved on Third Reading.

APPROVAL OF HOUSE BILL NO. 8251 ON THIRD READING

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body considered, on Third Reading, House Bill No. 8251, copies of which were electronically distributed to the senators on May 9, 2024.

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

AN ACT CREATING FOUR (4) ADDITIONAL BRANCHES OF THE REGIONAL TRIAL COURT AND FOUR (4) ADDITIONAL BRANCHES OF THE MUNICIPAL TRIAL COURT IN CITIES IN THE EIGHTH JUDICIAL REGION TO BE STATIONED IN THE CITY OF ORMOC, PROVINCE OF LEYTE, AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR, AMENDING FOR THE PURPOSE SECTION 14(1) AND SECTION 29 OF BATAS PAMBANSA BLG. 129, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS "THE JUDICIARY REORGANIZATION ACT OF 1980," AS AMENDED.

Secretary Bantug called the roll for nominal voting.

RESULT OF THE VOTING

The result of the voting was as follows:

In favor

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

Against

None

Abstention

None

With 23 senators voting in favor, none against, and no abstention, the Chair declared House Bill No. 8251 approved on Third Reading.

APPROVAL OF HOUSE BILL NO. 8255 ON THIRD READING

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body considered, on Third Reading, House Bill No. 8255, printed copies of which were electronically distributed to the senators on May 9, 2024.

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

AN ACT CREATING TWO (2) ADDITIONAL BRANCHES OF THE MUNICIPAL TRIAL COURT IN CITIES IN THE SIXTH JUDICIAL REGION TO BE STATIONED IN THE CITY OF BACOLOD, PROVINCE OF NEGROS OCCIDENTAL, AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR, AMENDING FOR THE PURPOSE SECTION 29 OF BATAS PAMBANSA BLG. 129, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS "THE JUDICIARY REORGANIZATION ACT OF 1980," AS AMENDED.

Secretary Bantug called the roll for nominal voting.

RESULT OF THE VOTING

The result of the voting was as follows:

In favor

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

Against

None

Abstention

None

With 23 senators voting in favor, none against, and no abstention, the Chair declared House Bill No. 8255 approved on Third Reading.

APPROVAL OF HOUSE BILL NO. 8252 ON THIRD READING

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body considered, on Third Reading, House Bill No. 8252, printed copies of which were electronically distributed to the senators on May 9, 2024.

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

AN ACT CREATING TWO (2) ADDITIONAL BRANCHES OF THE REGIONAL TRIAL COURT IN THE TWELFTH JUDICIAL REGION TO BE STATIONED IN THE MUNICIPALITY OF TUBOD, PROVINCE OF LANA DEL NORTE, AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR, AMENDING FOR THE PURPOSE SECTION 14 (M) OF BATAS PAMBANSA BLG. 129, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS "THE JUDICIARY REORGANIZATION ACT OF 1980," AS AMENDED.

Secretary Bantug called the roll for nominal voting.

RESULT OF THE VOTING

The result of the voting was as follows:

In favor

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

Against

None

Abstention

None

With 23 senators voting in favor, none against, and no abstention, the Chair declared House Bill No. 8252 approved on Third Reading.

QUESTION OF PRIVILEGE OF SENATOR PIMENTEL

At this juncture, Senator Pimentel voiced concern about the uncomfortable temperature in the Session Hall. Taking into account the varying health conditions of the senators and the excessive heat, which necessitated the use of electric fans, he proposed the suspension of the session to address the issue and assess the feasibility of proceeding with the day's agenda.

Senator Dela Rosa affirmed his support for Senator Pimentel's motion.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR TOLENTINO

On the bills concerning the creation of courts, Senator Tolentino conveyed gratitude on behalf of several Integrated Bar of the Philippines (IBP) chapters from various regions. He extended appreciation for the passage of the bills, and particularly thanked Senate President Zubiri, Majority Leader Villanueva, and Minority Leader Pimentel for their roles in advancing the legislation.

Additionally, in response to Senator Pimentel's request, Senator Tolentino manifested his intention to submit a comprehensive statement on the passage of the bills on Third Reading.

Following is the manifestation of gratitude submitted by Senator Tolentino, which is deemed read into the *Journal* and the *Record of the Senate*:

I am deeply honored and grateful for the approval of Third Reading of House Bill Nos. 6582, 6583, 6584, 8247, 8248, 8249, 8250, 8253, 8254, 8256, 8258, 8259, 8260, 8251, 8255, 8252 — calling for the creation of additional courts throughout the country.

This Representation would like to extend his heartfelt appreciation to Senate President Juan Miguel Zubiri, Majority Floor Leader Senator Joel Villanueva, and of course, our Minority Floor Leader Senator Koko Pimentel for his insightful inputs during the interpellation. As always, their invaluable insights have become instrumental in coming up with stronger versions of the proposed measures.

My heart is filled with gratitude to the Supreme Court through the Office of the Court Administrator, Department of Budget and Management, Philippine Judges Association, National Prosecutors League of the Philippines, and the Public Attorney's Office for attending the committee hearings and providing the necessary data to defend these measures before this august Chamber.

My dear colleagues, I cannot further express the importance of access to justice, as this serves as the bedrock of a democratic society. Needless to say, access to justice affirms our inherent right to live with dignity, security, and respect as members of our society.

We have heard and witnessed stories of our people who were forced to travel long distances to access the nearest courts and suffer substantial financial strain, effectively obstructing their right to justice. Meanwhile, we also know for a fact that in areas where courts already exist, the burden of cases has still become overwhelming, thereby hindering the timely delivery of justice.

With the establishment of additional courts, we will be able to cater to litigants in underserved areas and we likewise anticipate that there will be a decrease in the average caseload to a manageable level of 300 or even fewer cases per court.

A manageable caseload would enable a judge to thoroughly review evidence, consider legal arguments, and make well-reasoned decisions. Moreover, with a manageable caseload, a judge can prioritize his/her health, attend to familial obligations, and live a life beyond the confines of his/her Chambers.

In closing, allow me to emphasize: the creation of additional courts would significantly help provide for an effective and efficient administration of justice, and fundamentally, build the trust and confidence of our people in our justice system.

COSPONSOR

Upon his request, Senator Go was made a cosponsor of the House bills on the creation of courts, which had passed Third Reading.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR ESTRADA

Senator Estrada expressed readiness for interpellations on Senate Bill No. 2501, regardless of the Body's decision on the session's suspension. He hoped for the bill's passage before the *sine die* adjournment.

Senate President Zubiri remarked that following the current session day, there would only be five remaining session days.

SUSPENSION OF SESSION

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

It was 4:07 p.m.

RESUMPTION OF SESSION

At 5:22 p.m., the session was resumed.

COMMITTEE REPORT NO. 247 ON HOUSE BILL NO. 9154*(Continuation)*

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body resumed consideration, on Second Reading, of House Bill No. 9154 (Committee Report No. 247), entitled

AN ACT GRANTING A FRANCHISE TO THE ROMBLON ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE, INC. (ROMELCO) TO CONSTRUCT, INSTALL, ESTABLISH, OPERATE, OWN, MANAGE AND MAINTAIN DISTRIBUTION SYSTEMS FOR THE CONVEYANCE OF ELECTRIC POWER TO THE END-USERS IN THE MUNICIPALITIES OF BANTON, CORCUERA AND CONCEPCION, PROVINCE OF ROMBLON.

Senator Villanueva stated that the parliamentary status was the period of amendments.

Thereupon, the Chair recognized Senator Poe, sponsor of the measure, for the committee amendments.

COMMITTEE AMENDMENTS

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

1. On page 2, line 9, after the word "successor," insert the phrase OR THE NATIONAL ELECTRIFICATION ADMINISTRATION (NEA) OR ITS LEGAL SUCCESSOR;
2. On the same page, line 21, after the first mention of the acronym "ERC," insert the words AND NEA;
3. Still on the same page and line, after the second mention of the acronym "ERC," insert the phrase OR THE NEA;
4. On page 4, line 1, insert a new Section 8 to read as follows:

SEC. 8. COMMITMENT TO PROVIDE AND PROMOTE THE CREATION OF EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES. — THE GRANTEE SHALL CREATE EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES AND SHALL ALLOW ON-THE-JOB TRAININGS IN THEIR FRANCHISE OPERATION: PROVIDED, THAT, PRIORITY SHALL BE ACCORDED TO THE RESIDENTS WHERE THEIR PRINCIPAL OFFICE IS LOCATED: PROVIDED, FURTHER, THAT THE GRANTEE SHALL COMPLY WITH THE APPLICABLE LABOR STANDARDS AND ALLOWANCE ENTITLEMENT UNDER EXISTING LABOR LAWS, RULES AND REGULATIONS, AND SIMILAR ISSUANCES;

5. Renumber the succeeding sections accordingly;
6. On the same page, delete the entire Section 11, and renumber the succeeding sections accordingly.

INQUIRY OF SENATOR PIMENTEL

Asked by Senator Pimentel why Section 11 would be deleted when it was a standard requirement that the acceptance of franchise should be made in writing, Senator Poe disclosed that during the Eighteenth Congress, both the Senate and the House of Representatives agreed to remove the requirement since the franchise is deemed automatically accepted once approved and enacted into law.

As to whether the requirement for written acceptance is a matter of policy, and why Congress previously mandated it, Senator Poe stated that according to the House of Representatives,

written acceptance is no longer necessary since compliance with the conditions of the franchise now signifies acceptance. She stated that one indicator of the acceptance is the submission of necessary requirements to concerned government agencies within a specified time frame.

In the event that a franchise holder explicitly expresses non-acceptance of the franchise, Senator Poe stated that while there has never been such an instance, Congress would need to establish the standard requirement of a written acceptance for all franchises.

As to why the requirement of a written acceptance was still included in the draft despite claims of deletion since the Eighteenth Congress, Senator Poe explained that the provision was inadvertently not removed from the old template. Senator Pimentel suggested bringing the matter to the attention of both Houses for clarification.

COMMITTEE AMENDMENTS

(Continuation)

7. On page 6, line 4, replace the word "Clause" with the phrase OF EXISTING LAWS; and
8. On the same page, line 6, replace the last period (.) with a semicolon (;) and insert the phrase AND REPUBLIC ACT NO. 10531 OR THE NATIONAL ELECTRIFICATION ADMINISTRATION REFORM ACT OF 2013.

TERMINATION OF THE PERIOD OF COMMITTEE AMENDMENTS

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

SUSPENSION OF SESSION

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, the session was suspended.

It was 5:32 p.m.

RESUMPTION OF SESSION

At 5:32 p.m., the session was resumed.

TERMINATION OF THE PERIOD OF INDIVIDUAL AMENDMENTS

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

APPROVAL OF HOUSE BILL NO. 9154 ON SECOND READING

Submitted to a vote, there being no objection, House Bill No. 9154 was approved on Second Reading, subject to style.

SUSPENSION OF CONSIDERATION OF HOUSE BILL NO. 9154

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

COMMITTEE REPORT NO. 248 ON HOUSE BILL NO. 6295*(Continuation)*

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body resumed consideration, on Second Reading, of House Bill No. 6295 (Committee Report No. 248), entitled

AN ACT GRANTING A FRANCHISE TO THE LEYTE II ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE INC. (LEYECO II) TO CONSTRUCT, INSTALL, ESTABLISH, OPERATE, OWN, MANAGE AND MAINTAIN DISTRIBUTION SYSTEMS FOR THE CONVEYANCE OF ELECTRIC POWER TO THE END-USERS IN THE CITY OF TACLOBAN AND MUNICIPALITIES OF BABATNGON AND PALO, PROVINCE OF LEYTE.

Senator Villanueva stated that the parliamentary status was the period of amendments.

Thereupon, the Chair recognized Senator Poe, sponsor of the measure, for the committee amendments.

COMMITTEE AMENDMENTS

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

1. On page 2, line 14, after the word "successor," insert the phrase OR THE NATIONAL ELECTRIFICATION ADMINISTRATION (NEA) OR ITS LEGAL SUCCESSOR;
2. On the same page, line 26, after the acronym "ERC," insert the words AND NEA;
3. Still on the same page, line 27, after the acronym "ERC," insert the phrase OR THE NEA;
4. On page 4, line 7, insert a new Section 8 to read as follows:

SECTION 8. *THE COMMITMENT TO PROVIDE AND PROMOTE A CREATION OF EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES.* — THE GRANTEE SHALL CREATE EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES AND SHALL ALLOW ON-THE-JOB TRAININGS IN THEIR FRANCHISE OPERATION: *PROVIDED, THAT* THE PRIORITY SHALL BE ACCORDED TO THE RESIDENTS WHERE THEIR PRINCIPAL OFFICE IS LOCATED: *PROVIDED, FURTHER,* THAT THE GRANTEE SHALL COMPLY WITH THE APPLICABLE LABOR STANDARDS AND ALLOWANCE ENTITLEMENT UNDER EXISTING LABOR LAWS, RULES, AND REGULATIONS, AND SIMILAR ISSUANCES.;

5. Renumber the succeeding sections accordingly;
6. On the same page, delete the entire Section 11 and renumber the succeeding sections accordingly;
7. On page 6, line 14, replace the word "Clause" with the phrase OF EXISTING LAWS; and
8. Still on the same page, line 16, replace the last period (.) with a semicolon (;) and insert the phrase AND REPUBLIC ACT NO. 10531 OR THE NATIONAL ELECTRIFICATION ADMINISTRATION REFORM ACT OF 2013.

TERMINATION OF THE PERIOD OF COMMITTEE AMENDMENTS

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

TERMINATION OF THE PERIOD OF INDIVIDUAL AMENDMENTS

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

APPROVAL OF HOUSE BILL NO. 6295 ON SECOND READING

Submitted to a vote, there being no objection, House Bill No. 6295 was approved on Second Reading.

SUSPENSION OF CONSIDERATION OF HOUSE BILL NO. 6295

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

COMMITTEE REPORT NO. 249 ON HOUSE BILL NO. 9805

(Continuation)

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body resumed consideration, on Second Reading, of House Bill No. 9805 (Committee Report No. 249), entitled

AN ACT GRANTING NEGROS ELECTRIC AND POWER CORP. A FRANCHISE TO ESTABLISH, OPERATE, AND MAINTAIN, FOR COMMERCIAL PURPOSES AND IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST, A DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM FOR THE CONVEYANCE OF ELECTRIC POWER TO THE END-USERS IN THE CITIES OF BACOLOD, SILAY, TALISAY, AND BAGO AND THE MUNICIPALITIES OF MURCIA AND DON SALVADOR BENEDICTO, ALL IN THE PROVINCE OF NEGROS OCCIDENTAL, AND ENSURING CONTINUOUS AND UNINTERRUPTED SUPPLY OF ELECTRICITY IN THE FRANCHISE AREA.

Senator Villanueva stated that the parliamentary status was the period of amendments.

Thereupon, the Chair recognized Senator Poe, sponsor of the measure, for the committee amendments.

COMMITTEE AMENDMENTS

On page 4, lines 16 to 23, as proposed by Senator Poe, there being no objection, the Body approved the deletion of the entire Section 12 and the renumbering of the succeeding sections accordingly.

TERMINATION OF THE PERIOD OF COMMITTEE AMENDMENTS

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

SUSPENSION OF SESSION

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, the session was suspended.

It was 5:38 p.m.

RESUMPTION OF SESSION

At 5:39 p.m., the session was resumed.

GATCHALIAN AMENDMENTS

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

Page 2

- On line 35, replace the word “costly” with COST;
- On line 36, after the word “manner,” insert the phrase PURSUANT TO REPUBLIC ACT NO. 9136;
- On line 39, delete the word “charge” and replace it with the words ONLY INCUR;
- On the same line, delete the words “power rates” and replace it with COSTS; and
- On line 44, between the word “the” and acronym “ERC,” insert DOE AND.

PROPOSED AMENDMENT OF SENATOR GATCHALIAN

On page 2, line 45, Senator Gatchalian proposed to replace the phrase “be allowed to avail” with IF QUALIFIED, AVAIL OF THE EXCEPTION FOR. Senator Poe expressed regret that she could not accept the amendment, as it was the first time that there would be a joint venture ownership from an existing cooperative with a private company applicant.

Senator Gatchalian said that the proposed amendment simply stated that the grantee, if qualified, would be allowed to avail of the negotiated power procurement. However, Senator Poe explained that the EPIRA Law did not anticipate such kind of situation; thus, instead of including DOE, the ERC was retained for emergency procurement in the meantime. For his part, Senator Gatchalian noted that emergency procurement has already been promulgated by DOE under Department Circular (DC) 2003-06-0021, which was being followed by all utilities.

Senator Poe clarified that the procurement under the provision does not cover joint ventures but only addresses emergency situations. She further explained that the one-year provisional period was meant to stabilize the prices; hence, the DOE was not considered the best department to mitigate the situation regarding the cost of procurement.

Noting that there is no bidding in a negotiated procurement, Senator Gatchalian explained that the purpose of his proposed amendment was to ensure that the joint venture is qualified under the rules to undertake it. For her part, Senator Poe maintained that under the current rules, the joint venture would not be qualified to avail of the negotiated procurement of emergency power supply, as there was neither *force majeure* nor an emergency situation, but a takeover. Unfortunately, she said that takeover is a new concept; hence, there are still no regulations or exceptions in place within the DOE for such. She reiterated that the one-year period was to give the joint venture a chance to reorganize, among other things, which could serve as a template for future joint ventures qualified to be granted a franchise.

SUSPENSION OF SESSION

Upon motion of Senator Gatchalian, the session was suspended.

It was 5:48 p.m.

RESUMPTION OF SESSION

At 5:50 p.m., the session was resumed.

PROPOSED AMENDMENT OF SENATOR GATCHALIAN

(Continuation)

Upon conferring with Senator Poe, Senator Gatchalian withdrew his proposed amendment.

GATCHALIAN AMENDMENTS

(Continuation)

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

Page 2

- On line 49, after the word "year," insert the phrase AND ARE NON-EXTENDABLE;

Page 4

- On line 44, before the word "Congress," insert the phrase THE GRANTEE SHALL SEEK THE PRIOR APPROVAL OF;
- On the same line, after the word "Congress," delete the phrase "shall be informed";
- On line 46, delete the word "after" and replace it with BEFORE;
- On lines 48 and 49, delete the words "report to," and replace it with the phrase SEEK PRIOR APPROVAL FROM; and
- On line 49, after the word "Congress," insert OF.

PROPOSED AMENDMENT OF SENATOR HONTIVEROS

Senator Hontiveros stated that the joint venture would retain 30% ownership in CENECO. However, she pointed out that the last sentence of the first paragraph of Section 16 would render the preceding section irrelevant, as it provides for 20% ownership. Thus, on page 5, lines 8 to 11, she proposed the deletion of the last sentence that reads "*Provided, further,* That ownership by the Central Negros Electric Cooperative (CENECO), or its successor cooperative or corporation, of at least twenty percent (20%) of the outstanding capital stock of the Grantee shall be deemed a compliance with the dispersal of ownership requirement."

SUSPENSION OF SESSION

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

It was 5:58 p.m.

RESUMPTION OF SESSION

At 5:59 p.m., the session was resumed.

PROPOSED AMENDMENT OF SENATOR HONTIVEROS

(Continuation)

Upon resumption, Senator Poe explained that the offer was to retain 30% ownership, but mentioned that the offer could eventually decrease to as low as 20%. She noted that

Congress might not be able to prevent the figure from decreasing to as low as 20% due to investment considerations. She added that the NEPC was already compliant with the 30% inclusion of their stock ownership for the time being. Consequently, she informed the Body that she could not accept the proposed amendment of Senator Hontiveros.

Senator Hontiveros stated that the title of Section 16 of the proposed measure, "Dispersal of Ownership," might not accurately reflect its current formulation, which she believe to actually be anti-dispersal of ownership. Moreover, she surmised that citing the investment angle, as previously mentioned by Senator Poe, could be challenging concerning the grantee's interests in the bill's area of operations. She stated that such consideration also encompasses the compliance status of its joint venture agreement with CENECO and its obligations under the law and the spirit of the Constitution regarding ownership dispersal.

PROPOSED AMENDMENT OF SENATOR GATCHALIAN

On page 5, line 9, before the word "corporation," Senator Gatchalian proposed inserting the phrase PUBLICLY LISTED.

Senator Poe stated that she could not accept the proposed amendment as making CENECO publicly listed would pose significant challenges, especially considering that other cooperatives granted franchises were also not publicly listed.

In response, Senator Gatchalian clarified that his proposal aimed to enhance the ownership structure of CENECO by making it a publicly listed corporation. He added that the status would not only enhance transparency but also uphold the true essence of being a public utility by dispersing ownership to the public.

Senator Poe argued that CENECO would struggle to meet the requirements of being a publicly-listed company mainly because consumer-owners could already be considered stockholders under the law, which states that in a cooperative, those receiving services are also the owners. Therefore, she suggested that consumer-owners of CENECO could not sell their stocks because they must also be clients of CENECO.

Senator Gatchalian then read into the *Journal* and the *Record of the Senate* the rationale for his proposed amendment:

"To ensure that the policy objective of public participation encouragement under the Constitution is not negated, a qualification for the type of successor corporation of CENECO is provided. It is crucial that the successor corporation of CENECO is also publicly listed so that the purpose of dispersal of ownership is complied with. If the successor of CENECO is a private corporation, then it should not be considered as compliance with the 20% public listing requirement."

Senator Gatchalian clarified that if CENECO remained private, the dispersal of ownership of the NEPC would not satisfy the 20% publicly listed ownership proposal, which was meant to be an added feature facilitating the seamless transition from privately owned to publicly listed, ensuring compliance with the 20% ownership dispersal requirement.

Replying to Senator Gatchalian, Senator Poe highlighted the stringent requirements for publicly listing a corporation, including a P50 million annual income and a P300 million profit for three years, requirements which, she surmised, CENECO would never be able to meet. While acknowledging Senator Gatchalian's point regarding the dual nature of ownership that her acceptance of the proposed amendment would afford, she argued that not inserting the term "publicly listed" would prevent confusion in the future.

INQUIRY OF SENATOR PIMENTEL

Still on Section 16 (*Dispersal of Ownership*), Senator Pimentel sought clarification on whether, based on its wording, the grantee was already considered compliant with the ownership dispersal requirement and thus exempt from additional requisites. Senator Poe responded in the affirmative, stating that with a 30% public ownership of CENECO, the grantee already meets the requirement for public dispersal of ownership.

Senator Pimentel then called the attention of the Body to the last sentence of Section 16, which states: "Non-compliance with this section shall render the franchise *ipso facto* revoked." He inquired about the ways in which the section could be violated.

In response, Senator Poe explained that one way Section 16 could be violated is if CENECO falls below the 20% requirement for public ownership.

While Senator Pimentel acknowledged that the 30% public ownership would satisfy the requirement, he opined that the Constitution envisioned a robust public participation in the stockholdings of public utilities. He queried whether there were essentially two major stockholders from the outset, CENECO and its joint venture partner. Senator Poe replied in the affirmative.

Asked if the partner entities needed to take additional steps to ensure compliance with Section 16, Senator Poe explained that as long as CENECO maintained at least 20% public ownership, no further action would be necessary.

Even though the public ownership of CENECO was already at 30% at that time, Senator Pimentel expressed uncertainty about whether the spirit of dispersal of ownership was fully met, given that a portion of the section explicitly states that the current ownership was already compliant, a feature absent in other franchise grants.

In response, Senator Poe stated that such a scenario would apply if the current owner were publicly listed. However, she noted that since CENECO has approximately around 100,000 members, it met the 20% requirement.

Senate President Zubiri, at this point, reflecting on his tenure as chairperson of the Committee on Cooperatives, noted that electric cooperatives, while not registered with the CDA that merged with NEA, were technically owned by their individual members, each represented by an electric meter. Consequently, he believed that CENECO had indeed complied with the 20% requirement of public ownership, as it should be 100% owned by the consumers in the area. In this context, he opined that there would be no need for CENECO to register with the SEC for a public offering. Senator Poe agreed, reiterating that the cooperative was actually owned by the subscribers themselves.

Senator Pimentel thanked Senate President Zubiri for his explanation. However, he drew the Body's attention to the documents presented by the grantee, which indicated that CENECO had about 100,000 subscribers. Senator Poe clarified that the exact number of subscribers was 178,000.

Senator Pimentel asked whether the figure truly represented the dispersion of ownership required by the Constitution. While he did not propose an amendment, he stated that he propounded the question to assist fellow senators in proposing their individual amendments at the proper time.

PROPOSED AMENDMENT OF SENATOR GATCHALIAN

On page 5, Senator Gatchalian proposed deleting lines 13 to 17, as well as a portion of line 18 from the word "already" to the word "that."

Additionally, on page 5, line 24, after the word "requirement," he proposed the insertion of the following paragraph:

PROVIDED, THAT, IN THE EVENT THE ERC ALLOWS THE REASONABLE EXTENSION OF FIVE (5)-YEAR PERIOD, THE HOLDING OF PERSONS, NATURAL OR JURIDICAL, INCLUDING DIRECTORS, OFFICERS, STOCK-HOLDERS, AND RELATED INTERESTS IN THE GRANTEE AND ITS RESPECTIVE HOLDING COMPANY, IF ANY, SHALL NOT EXCEED TWENTY-FIVE PERCENT (25%) OF THE VOTING SHARES OF STOCK UNLESS THE UTILITY OR THE HOLDING COMPANY HOLDING THE SHARES OR ITS CONTROLLING SHAREHOLDERS ARE ALREADY LISTED IN THE PHILIPPINE STOCK EXCHANGE, INC. (PSE).

Senator Poe informed the Body that she could not accept Senator Gatchalian's proposal as they would nullify the reason for the extension regarding compliance with the dispersal of ownership.

In response, Senator Gatchalian explained that his proposed amendments rearranged portions of the section, giving importance to the application process. He emphasized that the extension would only be considered upon granting the application. He added that if the application were not granted, the reasons for denial would then be enumerated.

Senator Poe opined that the proposed amendment appeared to anticipate noncompliance. She argued that the grantee could not immediately decrease its ownership when the immediate goal should be to improve performance. She emphasized that the guarantee improvement would be at least a 70% ownership on its part.

In response, Senator Gatchalian maintained that there was no significant difference, as his proposal aimed to prioritize the application process, with the extension proviso following afterward. Senator Poe reiterated her previous stance, stating that she did not find the proposal a necessity at that point.

SUSPENSION OF SESSION

Upon motion of Senator Gatchalian, the session was suspended.

It was 6:15 p.m.

RESUMPTION OF SESSION

At 6:24 p.m., the session was resumed.

PROPOSED AMENDMENT OF SENATOR GATCHALIAN

(Continuation)

Senator Poe did not accept Senator Gatchalian's proposed amendment.

In response, Senator Gatchalian clarified that his amendment aimed to set a time limit for ownership dispersal and facilitate public involvement in the company's management, operations,

and decision-making processes. He believed that it would enhance transparency and public engagement, enabling individuals to participate in future benefits. However, he stated that he was withdrawing his proposal.

GATCHALIAN AMENDMENTS

(Continuation)

As proposed by Senator Gatchalian and accepted by the sponsor, there being no objection, the Body approved the following amendments:

Page 5

- On lines 46 and 47, replace the phrase “accord preference to hiring” with the word HIRE; and

Page 6

- Delete lines 4 to 10, and replace it with the following paragraph: THE GRANTEE SHALL COMPLY WITH THE SYSTEM LOSS CAP PRESCRIBED FOR PRIVATE DISTRIBUTION UTILITIES WITHIN A TRANSITION PERIOD DETERMINED BY THE ERC: *PROVIDED*, THAT SUCH TRANSITION PERIOD SHALL NOT EXCEED FIVE (5) YEARS FROM THE GRANT OF THE GRANTEE’S CPCN: *PROVIDED FURTHER*, THAT WITHIN SIX (6) MONTHS FROM THE ISSUANCE OF THE CPCN, THE GRANTEE SHALL SUBMIT TO THE ERC A PROPOSED IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY INCLUDING THE ESTIMATED RATE IMPACT ON CONSUMERS TO ACHIEVE THE PRESCRIBED SYSTEM LOSS CAP WITHIN SUCH TRANSITION PERIOD.

PROPOSED AMENDMENT OF SENATOR HONTIVEROS

On page 6, line 13 of the bill, after the words “The Grantee,” Senator Hontiveros proposed to insert the phrase SHALL ENSURE THE SECURITY OF TENURE OF CENECO EMPLOYEES AS PROVIDED BY LAW AND RELEVANT JURISPRUDENCE. ADDITIONALLY, THE GRANTEE.

She explained that her amendment aimed to protect the job security of displaced CENECO employees and prioritize their tenure over the grantee’s job commitments. However, Senator Poe rejected the amendment, citing the grantee’s plan to align compensation packages with industry standards.

Relative thereto, Senator Poe mentioned a proposed amendment on page 6, line 15, Section 18, which would replace the phrase “the residents of the franchise area” with EMPLOYEES OF CENTRAL NEGROS ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE, INC. (CENECO), WHO SHALL ENJOY THE SAME ALLOWANCES AND BENEFITS RECEIVED BY THE EMPLOYEES OF THE GRANTEE WITH THE SAME QUALIFICATIONS AND JOB DESCRIPTION.

She assured that the employees would receive retirement and severance packages, even in the event of bankruptcy. She emphasized that since a new company would assume control, it could not grant the same positions and arrangements for its employees.

In response, Senator Hontiveros noted that the amendment was not approved by the CENECO general assembly, despite being a joint venture agreement. She speculated potential salary reductions for prospective employees, considering the rationalization of the compensation package.

She also noted that the proposed amendment of Senator Poe solely addresses benefits and allowances, with no provision for the salaries of employees who intend to remain with

the company. She pointed out that employees would appreciate severance and retirement packages only upon their separation from the company, which was apparently not their intention at the moment. She emphasized that the employees were seeking job security and intend to remain employed.

At this point, Senator Hontiveros moved for a division of the House.

SUSPENSION OF SESSION

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

It was 6:33 p.m.

RESUMPTION OF SESSION

At 7:01 p.m., the session was resumed with Senate President Zubiri presiding.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR VILLANUEVA

Upon resumption, Senator Villanueva stated that Senator Hontiveros had earlier introduced an individual amendment on House Bill No. 9805, which was not accepted by Senator Poe, hence, the next course of action was to divide the House.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR HONTIVEROS

Senator Hontiveros reminded the Body that the Security of Tenure Bill had been passed by the Senate but was later vetoed by the former President Rodrigo Duterte.

She emphasized that the Body's vote would determine the fate of her proposed amendment, which aimed to secure the tenure of over 400 CENECO employees. She argued that it would be inconsistent not to provide security of tenure after passing such legislation. She then appealed to the other Members to support her amendment.

In response, Senator Poe acknowledged the cooperative's commitment to security of tenure but stressed that under the management of a different company, CENECO would follow a new direction outlined as follows:

- 1) Offering severance pay to CENECO employees based on their years of service in the cooperative;
- 2) Allowing employees to reapply, with not all being absorbed, to maintain the company's attractiveness to investors; and
- 3) Focusing on expanding business ventures in Bacolod and other areas in the country to remain business-friendly.

Senator Poe expressed appreciation to Senator Hontiveros for raising her concern but stated that she could not accept the proposal due to its long-term implications.

Senator Hontiveros clarified that her proposal was not a political accommodation but a rights-based amendment aligned with the Senate's legislative priorities.

In reply, Senator Poe reiterated the options of severance pay and reapplication for employees under the new company. She then requested a division of the House.

DIVISION OF THE HOUSE

At this point, the Chair called for a division of the House and requested those in favor of the amendment of Senator Hontiveros to raise their hands. Thereafter, he also asked those against it to do the same.

With two senators voting in favor, 12 against, and no abstention, the Hontiveros amendment was lost.

PROPOSED AMENDMENT OF SENATOR PIMENTEL

On page 5, line 48, Senator Pimentel proposed replacing the period (.) with a semicolon (;) and adding the phrase *PROVIDED, THAT IN THE ABSORPTION OF FORMER CENECO EMPLOYEES, THERE SHALL BE NO DIMINUTION OF RANKS, SALARIES, BENEFITS, OR RIGHTS PREVIOUSLY ENJOYED BY THESE EMPLOYEES.*

Senator Poe stated that she could not accept the amendment as it might cause salary imbalances. However, Senator Pimentel underscored that there would be no salary distortion since the company would be starting anew. He expressed concern that rehired employees would receive lower salaries compared to what they were earning from CENECO. Senator Poe replied that salaries would be based on industry standards, noting that such employees would receive severance pay in anticipation of security of tenure concerns.

Senate President Zubiri interjected that salary decisions would be at the discretion of the new employer, emphasizing that cooperatives allocate significant funds to salaries and board member compensations rather than reinvesting in the company. He also stated that the new company would aim to streamline to allocate more funds for expansion and modernization, potentially resulting in lower salaries for new hires compared to existing employees. In response, Senator Pimentel said that he would no longer pursue his proposal.

PIMENTEL AMENDMENTS

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

1. On page 3, line 42, delete the word "power" and replace it with RIGHT;
2. On the same page, line 49, delete the phrase starting with the words "including but" up to the words "franchise area" of line 54; and
3. Still on the same page, delete the phrase starting with the words "*Provided, further*" on line 55 up to the word "value" on line 9, page 4.

TERMINATION OF THE PERIOD OF INDIVIDUAL AMENDMENTS

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

APPROVAL OF HOUSE BILL NO. 9805 ON SECOND READING

Submitted to a vote, there being no objection, House Bill No. 9805 was approved on Second Reading.

SUSPENSION OF CONSIDERATION OF HOUSE BILL NO. 9805

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

SUSPENSION OF SESSION

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, the session was suspended.

It was 7:15 p.m.

RESUMPTION OF SESSION

At 7:27 p.m., the session was resumed.

COMMITTEE REPORT NO. 204 ON SENATE BILL NO. 2560

(Continuation)

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body resumed consideration, on Second Reading, of Senate Bill No. 2560 (Committee Report No. 204), entitled

AN ACT DEFINING AND PENALIZING FINANCIAL ACCOUNT SCAMMING
AND OTHER OFFENSES, AND PROVIDING FOR THE ENFORCEMENT
MECHANISMS THEREFOR.

Senator Villanueva stated that the parliamentary status was still the period of individual amendments, using the amendment by substitution received by the Bills and Index Service and the Members on May 6, 2024 as the working draft.

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

MOTION OF SENATOR VILLAR (M)

Senator Villar (M) moved to suspend Rule XXIX, Section 82 of the *Rules of the Senate*.

SUSPENSION OF SESSION

Upon motion of Senator Pimentel, the session was suspended.

It was 7:29 p.m.

RESUMPTION OF SESSION

At 7:31 p.m., the session was resumed.

WITHDRAWAL OF MOTION

Senator Villar (M) withdrew his motion to suspend the *Rules*.

INDIVIDUAL AMENDMENTS

As proposed by Senator Villar (M), on behalf of Senators Escudero, Gatchalian, and Legarda, the Body approved the following amendments:

Page 8

By Senator Escudero

- Delete lines 15 to 17;

By Senator Gatchalian

- On line 31, after the word “committed,” insert the phrase OR WHOSE FINANCIAL ACCOUNT IS MAINTAINED WITH AN INSTITUTION OPERATING IN THE PHILIPPINES;

SUSPENSION OF SESSION

Upon motion of Senator Villar (M), the session was suspended.

It was 7:32 p.m.

RESUMPTION OF SESSION

At 7:32 p.m., the session was resumed.

INDIVIDUAL AMENDMENTS

(Continuation)

Page 4

By Senator Legarda

- On line 21, after the word “jurisdiction,” replace the period [.] with a colon [:] and insert the phrase *PROVIDED, THAT INSTITUTIONS SHALL PROMPTLY NOTIFY THE BSP WHENEVER IT TEMPORARILY HOLDS THE FUNDS SUBJECT OF A DISPUTED TRANSACTION;* and
- On line 39, after the word “funds,” insert the phrase *THE PERIOD WHEREIN THE INSTITUTIONS SHOULD NOTIFY THE BSP WHENEVER IT HOLDS THE FUNDS.*

MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR PIMENTEL

Senator Pimentel manifested his intention to propose additional amendments, which he will submit to Senator Villar (M) for review. He then proposed to suspend consideration of the bill until the following day.

INQUIRY OF THE CHAIR

Senate President Zubiri asked whether all the proposed individual amendments of Senators Escudero, Gatchalian, and Legarda had already been introduced. Senator Villar (M) replied in the affirmative, stating that their amendments had been incorporated into his earlier proposals. He noted that Senators Pimentel and Hontiveros intend to introduce their amendments in the next plenary session.

SUSPENSION OF CONSIDERATION OF SENATE BILL NO. 2560

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

COMMITTEE REPORT NO. 138 ON SENATE BILL NO. 2501*(Continuation)*

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body resumed consideration, on Second Reading, of Senate Bill No. 2501 (Committee Report No. 138), entitled

AN ACT PROVIDING A NEW SEPARATION, RETIREMENT AND PENSION SYSTEM FOR THE MILITARY AND THE UNIFORMED PERSONNEL, AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR.

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

Thereupon the Chair recognized Senator Estrada, sponsor of the measure, and Senator Go for his interpellation.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR GO

At the outset, Senator Go delivered the following statement:

I have always been supportive of our military and uniformed personnel. *Buhay po ang isinakripisyo nila upang mapanatili ang seguridad ng bansa. Iba po ang sakripisyo nila dahil buhay ang nakataya dito kaya dapat pag-aralan nang mabuti ang Pension Reform Bill.*

Let me reiterate—*tinaasan natin ang sahod ng uniformed personnel noong panahon ni dating Pangulong Duterte—2018 naalala ko nadoble ang sahod nila—ang entry position level. Pinaghirapan natin ito kasama ang ating Senate President dahil isa ito sa pinangako na madoble nga.*

It was implemented in 2018. *Saksi ako dito; pinaghirapan natin ito at naisakatuparan. Ayaw naman natin na na-low morale ang ating military at uniformed personnel. Nabalitaan ko iyung iba, nag-file ng early retirement.*

Hindi ako sang-ayon kung masasayang ang pinaghirapan nating dagdag sahod na iyon. Huwag naman sana tayo bigay bawi dahil dinoble nga, ngayon kailangan nilang magcontribute.

Again, those retired and in active iservice should not be affected. *Karamihan sa kanila ay may pinaglaanan na ng pera—expecting sa matatanggap nila once they retired.*

Binigay na natin sa kanila. Iyong iba, nakaplano na, nangutang na, nakalaan na para sa gamot. Nakapag-loan na para sa future ng kanilang anak. Nakaplano lahat iyan. Sabi ko nga, kung ikakaltas na sundalo ay katumbas na iyan ng isang sakong bigas na pwede nang ipakain ng ordinaryong sundalo sa pamilya nila. Malaking bagay ito para sa kanila.

Ang daming natatakot at nangangamba na galawin ang pensyon nila kaya nag-early retirement. Last year ay medyo mataas ang numero kumpara ngayong taon kaya huwag sana nating baguhin ang sistema para sa kanila sa kalagitnaan. Huwag nating pahirapan ang mga sundalo, pulis, at iba pang uniformed personnel dahil buhay ang isinakripisyo nila sa pagseserbisyo sa kanilang bayan.

INTERPELLATION OF SENATOR GO

Responding to Senator Go's statement, Senator Estrada acknowledged that many military and uniformed personnel opted for early retirement due to concerns about potential changes in contributions for active MUP once the bill becomes law. He assured that neither current pensioners nor active MUP would be negatively affected by the proposed legislation.

He emphasized that the proposed measure would not alter or decrease pensions. Additionally, he stated that automatic indexation is in place to ensure that pensioners will continue to receive the same benefits, and active MUP will receive their expected pensions from the start of their

service. He also emphasized that the measure includes a proposed annual adjustment in base pay and a maximum benefit rate of 90%.

At this point Senator Go presented a photo showing MUP pensioners who retired due to concerns about the proposed changes, alongside active MUP. He inquired about the effects of the bill on MUP, to which Senator Estrada confirmed that they would be positively affected through proposed salary increases and automatic indexation.

Senator Go lauded Senator Estrada’s efforts to reflect the sentiments of MUP in the proposed measure. He then asked about the DND’s position on mandatory contributions for new entrants. Senator Estrada explained that the agency aligns with the proposed measure where new military personnel would contribute 7% to the pension system while new uniformed personnel would contribute 9%. He clarified that the differentiation is due to the fact that the military still holds significant assets.

Senator Go surmised that new entrants would learn the details upon signing their contracts. He opined that the committee deemed it best to limit the mandatory contributions to new entrants as a compromise.

He expressed concern over the potential impact on MUP recruitment due to the changes in retirement benefits and mentioned having filed a bill for the modernization of Philippine Coast Guard (PCG), Bureau of Fire Protection (BFP), Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (BJMP), and Bureau of Corrections (BuCor).

Addressing recruitment and retirement statistics, Senator Estrada stated that there is a total of 11,656 estimated retirees per year which include 4,247 from the PNP, 3,760 from AFP, 2,728 from PCG, 509 from BFP, 298 from BJMP, 76 from BuCor, and 38 from NAMRIA.

On the other hand, he said that the 32,057 new entrants include 10,000 for PNP, 13,000 for AFP, 4,000 for PCG, 2,000 for BFP, 2,000 for BJMP, 1,000 for BuCor, as well as 57 new entrants for NAMRIA.

Asked for data on the optional retirements of MUP due to concerns over anticipated changes in the pension system, Senator Estrada provided the following information:

Agency	Retirees		
	2022	2023	2024
PNP	2,520	3,323 <i>(as of February)</i>	1,348 <i>(as of February)</i>
AFP	466	384	61

Senator Go opined that the figures include those who retired early due to worries about the new system. Moreover, Senator Estrada stated another set of data.

Agency	Retirees					
	2022		2023		2024	
					<i>(as of March)</i>	
	<i>Optional</i>	<i>Compulsory</i>	<i>Optional</i>	<i>Compulsory</i>	<i>Optional</i>	<i>Compulsory</i>
BFP	133	235	265	244	209	292
BJMP	65	136	99	166	23	47

Senator Estrada explained that the compulsory retirement age is 57 years old, while the optional retirement age is 56 years old starting 2024.

Queried about other countries and their system of contribution for retirement benefits, Senator Estrada confirmed that Brunei and Singapore are two Southeast Asian countries where the MUP pension is fully funded by the national government, while other countries source pension funds from contributions.

Furthermore, he stated that the workers' shares range from 3% (Thailand) to 8% (Vietnam, Laos), with government shares ranging from 3% to 14%. He stated that Russia has a 22% contribution rate.

Additionally, Senator Estrada mentioned that there is no automatic indexation in Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand, and Brunei. Furthermore, he explained that Vietnam's system is indexed to the cost of living and economic growth, while Russia's is indexed to inflation.

He pointed out that only the Philippines and Brunei do not have a pensionable age, while other jurisdictions have ages ranging from 44 to 62 years. He also noted that Russia and Brunei require 15 years of service; Indonesia, Singapore, Vietnam, and the Philippines require 20 years of service; and Laos, 25 years of service.

Addressing additional queries, the sponsor reiterated that the 7% contribution of the AFP is matched by a 14% government share, while the 9% contribution of other uniformed personnel has an equivalent 12% government share, as proposed by the Government Service Insurance System (GSIS).

Senator Estrada explained that since ordinary civilian employees also contribute 9%, which is matched by a 12% government share, the alignment was intentional for synchronization.

As for addressing pension deficits, Senator Estrada expressed optimism that the problems would be solved gradually. He asserted that the full impact of the reforms might be realized in 20 years, but implementing them immediately is crucial for it to happen.

Relative thereto, Senator Go quoted Section 14 (a), which states: "Military Personnel shall contribute seven percent (7%) of their base pay and longevity pay as personal share and the National Government shall contribute fourteen percent (14%) as its counterpart share." He then asked to clarify the phrase "seven percent (7%) of their base pay."

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

Senator Estrada stated that at the proper time, the committee would amend the provision.

Senator Go also noted that Section 14(a) stipulates that "the aforementioned rates may be adjusted by the Development Budget Coordination Committee (DBCC), in consultation with the AFP Trust Fund Committee, on account of adverse fiscal or economic conditions or the fiscal constraints of the National Government."

Concerning the possibility of the DBCC increasing the rates beyond the proposed 7%, Senator Estrada explained that the DBCC, comprised of the Department of Finance (DOF), Department of Budget and Management (DBM), NEDA, and Office of the President (OP), is primarily tasked with reviewing and approving macroeconomic targets, revenue projections, borrowing levels, aggregate budget levels, expenditure priorities, and recommending to the Cabinet and the President the consolidated public sector financial position and national government fiscal program. Consequently, he said that it is in the position to increase rates.

Asked if the responsibility to adjust rates would fall under the DBCC even in cases when the committee disagrees, Senator Estrada replied in the affirmative. He also confirmed that the same principle applies to the rates for uniformed personnel.

Senator Go believed that Congress should further empower the committee, rather than solely entrusting rate adjustments to the DBCC, to better safeguard stakeholder interests. Additionally, he proposed expanding the AFP Trust Fund Committee's membership to include the secretaries of the DOF and DBM, who are also DBCC members.

Regarding the AFPRSBS, established in 1973, Senator Estrada cited the following reasons for its failure:

- The System was underfunded from the outset;
- There is no government counterpart in the pension contribution system apart from the initial P200 million seed capital;
- PD 361, as amended by PD 1656, mandates AFPRSBS to return soldiers' contributions; in contrast, SSS and GSIS do not refund their members' contributions; instead, these contributions are utilized to bolster their fund growth and sustain pension requirements;
- Compared to other countries, the AFP pension is deemed generous due to several factors: it is based on the base pay and longevity pay of the next higher grade; it increases with each raise in the active soldier's salary; it is granted earlier, at 56 years of age; and soldiers' dependents receive a high percentage of the pension once widowed, at 75%; and
- The increase in number of pensioners contributed to the escalation in the pension requirement, and the improved life expectancy of retirees further resulted in a pension requirement that outpaced the yield from RSBS investments.

Senator Estrada informed the Body that the AFPRSBS has been classified as dissolved, liquidated, and inactive by the Governance Commission for Government-Owned or Controlled Corporations (GCG).

Senator Go recalled that in previous interpellations, it was discussed that uniformed personnel have to contribute at a higher rate of 9% since they have no assets, unlike the AFP. He inquired if government could afford to grant 7%, the same rate as the military, instead of 9%.

Senator Estrada stated that prior to the interpellations, he requested the DOF and other economic managers to consider applying the same 7% rate for MUP to other personnel such as the PNP, NAMRIA, PCG, and BuCor, and inquired about the cost the adjustment would entail for the government. He said that according to the managers, it would cost the government P1.4 billion for the first year, with costs increasing over time. He expressed his belief that with the track record of the GSIS, it could manage increased contributions from uniformed personnel services, 7% for the military, and 9% for other uniformed personnel.

The sponsor stated that the committee prescribed a lower contribution rate for the military for several reasons: firstly, compared to other uniformed personnel, the AFP has assets that could be utilized for the pension fund, unlike other uniformed services; secondly, according to the Defense Secretary, the AFP performs its *sui generis* mandate as outlined in the 1987 Constitution, which is to secure the sovereignty of the Republic of the Philippines and the integrity of the country's national territory; and lastly, military personnel do not receive additional financial support from the local government units, in contrast to the PNP, who receive allowances, transportation support including vehicles, gas allowance, and firearms.

Senator Estrada recalled that during his tenure as mayor of the City of San Juan, its budget of P300 million enabled the provision of financial benefits to the PNP. Additionally, he cited his father's term as chief executive of the City of Manila, during which he increased the police officers' monthly allowance to P10,000.

Senator Go noted that the City of San Juan boasts of a substantial budget. He then inquired about potential outcomes if an LGU could not offer support to the local police. Senator Estrada surmised that without LGU support, there would likely be issues concerning law and order. He emphasized that during his tenure, the ideal police-to-citizen ratio was 1:500, which he believed justified support for the local police. He also mentioned that Senator Ejercito, who also served as mayor of San Juan, provided support to the local police by supplying brand new patrol vehicles, thereby enhancing police visibility during his term.

Additionally, he recalled that when he assumed office as mayor of San Juan City in 1992, its income stood at P60 million. He stated that during his tenure, he successfully established a hospital. He stated that like other mayors who approach the Senate seeking projects, he too reached out to senators and visited the Senate seeking support to establish a hospital and a police building.

Senator Go supposed that Senator Estrada could persuade the economic managers to reconsider the contribution rate of the other uniformed personnel from 9% to 7%.

On another matter, Senator Go noted that Section 38 provides that "On the fifth (5th) year, and when the need arises thereafter, there shall be a review on the base pay and the rule on automatic indexation by the Development Budget Coordination Committee."

Asked to clarify the reckoning time of the fifth year and whether the provision would allow the DBCC to remove automatic indexation for active and retired personnel, Senator Estrada explained that according to the House version, which was also adopted by the Senate version, if an MUP received P100,000 per month on the first year, the amount would increase by 3%, totaling P103,000, for the following year. He said that the 3% increase would be applied to the new amount each subsequent year for a period of 10 years. He explained that the Senate endorsed the House version because when President Duterte doubled the salaries of the AFP personnel, the national government had to secure additional funds to accommodate the doubled salaries.

On whether the review on the base pay and the rule on indexation on the fifth year under Section 38 would allow the DBCC to remove the automatic indexation for active MUPs, Senator Estrada replied in the negative.

Thereafter, Senator Go pointed out that Section 39 (*Separation, Retirement and Pension Benefits of the Active Military Uniformed Personnel*) provides that "the maximum retirement pay for active Military or Uniformed Personnel who will compulsorily retire after the effectivity of this Act shall be increased to ninety percent (90%)." He asked why the bill would exclude retirees prior to its enactment. In response, Senator Estrada stated that an amendment on the matter would be proposed at the proper time.

To Senator Go's further query on Section 40 which provides medical insurance to MUP upon their compulsory retirement, Senator Estrada explained that through numerous consultations, the AFP emphasized the critical need to provide pensioners and retirees with high-quality and affordable healthcare. Furthermore, he noted that retirees expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of regional branches of the AFP Medical Center, or the V. Luna General Hospital, which provides them with free healthcare. As such, he explained that the retirees would be able to access

healthcare at the nearest available hospitals in the provinces through the medical insurance outlined in the bill.

Senator Go acknowledged the challenging situation faced by the government's finance managers in managing the escalating pension requirements and averting a potential budget crisis. However, he emphasized the importance of recognizing the nature of the MUP's roles in ensuring the safety and security of Filipinos and the nation. He expressed hope that the Body would be able to strike a balance between addressing the fiscal position of the country and considering the welfare and livelihood of MUP.

SUSPENSION OF SESSION

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, the session was suspended.

It was 8:25 p.m.

RESUMPTION OF SESSION

At 8:27 p.m., the session was resumed.

SUSPENSION OF CONSIDERATION OF SENATE BILL NO. 2501

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

SUSPENSION OF SESSION

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, the session was suspended.

It was 8:28 p.m.

RESUMPTION OF SESSION

At 8:28 p.m., the session was resumed.

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. 2659, entitled

AN ACT DEFINING THE SCOPE AND EXTENT OF THE FISCAL AUTONOMY
OF THE JUDICIAL BRANCH OF GOVERNMENT AND FOR OTHER
PURPOSES

Introduced by Senator Tulfo

To the Committees on Justice and Human Rights; and Finance

Senate Bill No. 2660, entitled

AN ACT PROVIDING FOR PROTECTION OF THE REMITTANCES OF OVERSEAS
FILIPINO WORKERS

Introduced by Senator Tulfo

**To the Committees on Banks, Financial Institutions and Currencies; Migrant
Workers; and Ways and Means**

Senate Bill No. 2661, entitled

AN ACT PROVIDING A POLLEN AND MIX MOLD DETECTION AND
MANAGEMENT PROGRAM, CREATING FOR THE PURPOSE THE POLLEN
AND MIX MOLD MONITORING SERVICE, AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS
THEREFOR

Introduced by Senator Legarda

To the Committees on Science and Technology; Health and Demography; and Finance

Senate Bill No. 2662, entitled

AN ACT ESTABLISHING THE STANDARDS FOR A LIVING WAGE, AMENDING
FOR THE PURPOSE PRESIDENTIAL DECREE NO. 442, OTHERWISE KNOWN
AS THE LABOR CODE OF THE PHILIPPINES, AS AMENDED

Introduced by Senator Legarda

To the Committee on Labor, Employment and Human Resources Development

Senate Bill No. 2663, entitled

AN ACT MODIFYING AND EXPANDING THE COMPOSITION OF THE BOARD
OF THE NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR CULTURE AND ARTS, MANDATING
THE ESTABLISHMENT AND OPERATION OF CULTURAL FACILITIES AND
REGIONAL OFFICES THEREFOR, AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR

Introduced by Senator Legarda

**To the Committees on Culture and the Arts; Civil Service, Government Reorganiza-
tion and Professional Regulation; and Finance**

ADDITIONAL REFERENCE OF BUSINESS

BILLS ON FIRST READING

Senate Bill No. 2664, entitled

AN ACT FURTHER PROTECTING THE INTEGRITY OF THE RIGHT TO
SUFFRAGE BY AMENDING SECTION 261 OF BATAS PAMBANSA BLG. 881,
s. 1985, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS THE "OMNIBUS ELECTION CODE," AS
AMENDED, DEFINING THE CRIME OF CYBER VOTE-BUYING AND VOTE-
SELLING, AND PROVIDING PENALTIES THEREOF

Introduced by Senator Poe

To the Committees on Electoral Reforms and People's Participation; and Justice and Human Rights

Senate Bill No. 2666, entitled

AN ACT INSTITUTING THE CHARTER OF THE NATIONAL LIBRARY OF THE PHILIPPINES, REORGANIZING ITS STRUCTURE, DEFINING ITS POWERS AND FUNCTIONS, AND PROVIDING FUNDS THEREFOR

Introduced by Senator Legarda

To the Committees on Basic Education; Civil Service, Government Reorganization and Professional Regulation; Ways and Means; and Finance

Senate Bill No. 2667, entitled

AN ACT PRESCRIBING FOR A UNIFORM SYSTEM GOVERNING THE SECURITY OF CLASSIFIED MATTER IN GOVERNMENT OFFICES, PROVIDING THE PROCEDURES IN CLASSIFYING, SAFEGUARDING, AND DECLASSIFYING INFORMATION, THEREBY IMPOSING PENALTIES IN CASES OF LEAKAGE, BREACH, AND/OR VIOLATION OF ANY PROVISION OF THIS ACT

Introduced by Senator Tolentino

To the Committees on National Defense and Security, Peace, Unification and Reconciliation; and Civil Service, Government Reorganization and Professional Regulation

Senate Bill No. 2668, entitled

AN ACT GRANTING PHILIPPINE CITIZENSHIP TO FAVOUR ONOH

Introduced by Senator Tolentino

To the Committee on Rules

COMMITTEE REPORT

Committee Report No. 251, prepared and submitted by the Special Committee on Philippine Maritime and Admiralty Zones, on Senate Bill No. 2665, with Senators Pimentel III, Estrada, Revilla Jr., Gatchalian, Tulfo, Dela Rosa, and Tolentino as authors thereof, entitled

AN ACT AUTHORIZING THE PRESIDENT OF THE PHILIPPINES TO ESTABLISH THE ARCHIPELAGIC SEA LANES IN PHILIPPINE ARCHIPELAGIC WATERS, PRESCRIBING THE OBLIGATIONS OF FOREIGN SHIPS AND AIRCRAFT EXERCISING ARCHIPELAGIC SEA LANES PASSAGE THROUGH THE DESIGNATED ARCHIPELAGIC SEA LANES, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES,

recommending its approval in substitution of Senate Bill Nos. 78, 462, 1490, 2395, 2438, and 2606, taking into consideration House Bill No. 9034.

Sponsor: Senator Tolentino

To the Calendar for Ordinary Business

SPECIAL ORDER

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body approved the transfer of Committee Report No. 251 on Senate Bill No. 2665 from the Calendar for Ordinary Business to the Calendar for Special Orders.

COMMITTEE REPORT NO. 251 ON SENATE BILL NO. 2665

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body considered, on Second Reading, Senate Bill No. 2665 (Committee Report No. 251), entitled

AN ACT AUTHORIZING THE PRESIDENT OF THE PHILIPPINES TO ESTABLISH THE ARCHIPELAGIC SEA LANES IN PHILIPPINE ARCHIPELAGIC WATERS, PRESCRIBING THE OBLIGATIONS OF FOREIGN SHIPS AND AIRCRAFT EXERCISING ARCHIPELAGIC SEA LANES PASSAGE THROUGH THE DESIGNATED ARCHIPELAGIC SEA LANES, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.

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

The Chair recognized Senator Tolentino for the sponsorship.

SPONSORSHIP SPEECH OF SENATOR TOLENTINO

In sponsoring Senate Bill No. 2665, Senator Tolentino delivered the following speech:

Nagpapasalamat muna ako kina Sen. Sonny Angara, Sen. Sherwin Gatchalian, and our good hardworking Majority Leader for giving me the space and time to sponsor this important measure.

In November last year, the Senate Special Committee on Philippine Maritime and Admiralty Zones birthed the proposed Philippine Maritime Zones Law, a landmark legislation that would define our maritime entitlements. That was barely a month after the first meeting of the then newly-created Special Committee.

As the sponsor of the bill who went through the fine-toothed comb of interpellations from our colleagues, I am proud to say that everyone in this hall pulled their weight on this rigorous work. It was a prodigious output of this institution just awaiting the final signature of the President. And to remind everyone, it was approved on Third Reading by this Chamber in just four months, with the Senate version being adopted by the House of Representatives with only minor amendments.

This speaks of how the Senate defines our priorities. On matters of national interest and territorial integrity, we show conviction at a momentous speed. We hit the ground running.

Today, we must keep our momentum for an equally relevant and pressing legislation.

As your chairman of the Senate Special Committee on Philippine Maritime and Admiralty Zones, allow me to once again stand before you and have the honor of sponsoring Senate Bill No. 2665, or the Philippine Archipelagic Sea Lanes Act.

This bill, under Committee Report No. 251, is authored by this Representation and Senators Pimentel, Estrada, Revilla, Gatchalian, Tulfo, and Dela Rosa.



This bill establishes the system of archipelagic sea lanes in the Philippine archipelagic waters by connecting the coordinates of the following axis lines:

- a. Philippine Sea-Balintang Channel-West Philippine Sea;
- b. Celebes Sea-Sibutu Passage-Sulu Sea-Cuyo East Pass-Mindoro Strait–West Philippine Sea; and
- c. Celebes Sea-Basilan Strait-Sulu Sea-Nasubata Channel-Balabac Strait-West Philippine Sea.

Our fellow *kababayans* would rightly ask: *Ano na naman iyang Archipelagic Sea Lane na iyan at ano naman ang benepisyong sa Pilipinas ng pagtatalaga ng Archipelagic Sea Lane?*

The Philippines is currently composed of 7,641 islands, which makes our country an archipelagic state. *Hiwa-hiwalay at magkakalayo ang ating mga isla.* But instead of keeping parts of our country separate from each other, we must lead the charge in claiming the inseparable unity of our land and waters—may it be around, between, and connecting the islands of the Philippines, irrespective of their breadth and dimensions.

The international community afforded us the right to do so. We have earned our legal and international recognition in no less than the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, or UNCLOS.

Under Article 53 (1) of the UNCLOS, “an archipelagic state may designate sea lanes and air routes thereabove, suitable for the continuous and expeditious passage of foreign ships and aircraft through or over its archipelagic waters and the adjacent territorial sea.”

Sa simpleng pagpapakahulugan, mahalaga po itong pagkilala na ang mga bansang tulad ng Pilipinas, isang archipelagic State, ay may kapangyarihang magtakdang tiyak na daanang dagat na angkop para sa paglalayag ng mga dayuhang barko at eroplano sa ating mga katubigan.

But without an enabling law in its fine print, it remains a lost opportunity.

Let me start on the matter of our national security. It is important for the Philippines to enact a law designating archipelagic sea lanes, or ASLs, especially with respect to foreign military vessels and aircraft. We are well aware that foreign vessels and aircraft may transit in normal mode under the right of Archipelagic Sea Lanes Passage. However, this does not preclude us from setting regulations and obligations, especially against actions prejudicial to the security of the country.

Thus, without a law designating our ASLs, we risk compromising our national security and limiting the exercise of authority of the Philippine Government within its own maritime zones.

We also need this bill for jurisdictional clarity. We take note that under the UNCLOS, ships are required to respect the designated ASL and traffic separation scheme (TSS) established therein. The passage of this bill will lead into a more organized and uniformed manner of monitoring maritime incidents as Traffic Separation Schemes (TSS) will strictly be observed. Thus, the designation of ASL will limit the areas or passages where foreign vessels are passing through, which in effect will enable the efficient use of monitoring within our maritime jurisdiction.

On resource management, with the designated ASL, the Philippines can better identify the areas where it can develop and establish infrastructure or enhancement of maritime safety and security. In effect, the maritime safety and security of passing ships will be better served by the PCG, Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), and other law enforcement agencies since they can focus more resources on the said areas.

Ano naman po ang mawawala sa atin kung hindi natin bibigyan ng prayoridad ang pagpasa sa panukalang ito?

Without the designation of the archipelagic sea lanes and the prescription of protective measures, powerful states would necessarily have the advantage of defining the right of passage on their own terms.

History has taught us a precautionary tale. During the Sibutu Passage incident in 2019, a Chinese military vessel entered our archipelagic waters and loitered in the Sulu Sea.

In reaction to the Philippines' public protest, the Chinese Embassy released an article arguing that so far, the Philippines has not submitted a proposal to the International Maritime Organization (IMO) on the designation of archipelagic sea lanes passage. As such, the right of archipelagic sea

lanes passage may be exercised through the routes normally used for international navigation including the Sibutu Passage as it is one of the eight most important straits lying wholly within Philippine archipelagic waters. It is an important transit route normally used for international navigation that all vessels can sail through as an archipelagic sea lane passage, including the Chinese warships.

Without the designation of an archipelagic sea lane, specifically for military aircraft and military foreign vessels; any foreign military vessels and aircraft can just pass through our archipelagic sea lanes, and they can have the excuse. Just like what the Chinese have said: There are no designated sea lanes for us to pass.

But if we designate sea lanes, at least they would be obliged to follow that route and not loiter anywhere, wherever they want within our archipelagic sea lanes.

In the midst of all these more aggressive behaviors we are seeing from our Chinese neighbor, we cannot afford to delay this measure any longer.

Hindi ko na po ito patatagalin pa para masimulan na natin ang pagtalakay sa napakahalagang panukalang batas na ito.

On behalf of all our brave men and women patrolling the West Philippine Sea, on behalf of our fishermen being deprived of their fishing rights in Scarborough Shoal, and on behalf of our maritime nation that needs reinforced legal protection, I call on each of our colleagues here to likewise see the urgency of this measure and prioritize the immediate passage of this bill.

Once again, I would like to thank Sen. Sonny Angara, Sen. Win Gatchalian, and Sen. Joel Villanueva, our hardworking Majority Leader, for giving me the appropriate space and time to deliver the sponsorship speech.

Mabuhay ang Pilipinas!

COSPONSORSHIP SPEECHES

Pursuant to the manifestation of Senator Villanueva, the following cosponsorship speeches were deemed read into the *Journal* and the *Record of the Senate*:

By Senator Legarda

It is high time and it is just righteous that we now designate by law and by the President of the Republic of the Philippines all archipelagic sea lanes and air routes passage by foreign ships and aircrafts.

The Archipelagic Sea Lanes Act adopts protective measures to regulate international measures activities, including measures adopted or to be proposed for adoption in accordance with the regulations of the International Maritime Organization (IMO).

The following are the designated Archipelagic Sea Lanes: 1) Philippine Sea-Balintang Channel-West Philippine Sea; 2) Celebes Sea-Sibutu Passage-Sulu Sea-Cuyo East Pass-Mindoro Strait-West Philippine Sea; and the 3) Celebes Sea-Basilan Strait-Sulu Sea-Nasubata Channel-Balabac Strait-West Philippine Sea.

The designation of archipelagic sea lanes solidifies our sovereignty and our maritime domain. It prevents unwanted and arbitrary passage of foreign vessels. This is important because the breach of such threatens and harms our marine ecosystem and biodiversity, our national sovereignty, and the security of Philippine flag vessels.

This act prevents foreign vessels from polluting, conducting research and survey activities, fishing, marine bioprospecting, and loading and unloading of persons, goods, or currency.

We need to protect the diverse marine life in our archipelago. Foreign ships cannot just be allowed to go freely wherever they intend to be. The challenge will be in the implementation, but at the very least, the designation of the archipelagic sea lanes now defines and fortifies the legal boundaries for said ships and vessels.

For these reasons and more, I am proud to cosponsor Committee Report No. 251 on Senate Bill No. 2665, or the Archipelagic Sea Lanes Act.

By Senator Dela Rosa

It is my privilege to cosponsor Senate Bill No. 2665 under Committee Report No. 251 or the "Philippine Archipelagic Sea Lanes Act."

"Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach him how to fish and you feed him for a lifetime."

Often we have used such saying to inspire our less fortunate fellow Filipinos to work harder because no one can free them from hunger and poverty but themselves. The government can only do so much with such limited resources.

But perhaps, our application of the aforementioned Chinese proverb might no longer be applicable to the current situation of our people. For the past decades or so, our fishermen have been on the receiving end of harassment and bullying from the Chinese. In a situation where the choice is between your survival or your untimely end, what will be the use of being taught how to fish? *Tinuruan nga nating mangisda, ngunit hindi naman natin nabigyan ng kaukulang proteksyon laban sa mga magtatangkang agawin ang kung anuman ang meron siya.*

Teaching our people to fish for them to thrive for a lifetime would be senseless if they are forcibly driven away from their traditional fishing spot within our exclusive economic zone. Our people are not poor because they are lazy. They are deprived of their livelihood; of their opportunity to win in life; and sadly, for some, the chance to survive. *Kahit po gaano kasipag ang mga Pilipino, kung patuloy po silang inaagawan ng kanilang karapatan para pakinabangan ang likas na yaman na nakalaan sa kanila, darating ang araw na mawawalan sila ng pangkain sa araw-araw.*

The establishment of Philippine Archipelagic Sea Lanes as embodied in the proposed bill will ensure the protection of fishing grounds and key biodiversity areas in Philippine waters. This will safeguard the integrity of our national territory.

Further, the proposed measure ensures that foreign ships and aircraft exercising the right of archipelagic sea lanes shall not engage in threat or use of force against the sovereignty, territorial integrity, or political independence of the Republic of the Philippines or in any other manner in violation of the principles of international law embodied in the Charter of the United Nations.

Hindi lang po ang threat or use of force ang ipinagbabawal sa panukalang ito. Pati na rin po ang marine pollution, sinigurado natin na hindi natin papayagan sa ating teritoryo sa mga gustong gumamit ng ating sea lanes. There will be no discharge of oil, solid wastes and other noxious substances allowed. Nor will discharge of sewage, garbage, and air emissions from ships in Philippine territory and maritime zones be permitted.

Most importantly, this legislative measure does not only give our fishermen a fighting chance, but an assurance, a guarantee from our government, of protection from foreign encroachment. This will be a testament to the Senate's commitment to fight for our rightful claim to the West Philippine Sea. But perhaps, most especially, the Senate's dedication to safeguard every Filipino who intends to make a living peacefully and honorably.

In the end, it is not simply a question of whether to give them fish or to teach them how to fish. At the rate we are going, that is already irrelevant. It is a matter of dignity, and this Senate's recognition of it. Dignity, for livelihood and sustenance. Dignity, in continuing to defend and stand for what is rightfully ours. Dignity, for Filipinos, whether they are on land, or at sea.

With that, I wish to commend our esteemed colleague, Sen. Francis Tol Tolentino, for masterfully steering our course towards the passage of this timely measure.

By Senator Gatchalian

I rise today to cosponsor the "Philippine Archipelagic Sea Lanes Act," a testament to our unwavering commitment to safeguard our country's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

At its core, this Act fortifies our maritime security by empowering our President to actively mold and steer the ever-changing dynamics of the region's maritime landscape guided by a framework that takes into consideration national security, navigation safety, marine biodiversity protection, pollution risks and suitability for continuous and expedient transit when identifying and setting the archipelagic sea lanes. Through such designated archipelagic sea lanes and air routes, we ensure that navigation and overflight rights, as enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, are respected and upheld.

Isaalang-alang natin ang West Philippine Sea, kung saan ang soberanya ng ating bansa ay patuloy na hinahamon. Ang mga alitan dito ay hindi lamang tungkol sa mga pag-angkin sa teritoryo; ito ay tungkol sa kabuhayan ng ating mga mangingisda, sa pagpreserba ng ating likas na yaman, at sa pagpapatibay ng ating mga karapatan bilang isang malayang bansa.

Crucially, this Act empowers our government to take decisive action in response to evolving challenges and threats by setting the framework over which the President will designate the coordinates of the archipelagic sea lanes following the routes and factors for selection specified in the measure. Also, the President has been empowered to establish additional or substitute sea lanes to address emerging concerns and ensure the continued effectiveness of our maritime policies.

We are also mindful of the delicate balance between the right of passage of foreign ships and aircrafts, and the need to prevent activities that could harm our environment or threaten our national security. Hence, the Act prohibits foreign vessels from engaging in fishing, marine bioprospecting, or any form of marine pollution within our waters. Furthermore, it prohibits the use of force and passage prejudicial to the security of the Philippines, as well as undertaking war games and other military exercises. Violation of this Act will be punished in accordance with existing fisheries, environmental, customs, immigration, or other special laws—sending a clear message that the Philippines will not tolerate actions that undermine our laws or endanger our seas.

Ang panukalang ito ay hindi lamang para sa atin, ngunit para rin sa kapakinabangan ng susunod na henerasyon ng mga Pilipino—lalo na't tinitiyak natin dito na ang ating karagatan ay napangangalagaan at napoprotektahan. Binibigyan din natin ng kumpiyansa ang ating mga mangingisda na magpatuloy sa kanilang hanapbuhay nang walang takot sa anumang banta ng pananamantala.

In conclusion, the Philippine Archipelagic Sea Lanes Act is a bold step forward. It is a declaration of our resolve to protect our maritime heritage, a blueprint for sustainable development, and a framework for peaceful and cooperative use of our archipelagic waters.

SUSPENSION OF CONSIDERATION OF SENATE BILL NO. 2665

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

SUSPENSION OF SESSION

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, the session was suspended.

It was 8:37 p.m.

RESUMPTION OF SESSION

At 8:40 p.m., the session was resumed.

APPROVAL OF THE JOURNAL

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body dispensed with the reading of the Journal of Session No. 71 (May 8, 2024) and considered it approved.

ADJOURNMENT OF SESSION

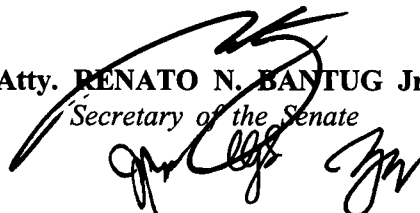
Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Chair declared the session adjourned until three o'clock in the afternoon of the following day.

It was 8:40 p.m.

I hereby certify to the correctness of the foregoing.

Approved on May 15, 2024

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

A large, stylized handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Renato N. Bantug Jr.', is written over the typed name and title.