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SESSION NO. 65
Wednesday, March 22, 2023

CALL TO ORDER

At 3:06 p.m., the Senate President, Hon. Juan Miguel "Migz" F. Zubiri, called the session to order.

PRAYER

Sen. Grace Poe led the prayer, to wit:

Sa Ngalan ng Ama, at ng Anak, at ng Espiritu Santo, amen.

Panginoon, salamat po sa buhay na ipinagkaloob Mo sa amin. Salamat sa bawat simula, sa bawat pagkakataong lumikha ng mabuti at makabubuti sa aming bayan.

Manahan Ka po sa aming lahat na naririto ngayon. Gawin Mo po kaming instrumento para sa paglikha ng isang bansang payapa at masagana sa pamamagitan ng mga panukalang batas na aming inaakda.

Bigyan Mo po ang bawat isa ng lakas at tapang na maglingkod nang may integridad at paggalang sa aming posisyon, nang may malasakit at pagmamahal sa aming pinaglilingkuran.

Nawa'y liwanag Mo, Panginoon, ang aming maging gabay sa aming trabaho at sa aming buhay.

Sa Ngalan ng Ama, at ng Anak, at ng Espiritu Santo, Amen.

ROLL CALL

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

Angara, S.	Marcos, I. R.
Binay, M. L. N. 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.
Estrada J. E.	Tolentino, F. T. N.
Gatchalian, W.	Tulfo, R. T.
Go, C. L. T.	Villanueva, J.
Hontiveros, R.	Villar, C. A.
Lapid, M. L. M.	Zubiri, J. M. F.
Legarda, L.	



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

Senator Cayetano (A) was on official business to attend engagements with policy experts and scholars of the National University of Singapore from March 20 to 23, as indicated in the March 20, 2023 letter of his chief of staff.

Senator Villar (M) was also on official business as part of the Philippine delegation to the Sixth United Nations Special Thematic Session on Water and Disasters which would be held at the United Nations Headquarters in New York on March 20 to 28, as indicated in the March 21, 2023 letter of his acting chief of staff.

Senator Escudero was absent.

BIRTHDAY GREETING

On behalf of the senators, Senator Villanueva greeted Senator Cayetano (P) on the occasion of her birthday that day.

SUSPENSION OF SESSION

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, the session was suspended to allow the senators to greet Senator Cayetano (P).

It was 3:08 p.m.

RESUMPTION OF SESSION

At 3:10 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. 64 (March 21, 2023) and considered it approved.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF THE PRESENCE OF GUESTS

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

- Israeli Ambassador Ilan Fluss;
- The representatives of the ASEAN Center for Biodiversity, led by Dr. Theresa Lim, Executive Director;
- Local government officials from Bagumbayan, Sultan Kudarat, led by Mayor Jonalette De Pedro;
- Champions of the 2022 Engineering Innovation Challenge from Batangas State University, led by Dr. Tirso Ronquillo, University President;
- World Universities Debating Champions from the Ateneo de Manila University;
- Mayor Rizalde “Sadong” Bernal of Dasol, Pangasinan;
- Councilor Albert Alvin “Chuckie” Antonio of the Third District of Quezon City; and
- Television and movie director Bobet Vidanes.

Senate President Zubiri welcomed the guests to the Senate.



MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR TOLENTINO

In connection with the coming barangay election, Senator Tolentino pointed out that the filing of certificates of candidacy (COCs) was scheduled to begin in the first week of July, which, he believed, was too early. He informed the Body that with the consent of Senator Marcos as the Chairperson of the Electoral Reforms and People's Participation, he filed before the Commission on Elections a petition seeking the postponement of the filing of COCs to the last week of August. He opined that the postponement of the early filing of COCs would prevent violence, help the LGUs perform their jobs well, and prevent early politicking. He expressed hope that the COMELEC would soon issue a resolution on his petition.

Thereafter, Senator Marcos acknowledged the petition filed by Senator Tolentino before the COMELEC and informed the Body that the commission was already considering it and that it would soon announce a new date for the filing of COCs.

QUESTION OF PRIVILEGE OF SENATOR TOLENTINO

After his manifestation, Senator Tolentino invoked Rule 39, Section 107 of the *Rules of the Senate*, to speak on a question of privilege, addressing the concerns raised about the "inaction" of the Committee on Accountability of Public Officers & Investigations (Blue Ribbon) on the alleged anomalous sugar importation in the country. He said that as chairperson of the Committee, he took the allegations as violative of the tradition of courtesy and covered by Rule XXXIV, Section 93 of the *Rules of the Senate* on unparliamentary acts and language which offend a senator or public institution.

Refuting the allegation, Senator Tolentino noted that the Committee had conducted in the previous year a thorough and exhaustive investigation on the Sugar Regulatory Administration's Sugar Order No. 4, which allowed the importation of 300,000 metric tons of sugar into the country, and had recommended the filing of charges against four officials of the Department of Agriculture and SRA. He said that the case was still pending before the Ombudsman.

He stated that the Blue Ribbon Committee has been working and would continue to work diligently, in fact, the committee's hands were full with the recently concluded NAIA human trafficking investigations (March 20, 2023) and that his other committee, the Committee on Justice and Human Rights, has been simultaneously conducting hearings on the hazing-related death of an Adamson student. He assured the Body that the Blue Ribbon Committee would act on pressing issues involving malfeasance, misfeasance, and nonfeasance in office by officers and employees of the government, its branches, agencies, subdivisions, and instrumentalities, and would investigate any matter of public interest. He added that the committee would remain steadfast and committed to its responsibilities and would hold accountable the persons liable.

Senator Hontiveros, in expressing her appreciation of Senator Tolentino's leadership, stated that she knew how well the Blue Ribbon Committee has been preparing for and conducting its investigations.

Senator Villanueva then stated that the resolution of Senator Tolentino was already referred to the Blue Ribbon Committee.

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. 2023, entitled

AN ACT CREATING A VAT REFUND MECHANISM FOR NON-RESIDENT



TOURISTS, ADDING FOR THE PURPOSE A NEW SECTION 112-A TO THE
NATIONAL INTERNAL REVENUE CODE OF 1997, AS AMENDED

Introduced by Senator Gatchalian

To the Committee on Ways and Means

Senate Bill No. 2024, entitled

AN ACT ESTABLISHING A TECHNICAL EDUCATION AND SKILLS
DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY (TESDA) TRAINING CENTER IN THE
MUNICIPALITY OF ISULAN, PROVINCE OF SULTAN KUDARAT, AND
APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR

Introduced by Senator Ejercito

**To the Committees on Environment, Natural Resources and Climate Change; and
Finance**

Senate Bill No. 2025, entitled

AN ACT CONVERTING THE CAMPUS OF THE POLYTECHNIC UNIVERSITY OF THE
PHILIPPINES LOCATED IN THE CITY OF PARAÑAQUE, INTO A REGULAR
CAMPUS OF THE POLYTECHNIC UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES, TO
BE KNOWN AS THE POLYTECHNIC UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES-
PARAÑAQUE CITY CAMPUS, AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR

Introduced by Senator Marcos

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

Senate Bill No. 2026, entitled

AN ACT ESTABLISHING A CENTER FOR AUTISM AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

Introduced by Senator Ejercito

**To the Committees on Health and Demography; Women, Children, Family Relations
and Gender Equality; and Finance**

Senate Bill No. 2027, entitled

AN ACT DECLARING CLIMATE CHANGE EMERGENCY AND ENHANCING
RESILIENCY AND ADAPTABILITY TO THE EFFECTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Introduced by Senator Ejercito

**To the Committees on Environment, Natural Resources and Climate Change; and
Finance**

COMMITTEE REPORT

Committee Report No. 61, prepared and submitted jointly by the Committees on Social Justice,
Welfare and Rural Development; and Finance, on Senate Bill No. 2028, with Senators Revilla Jr.,
Pimentel III, Gatchalian, Hontiveros, Marcos, and Go as authors thereof, entitled



AN ACT EXPANDING THE COVERAGE OF THE CENTENARIANS ACT OF 2016, AMENDING FOR THE PURPOSE REPUBLIC ACT NO. 10868, AND PROVIDING FUNDS THEREFOR,

recommending its approval in substitution of Senate Bill Nos. 21, 74, 824 and 1951.

Sponsor: Senator Marcos

To the Calendar for Ordinary Business

SUSPENSION OF SESSION

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, the session was suspended.

It was 3:20 p.m.

RESUMPTION OF SESSION

At 3:27 p.m., the session was resumed.

ADDITIONAL REFERENCE OF BUSINESS

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

BILLS ON FIRST READING

Senate Bill No. 2029, entitled

AN ACT ENSURING THE ALIGNMENT OF BASIC EDUCATION AND EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION, APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

Introduced by Senator Gatchalian

To the Committees on Basic Education; Women, Children, Family Relations and Gender Equality; and Finance

Senate Bill No. 2030, entitled

AN ACT AMENDING SECTION 6 OF REPUBLIC ACT NO. 6958, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS THE "CHARTER OF THE MACTAN-CEBU INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT AUTHORITY"

Introduced by Senator Angara

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

Senate Bill No. 2031, entitled

AN ACT ESTABLISHING SECURITY MONITORING SYSTEMS INSIDE PRISON CELLS IN THE PHILIPPINES AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR

Introduced by Senator Tulfo

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

Senate Bill No. 2032, entitled

AN ACT INSTITUTIONALIZING THE ASSISTANCE TO INDIVIDUALS IN CRISIS SITUATION PROGRAM OF THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WELFARE AND DEVELOPMENT, PROVIDING PENALTIES FOR THE VIOLATION OF CERTAIN UNLAWFUL ACTS, AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR

Introduced by Senator Angara

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

Senate Bill No. 2033, entitled

AN ACT EXTENDING THE LIFE OF THE PHILIPPINE AEROSPACE DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION (PADC) BY ANOTHER FIFTY (50) YEARS, AMENDING FOR THE PURPOSE PRESIDENTIAL DECREE NO. 286, AS AMENDED, ENTITLED "AUTHORIZING THE CREATION OF A PHILIPPINE AEROSPACE DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION, APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES"

Introduced by Senator Marcos

To the Committee on Government Corporations and Public Enterprises

RESOLUTIONS

Proposed Senate Resolution No. 554, entitled

A RESOLUTION DIRECTING THE APPROPRIATE SENATE COMMITTEE TO CONDUCT AN INQUIRY IN AID OF LEGISLATION TO IMPROVE AND ENHANCE GOVERNMENT FRONTLINE SERVICES WITH THE END VIEW OF ADOPTING STRICTER MEASURES AND PENALTIES IN CASES OF HARASSMENT, MISCONDUCT AND HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATION BY GOVERNMENT FRONTLINERS

Introduced by Senator Tulfo

To the Committees on Civil Service, Government Reorganization and Professional Regulation; and Justice and Human Rights

Proposed Senate Resolution No. 555, entitled

RESOLUTION DIRECTING THE PROPER SENATE COMMITTEES TO CONDUCT AN INQUIRY, IN AID OF LEGISLATION, ON THE REPORTED ALARMING AMOUNT OF FOOD WASTE IN THE COUNTRY

Introduced by Senator Binay

To the Committee on Agriculture, Food and Agrarian Reform

Proposed Senate Resolution No. 556, entitled

RESOLUTION URGING THE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY TO CONDUCT AN INQUIRY, IN AID OF LEGISLATION, ON THE PROGRAMS, ACTIVITIES, PROJECTS AND OTHER INITIATIVES OF THE DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY AND OTHER GOVERNMENT AGENCIES TO ENSURE CONTINUOUS SUPPLY OF ELECTRICITY THROUGHOUT THE YEAR, ESPECIALLY DURING PEAK SEASONS

Introduced by Senator Villanueva

To the Committee on Energy

Proposed Senate Resolution No. 557, entitled

RESOLUTION DIRECTING THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON LABOR, EMPLOYMENT AND HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT, AND OTHER APPROPRIATE COMMITTEE/S TO CONDUCT AN INQUIRY, IN AID OF LEGISLATION, ON ANTICIPATING THE WORKFORCE REQUIREMENTS AND POTENTIAL SKILLS GAP OF THE PHILIPPINE ELECTRIC VEHICLE INDUSTRY

Introduced by Senator Villanueva

To the Committee on Labor, Employment and Human Resources Development

COMMUNICATIONS

Letters from the Office of the President of the Philippines, transmitting to the Senate two (2) original copies of the following Republic Acts, which were signed by His Excellency, President Ferdinand Romualdez Marcos Jr.:

Republic Act No. 11934, entitled

AN ACT REQUIRING THE REGISTRATION OF SUBSCRIBER IDENTITY MODULE;

Republic Act No. 11935, entitled

AN ACT POSTPONING THE DECEMBER 2022 BARANGAY AND SANGGUNIANG KABATAAN ELECTIONS, AMENDING FOR THE PURPOSE REPUBLIC ACT NO. 9164, AS AMENDED, APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES;

Republic Act No. 11937, entitled

AN ACT GRANTING PHILIPPINE CITIZENSHIP TO JUSTIN DONTA BROWNLEE;

and Republic Act No. 11938, entitled

AN ACT CONVERTING THE MUNICIPALITY OF CARMONA IN THE PROVINCE OF CAVITE INTO A COMPONENT CITY TO BE KNOWN AS THE CITY OF CARMONA.

To the Archives

Letter from the Office of the President of the Philippines, transmitting to the Senate two (2) original copies of Republic Act No. 11936, entitled

AN ACT APPROPRIATING FUNDS FOR THE OPERATION OF THE GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES FROM JANUARY ONE TO DECEMBER THIRTY-ONE, TWO THOUSAND AND TWENTY-THREE



which was signed by His Excellency, President Ferdinand Romualdez Marcos Jr., together with his line-veto message in accordance with Article 6, Section 27(2) of the Constitution, which provides that "the President shall have the power to veto any particular items in an appropriation, revenue, or tariff bill."

To the Archives

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Committee Report No. 62, prepared and submitted by the Committee on Higher, Technical and Vocational Education (Upon Recommendation of the Subcommittee on the "Revitalized Reserve Officers Training Corps Act") jointly with the Committees on National Defense and Security, Peace, Unification and Reconciliation; and Finance, on Senate Bill No. 2034, with Senators Padilla, Estrada, Ejercito, Dela Rosa, Gatchalian, and Tolentino as authors thereof, entitled

AN ACT MANDATING THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION, DEVELOPMENT, TRAINING, ORGANIZATION AND ADMINISTRATION OF RESERVE OFFICERS' TRAINING CORPS (ROTC) PROGRAM IN HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND TECHNICAL VOCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS, APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES,

recommending its approval in substitution of Senate Bill Nos. 182, 236, 468, 1235, 1349, 1551, and 1565, taking into consideration House Bill No. 6687.

Sponsor: Senator Dela Rosa

To the Calendar for Ordinary Business

Committee Report No. 63, prepared and submitted jointly by the Sub-Committee on Senate Bill No. 129 – National Employment Recovery Strategy (NERS) of the Economic Affairs; Committees on Civil Service, Government Reorganization and Professional Regulation; and Finance, on Senate Bill No. 2035 with Senators Villanueva, Marcos, and Gatchalian, as authors thereof, entitled

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


recommending its approval in substitution of Senate Bill Nos. 129 and 1659.

Sponsor: Senator Villanueva

To the Calendar for Ordinary Business

REQUEST OF SENATE PRESIDENT ZUBIRI

Senate President Zubiri requested Senator Dela Rosa, chairperson of the Committee on Public Order and Dangerous Drugs, to conduct a *motu proprio* investigation in accordance with Section 2 of the Senate *Rules of Procedure Governing Inquiries in Aid of Legislation* and make the necessary report regarding the apprehension of 100 high-powered firearms in a condominium unit in Rockwell in Makati. He said that he was worried over the incident because the place was owned by a foreign national and it could be related to gun running, gun-for-hire, or terrorist activity, which might have some implications to national security.



In reply, Senator Dela Rosa stated that his committee would immediately comply with the instruction of Senate President Zubiri to investigate the incident and submit the required report. He agreed with the Senate President that the incident might have implications to national security and that it needed immediate action. He inquired, however, whether his committee was authorized to conduct such an investigation without a resolution to that effect.

Senate President Zubiri cited Section 2 of the *Rules of Procedure Governing Inquiries in Aid of Legislation*, to wit: "Inquiries may be initiated by the Senate or any of its Committees if the matter is within its competence, or upon petition filed or upon information given by any Senator or by any person not a member thereof." He added that it was in fact the Senate in plenary, which has the supreme authority, that was asking the committee to investigate the matter.

Senator Dela Rosa stated that he would heed the request of the Senate President, as he would not want the people to ask him, being the chairperson of the Committee on Public Order and Dangerous Drugs, what was happening in the country.

For his part, Senator Villanueva commended Senator Dela Rosa for being proactive as regards the particular incident, as the latter was the one who first sent pictures of the raid to the Viber group of the senators. He said that the people would want to know who acquired the guns and ammunitions, who facilitated its entry to the country, who were the buyers, and what activities were the perpetrators engaged in.

PROPOSED SENATE RESOLUTION NO. 404

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body considered Proposed Senate Resolution No. 404, entitled

RESOLUTION CONGRATULATING AND COMMENDING THE ATENEO DE MANILA UNIVERSITY FOR THEIR EXEMPLARY PERFORMANCE AND WINNING THE CHAMPIONSHIP IN THE RECENTLY CONCLUDED WORLD UNIVERSITIES DEBATING CHAMPIONSHIP 2023 HELD IN MADRID, SPAIN FROM DECEMBER 27, 2022 TO JANUARY 3, 2023,

taking into consideration Proposed Senate Resolution Nos. 405, 406, 412, 416, 417, and 438.

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

The Chair recognized Senator Villanueva to sponsor the resolution.

SPONSORSHIP SPEECH OF SENATOR VILLANUEVA

In sponsoring Proposed Senate Resolution No. 404, Senator Villanueva delivered the following speech:

Ako po ay lubos na nagagalak na mai-sponsor ang resolusyon na nagbibigay parangal sa Ateneo de Manila University Debate Society members na sina David Africa at Toby Leung sa kanilang pagsungkit ng kampeonato sa 2023 World Universities Debating Championship nitong nakaraang Enero sa Madrid, Spain.

Nagagalak po tayo sapagkat ang dalawang kabataang ito ay narito ngayon, physically present, sa ating bulwagan.

The World Universities Debating Championship is the world's biggest debating tournament. This is the third consecutive time that a team from Ateneo has advanced to the final round and the first time in the tournament's 43-year history that a Filipino team has won the championship.



In this year's final round, the teams debated on whether it is preferable to have a world where all individuals have a strong belief in Ubuntu, which translates to "I am because we are." It is an African philosophy that puts emphasis on being self through others. The word Ubuntu is very close to our hearts, especially with this Representation and Sen. Sonny Angara considering we are both Boston Celtics fanatics, especially during the 2008 NBA finals.

David and Toby bested other teams from Princeton University, Tel Aviv University, and Bulgaria's Sofia University in the finals. All in all, they defeated over 260 teams that joined the tournament this year.

So, to Toby and David, the Ateneo de Manila Debate Society, and the entire university, our biggest congratulations and commendation for this incredible achievement!

COSPONSORSHIP SPEECH OF SENATOR HONTIVEROS

In cosponsoring Proposed Senate Resolution No. 404, Senator Hontiveros delivered the following speech:

It is my honor and delight to associate myself with this resolution commending the Ateneo Debate Society, specifically, David Africa and Tobi Leung, for winning the 2023 World Universities Debating Championship (WUDC).

As an Atenean—as remarked on by the good Senate President—I am delighted to hear that my fellow Ateneans bagged the coveted championship and are the first Filipinos to do so. But more importantly, it is wonderful that this honor is bestowed on the Philippines at a juncture when the Philippines needs this shot of hope at a time when our country is being described as "patient zero" in social media disinformation.

It is heartening to know that our young Filipinos are leading the way in rocking the boat asking the critical questions, interrogating the status quo. After all, a healthy and thriving culture of debate feeds a working and flourishing democracy and empowers its citizens to demand a government that is open to criticism, accountable to the people, and free of corruption and violence. *Ito po ang pinakamabisa nating panangga sa mga trolls, fake news, at algorithms na anay sa ating demokrasya at hadlang sa ating malayang pag-iisip.*

To David Africa—incidentally, *si David ay miyembro ng Akbayan Youth*—and Tobi Leung, may they continue to commit their lives and work to fostering debate and critical thinking not just within their university and in global competitions, but in spaces where debating and critical thinking are most challenged, and shine the light of their brilliance not only where it is appreciated but also where it is sought to be suppressed. And in that space that seeks to suppress that light, may it shine even brighter.

COSPONSORSHIP SPEECH OF SENATOR ESTRADA

In cosponsoring Proposed Senate Resolution No. 404, Senator Estrada delivered the following speech:

With the indulgence of the sponsor, I would like to cosponsor Proposed Senate Resolution No. 404, entitled "Resolution Congratulating and Commending the Ateneo De Manila University for their Exemplary Performance and Winning the Championship in the Recently Concluded World Universities Debating Championship 2023 held in Madrid, Spain from December 27, 2022 to January 3, 2023."

The WUDC is the world's biggest debating tournament that is held annually in English language, in British Parliamentary format and with teams representing prestigious universities around the world.

In this 43rd WUDC, the Philippines emerged triumphant with the Ateneo De Manila University, I repeat, Ateneo De Manila University, bearing our flag. We are so proud of the victory of Mr. Tobi Leung and Mr. David Demitri Africa for having dominated this largest and most respected international debate competition.



Tobi Leung was named as the "Second Best Speaker," while David Africa was named as "The 8th Best Speaker" in this 43rd World Universities Debating Championship. They are the first Filipinos and the first Southeast Asians to have won this most-coveted honors among debate enthusiasts. We have bested contenders from Harvard College, Stanford University, Princeton University, Brown University, National University of Singapore, London School of Economics, and University of Sydney, among others, in the earlier rounds to secure the spot in the finals.

Our very own Ateneo De Manila University became the second university in Asia to bag the championship title.

This momentous victory is proof of the Filipino students' capacity to stand along the world's best young speakers and thinkers. They have ably represented the country and have showcased the nation's gift of eloquence, intellectual prowess, and ingenuity.

Their mastery of the art of persuasion, critical thinking, and creative formulation of ideas honed through the years of dedication, study, and discipline even at a young age, are positive characteristics that are worthy of emulation, especially for our students.

At bilang isang Atenista at bilang isang Pilipino, ako po ay lubos na nagagalak sa galing at talino ng kabataang Pilipino.

My felicitations also go to the other members of the Ateneo Debate Teams, namely: Quintin Chua, Aly Barranda, Bern Advincula, and Zen Tiangco for their job well done, and to all other people who have contributed their meaningful help and support to our champion team.

Again, thank you, Mr. Robert Nelson "Toby" Leung and Mr. David Demitri Africa for making us all proud! I hope that you will continue to use your talent and your genius to noble causes, to inspire your fellow youths. Congratulations, and we are proud of you.

Basta Atenista, magaling ka.

COSPONSORSHIP SPEECHES

At the instance of Senators Revilla and Lapid, upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the following cosponsorship speeches on Proposed Senate Resolution No. 404 were inserted into the *Journal and Record of the Senate*:

By Senator Revilla

We join our colleagues in recognizing the historic triumph of the Ateneo Debate Society. *Tunay ngang nakaukit sa kasaysayan ang kanilang tagumpay bilang kauna-unahang delegado ng Pilipinas na naging kampyon sa 43rd World Universities Debating Championship.*

The Filipino youth has always been passionate about using their voices. *Kahanga-hanga ang ipinamalas nilang husay sa pakikipagtalastasan. Sa daan-daang kalahok, nangibabaw ang galing ng Pilipino.*

Kung kahapon nga nang kinikala natin ang Math geniuses ay naihambing natin ang buhay sa isang Math equation, ngayon naman maaari nating ihalintulad ang tagumpay ng Ateneo Debate Society sa katangian ng mga Pilipino na namamayagpag saan man o anumang lahi ang katapat nito. Napatunayan na naman natin na ano mang hamon, sino mang katunggali, laging magwawagi ang Pilipino.

As we congratulate you, we do so with a prayer of hope that this win is but the first of many more. *Salamat at binuksan ninyo ang pintuang ito sa mga Pilipinong nag-aasam na magtagumpay sa pandaigdigang patimpalak.*

By Senator Lapid

Ikinagalak kong tumayo sa inyong harapan ngayon upang i-cosponsor ang resolusyon na bumabati sa Ateneo Debate Society na sa unang pagkakataon ay nagwagi sa 2023 World Universities Debating Championship ngayong taon.

Ang kanilang tagumpay ay nagpapakita ng kakayahan, dedikasyon, at husay sa larangan ng pagde-debate. Ito ay tunay na inspirasyon sa ating lahat.



Ang Ateneo Debate Society, bilang kinatawan ng ating bansa, ay nagpakita na sila ay kabilang sa mga pinakamahuhusay sa mundo.

Naniniwala ako na ang tagumpay na ito ay naging posible sa pamamagitan ng mahusay na pamumuno at coaching ng koponan, at suporta at paggabay ng mga guro at administrasyon ng Ateneo de Manila University.

Ito ay resulta ng matagal na panahon ng masikap na pagsasanay, paghahanda, at pagsusumikap. Ito isang tunay na testamento sa kultura ng kahusayan ng ating mga kampeon at kanilang unibersidad.

Sa mga kasapi ng Ateneo Debate Society, lalo na kina David Demitri Africa at Robert Nelson, taos-puso kong binabati ang kahanga-hangang tagumpay na ito. Nagdala kayo ng karangalan sa inyong unibersidad, sa inyong bansa, at sa inyong mga sarili.

Ang inyong tagumpay ay isang inspirasyon sa lahat ng ating mga kababayan.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR VILLANUEVA

Senator Villanueva stated that Senator Legarda was associating herself with the speeches on Proposed Senate Resolution No. 404.

ADOPTION OF PROPOSED SENATE RESOLUTION NO. 404

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, Proposed Senate Resolution No. 404, taking into consideration Proposed Senate Resolution Nos. 405, 406, 412, 416, 417, and 438, was adopted by the Body, subject to style.

COAUTHORS

Senator Villanueva manifested that all senators were coauthors of Proposed Senate Resolution No. 404.

PROPOSED SENATE RESOLUTION NO. 325

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body considered Proposed Senate Resolution No. 325, entitled

RESOLUTION CONGRATULATING AND COMMENDING THE BATANGAS STATE UNIVERSITY ENGINEERING STUDENTS TEAM FOR BEING THE CHAMPION-UNIVERSITY CATEGORY IN THE ENGINEERING INNOVATION CHALLENGE 2022 HELD IN SINGAPORE,

taking into consideration Proposed Senate Resolution Nos. 331 and 377.

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

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

SPONSORSHIP SPEECH OF SENATOR VILLANUEVA

In sponsoring Proposed Senate Resolution No. 325, Senator Villanueva delivered the following speech:

Today, I am deeply honored to sponsor Proposed Senate Resolution No. 325 commending the team of Engineering students from Batangas State University (BatSU) for winning in the University Category of the Engineering Innovation Challenge 2022 held in Singapore last November 4, 2022, with their "A.I.-Quaponics-360" invention.



This team of fourth year students, namely, Marc James Beltran, John Vincent Biscocho, Lawrence De Castro, Maria Nelly Magboo, and Jerico Matibag, bested the finalists from the National University of Singapore, Nanyang Technological University, and other top schools with their innovative small-scale aquaponics system using artificial intelligence (AI) technology.

The brilliant team from BatSU created an automated system to monitor the growth of fish and plants, water quality, nutrient circulation as well as when the plants could be harvested. And they were given only one month to develop and finish the project. *Iba talaga ang husay at galing ng mga kabataang Pilipino!*

The BatSU team will continue to work on their prototype for its possible introduction to the market. When this happens, it will be a game changer as it will vastly contribute to sustainability and agricultural modernization, and even promote home urban farming.

Muli, binabati po natin ang BatSU team kasama ang kanilang mentor at head ng Digital Transformation Center ng unibersidad na si Dr. Alvin Alon, gayundin po ang ating kaibigan, si at ang buong Batangas State University para sa tagumpay na ito. Indeed, the school was rightfully declared as the country's national engineering university in 2022.

REMARKS OF THE CHAIR

Senate President Zubiri stated that Batangas State University President Tirso Ronquillo helped change the status of BatSu into a science university.

COSPONSORSHIP SPEECH OF SENATOR LAPID

At the instance of Senators Lapid and Revilla, upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the following cosponsorship speeches on Proposed Senate Resolution No. 325 were inserted into the *Journal and Record of the Senate*:

By Senator Lapid

Ngayong hapon po ay ating papurihan ang mga mahuhusay na mag-aaral ng Batangas State University para sa kanilang natatanging tagumpay sa 2022 Engineering Innovation Challenge na ginanap sa Singapore. Ito ay isang napakahalagang tagumpay at isang patunay sa husay, pagkamalikhain at katalinuhan ng koponan na kumatawan sa ating bansa.

Ang maideklarang mga kampeon ng isang prestihiyosong internasyonal na kompetisyon tulad ng Engineering Innovation Challenge ay isang pambihirang tagumpay. Ipinakita ng koponan ng Batangas State University sa mundo na hindi lamang nila kayang harapin ang mga kumplikadong problema sa larangan ng engineering ngunit may kakayahang makabuo ng mga makabagong solusyon na maaaring magkaroon ng tunay na epekto sa ating lipunan.

Ang pambihirang tagumpay na ito ay salamin ng dedikasyon, pamumuno at pagsusumikap ng pangkat, pati na rin ang paggabay at suporta ng kanilang mga propesor at pamilya. Ito rin ay isang patunay ng kultura ng kahusayan at pagbabago na nililining at pinalalakas ng Batangas State University sa mga mag-aaral nito.

Sa mga miyembro ng Batangas State University team na sina Marc James Beltran, John Vincent Biscocho, Lawrence de Castro, Maria Nelly Magboo, at Jerico Matibag, binabati ko kayo sa kahanga-hangang tagumpay na ito. Nagdala kayo ng karangalan hindi lamang sa inyong unibersidad kundi pati na rin sa ating bansa.

By Senator Revilla

I wish to associate myself with the earlier commendations for the Electronics Engineering students from Batangas State University who have championed in the 2022 Engineering Innovation Challenge (EIC) in Singapore.

Nakakatuwang isipin na ang innovation project na A.I.-Quaponics-360 na likha ng ating mga future engineers na sina Marc Beltran, John Biscocho, Lawrence De Castro, Maria Magboo,



at Jerico Matibag, katuwang ng kanilang mentor na si Dr. Alvin Alon, ay nanguna sa mga proyekto ng mga mag-aaral na mula sa mga maituturing na pinakamagaling na unibersidad sa mundo, ang National University of Singapore at National Technological University.

The Filipino minds are among the world's best. This is a recognition of our capacity to provide innovative solutions leading to a sustainable future. *Ang kanilang panalo ay pagpapatibay ng mga adhikain ng kakapasa lamang na batas na nagdeklara sa Batangas State University bilang isang National Engineering University.*

Ang aking ding pagsaludo sa iba pang mga pangkat na nakilahok: AI-Rover, AI 3D SET GO at EUGTO, na kinilala din sa nasabing patimpalak. Thank you for bringing pride to our nation. Buo ang paghanga at suporta namin sa inyo!

ADOPTION OF PROPOSED SENATE RESOLUTION NO. 325

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, Proposed Senate Resolution No. 325, taking into consideration Proposed Senate Resolution Nos. 331 and 377, was adopted by the Body, subject to style.

COAUTHORS

Senator Villanueva manifested that all senators were coauthors of Proposed Senate Resolution No. 325.

SUSPENSION OF SESSION

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, the session was suspended.

It was 3:52 p.m.

RESUMPTION OF SESSION

At 3:58 p.m., the session was resumed.

COMMITTEE REPORT NO. 39 *(Continuation)*

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body resumed consideration of Committee Report No. 39 on Proposed Senate Resolution Nos. 390, 391, 392, 400, 401, 402, 403, 418, and 421 Re: The Air Traffic Management System Glitch at the Ninoy Aquino International Airport (NAIA).

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

Thereupon, the Chair recognized Senator Poe, sponsor of the measure, and Senator Pimentel for his interpellation.

INTERPELLATION OF SENATOR PIMENTEL

In reply to Senator Pimentel's query whether the committee report recommended criminal or administrative sanctions for the reputational damage brought about by the air traffic system glitch in NAIA last January 1, 2023, Senator Poe said that while the committee report had mentioned that someone should be held responsible for the incident, the committee prioritized the identification of the cause of the glitch and finding out how to fix it. She pointed out, however, that the Department of Transportation (DOTr), Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT),

and the National Security Group would conduct investigations to identify who were responsible for the flight disruption. She also believed that along with the need to establish the Philippine Transport Safety Board (PTSB), the former and incumbent DOTr officials should be held accountable.

Asked if the Body could still monitor developments pertaining to the investigation, Senator Poe replied in the affirmative, disclosing that some critical findings of the Committee on Public Services were: 1) there was no real maintenance provided to the equipment; 2) there was no equipment redundancy for uninterrupted power supply, circuit breaker, or AVR; and 3) there was staff shortage due to job poaching by foreign companies. She then noted the significance of Senator Angara's bill to exempt the Civil Aviation Authority of the Philippines (CAAP) personnel from the Salary Standardization Law so that their salaries would be competitive.

On whether the salary of air traffic control specialists in CAAP was under the Salary Standardization Law, Senator Poe replied in the affirmative. Senator Pimentel remarked that air traffic controllers were pirated by aeronautics authorities in other countries because of the highly technical and competitive nature of their job. He then asked if the maintenance workers would also be exempt from the Salary Standardization Law. Senator Poe stated that critical employees must be carefully classified especially when it comes to equipment maintenance, unless such service would be provided by Sumitomo-Thales.

Replying to Senator Pimentel's query as to whether Thales and Sumitomo were two distinct corporations or the compound name of a single corporation, Senator Poe stated that Sumitomo is a Japanese corporation and Thales is a French company. She stated that the two corporations formed a joint venture to provide maintenance services to NAIA. She added that when dealing with maintenance providers, there were various tiers or levels of training, and therefore, electrical engineers should be compensated competitively. She then proposed exempting the engineers from the salary standardization scheme. Senator Pimentel surmised that while the handling of the Communications Navigation System/Air Traffic Management (CNS/ATM) required special training, the uninterruptible power supply (UPS) and automatic voltage regulator (AVR) were common electrical equipment.

Senator Poe stated that the CNS/ATM was comprised of the UPS, AVR, and other equipment. Senator Pimentel added that during the committee hearings he attended, he learned that the system's equipment could be categorized as follows: 1) the CNS/ATM; 2) the AVR; and 3) the UPS. Among the three components, he believed the CNS/ATM to be the most technology-driven and central to the system.

Asked how much it would cost to acquire the government's existing CNS/ATM, she stated that if the government were to consider an entire independent structure for redundant support, the total modernization and upgrade of the system would cost around P13 billion. On the other hand, she stated that repairing and upgrading the existing system would cost approximately P2 billion, which the CAAP, through the DOTr, and the airport fees could cover. In addition, she stated that, with the exception of the previous administration, the CAAP had generated some revenue in the past, which it had transmitted to the National Treasury. Senator Pimentel concluded, based on Senator Poe's reply, that the CAAP could use its locally-generated funds to repair and upgrade the current system at the NAIA under the amended rules. Senator Poe echoed the sentiments of Senator Pimentel and informed the Body that a grant from the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) was needed to complete the system update.

In response to Senator Pimentel's earlier inquiry regarding the cost of the government's existing CNS/ATM, Senator Poe stated that the equipment approximately cost P13 billion. In addition, she stated that the procurement process began in 2001, when a study on the subject was conducted. However, she disclosed that the system had been halted by the then-Department of Transportation



and Communications (DOTC) in 2013, and that it had not been fully operational until its actual turnover in 2018.

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

Senator Pimentel believed that the situation described by Senator Poe was a waste of government resources, money, and time, given that the sole existing system was supposedly purchased in 2013 for P13 billion and was not used until 2018. Senator Ejercito interjected by saying that he deemed the equipment to already be a "new old stock" due to its prolonged unuse. In addition, he opined that the Communications, Navigation, and Surveillance (CNS) component of the CNS/ATM has a national security feature, which was surveillance component. Senator Poe acknowledged Senator Ejercito's observations and thanked him for his correction. She then informed the Body of her concerns regarding the absence of a backup for CNS/ATM, adding that neither the UPS nor the AVR components had been installed.

Senator Pimentel underscored that the government has every intention of procuring new equipment, despite a previous incident involving the purchase of helicopters that turned out to be second hand but cost more than the new model. In this regard, he hoped that the CNS/ATM that was purchased in 2013 was new at the time.

Asked if the committee report explained the reason behind the circumstances described as "a wastage of public funds, time, as well as opportunity," Senator Poe replied in the affirmative, adding that the lesson would have an even greater impact once the Body received an update from the DOTr regarding the identities of those responsible for the issue. She also hoped that the corresponding penalty would deter future offenders from committing similar crimes. She stated that the committee had made recommendations for avoiding flight interruptions, among which was to have an automatic switch that would ensure that a backup system was in place if the current one were to fail.

She informed the Body that currently, the AVR was still out of order, and that the new UPS had not yet been integrated into the system, which he believed would have a negative impact on travelers because it would necessitate several hours of airport system downtime.

Asked whether the new AVR and UPS could be included in NAIA's redundancy measures, Senator Poe replied in the affirmative.

As to the degree of the Sumitomo-Thales joint venture's involvement with the issue, Senator Poe revealed that three years ago, the joint venture was the one providing maintenance services to the airport. She stated, however, that because there were amounts still to be collected from the government, Sumitomo-Thales discontinued their service. She believed that airport maintenance had deteriorated since then.

Asked if she was aware of the alleged involvement in fraud of one of the two corporations, Senator Poe replied in the negative. She stated that despite her lack of knowledge regarding the company's operations, Sumitomo was a very reputable company. As for Thales, she stated that although she had limited information on its business, the company provided a variety of equipment to countries other than the Philippines.

As to how much the government owed the joint venture for its services, Senator Poe stated that at least P1 billion was owed to each company. She also informed the Body that, according to Secretary Jaime Bautista of the DOTr, the government had requested that the companies maintain the existing equipment while an agreement regarding the maintenance costs was being drafted. Furthermore, she stated that there was also a request from the Secretary to exclude for the time



being the costs incurred by the government in the past of the installation of the system. In addition to negotiating a separate agreement for the system's maintenance, she stated that Secretary Bautista would negotiate a separate deal for the system's maintenance.

Considering the separate costs associated with the equipment, its installation, and subsequent maintenance, Senator Poe believed that the government should be conscientious in managing its finances. Nonetheless, she emphasized that safety should be of paramount importance, and that the authorities should not skimp on safety-related matters. In this regard, Senator Pimentel emphasized the need to prioritize the science and technology education of the youth in order for the Philippines to remain competitive in the field. Concurring on the matter, Senator Poe mentioned other related high-earning industries, including the agriculture, semiconductors, and Information Technology–Business Process Outsourcing (IT-BPO) sectors.

Senator Pimentel proposed that the Committee on Public Services look into news reports, particularly a *Philippine Star* article dated August 17, 2010, regarding the Thales Group, formerly Thomson–CSF, whose failure to deliver a Global Marine Distress Safety System (GMDSS) to DOTC in 1998 resulted in the company being blacklisted by the Commission on Audit.

Senator Poe stated that the aforementioned issue was the reason COA stopped the implementation of the Thales' CNS/ATM system in 2010. She stated, however, that in 2013, the agency had to revert to the one purchased from Thales due to a failed transaction with another supplier. She added that she was conducting additional research on the Thales contract. She noted that the company possessed the expertise required by the government.

Senator Ejercito interjected in support of Senator Poe, stating that the company was highly regarded for radar technology not only in air travel, but also in surveillance and defense, adding that 18 countries around the world use Thales equipment combat management systems.

Senator Pimentel argued that his concern was not with the credibility of the Thales products, but rather with a specific contract with the Philippine government. In that regard, he surmised that the reason why there was still an unpaid amount was because the government had an outstanding claim against Thales. Senator Poe responded that while the COA disallowed the project in 2011, said disallowance was lifted in 2013 after the agency determined that the project was aboveboard.

Asked whether there was a connection between the January 1 NAIA glitch and its proposed privatization, Senator Poe believed that a study was necessary to find out if private sector-managed ATM systems had national security implications. She disclosed that she was informed by Secretary Bautista that JICA was already conducting research on the subject, with the goal of enhancing airport management and air traffic control. She then cited the privately-operated Mactan-Cebu International Airport as an example.

In reply to another query, Senator Poe believed that the January 1, 2023 glitch was the shared responsibility of CAAP and the Manila International Airport Authority.

As to how the separation of functions currently being performed by the CAAP, that of an airport regulator on the one hand, and an operator on the other, would improve CAAP's performance, Senator Poe stated that she was recommending that CAAP assume responsibility for airport regulation, while a separate body would be responsible for airport operations. She surmised that the proposal would make it easier for the CAAP to call out the operator if it was not performing its job properly.

As to the number of airports managed by CAAP, Senator Poe responded that there were 81 airports in all.



Upon further query, Senator Poe replied that the proposal calls for a new government body to operate all the 81 airports currently regulated by CAAP, although it would continue to serve as its regulator.

Senator Pimentel expressed hope that the proposal would be approved so that the same approach may be applied to PAGCOR and other government entities with more than one regulator and operator.

He commended Senator Poe on her comprehensive report and reminded her of his pending request for an update on CAAP's administrative probe on the matter.

Senator Poe responded by thanking Senator Pimentel for taking time to review the report, which she believed was crucial for public safety and was the responsibility of government leaders.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR GATCHALIAN

Preliminarily, Senator Gatchalian remarked that the investigation undertaken by Senator Poe has made her competent in various fields, such that she is a hybrid of an electrical engineer, transportation expert, lawyer, and mechanical engineer.

He disclosed that he intended to inquire about Senator Poe's perspective on the conflict resulting from CAAP's dual role as the regulator of all airports and the operator responsible for ensuring the safety of airports and passengers. Nonetheless, he noted that CAAP's status as its own regulator was brought up during the committee hearing as it cast doubt on the safety of airports. In addition, he stated that he supported Senator Poe's proposal to divide CAAP's regulatory and operational roles. He expressed concern that some government agencies, such as the Philippine Ports Authority and PAGCOR, have the dual function of being operator and regulator.

He then lauded Senator Poe for enlightening the senators on the deficiencies of the relevant government entities.

Senator Poe concurred with Senator Gatchalian that safety is a crucial aspect of airport operations, thus, there is a need for an official who can immediately answer all technical concerns pertaining to airport operations.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR VILLANUEVA

Senator Villanueva remarked that he had also brought up during the committee hearings the seventh recommendation of the committee report to promote personnel welfare and improve the agency's employee retention, given that the CAAP employs more contract-of-service or job order (JO) workers than regular employees. He pointed out that the number of CAAP's regular employees has decreased over the past years, from 43% in 2019, 42% in 2020, and 40% in 2021, while the number of contractual or JO employees has increased significantly, from 55% in 2019 to 59.8% in the current year. He then expressed his full support for Committee Report No. 39.

Senator Ejercito likewise commended Senator Poe for her comprehensive committee report.

TERMINATION OF THE PERIOD OF INTERPELLATIONS

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body closed the period of interpellations and proceeded to the period of amendments.



TERMINATION OF THE PERIOD OF AMENDMENTS

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

APPROVAL OF COMMITTEE REPORT NO. 39

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body approved Committee Report No. 39 and adopted the findings and recommendations therein.

SUSPENSION OF SESSION

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, the session was suspended.

It was 4:32 p.m.

RESUMPTION OF SESSION

At 4:42 p.m., the session was resumed.

SPECIAL ORDER

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body approved the transfer of Committee Report No. 61 on Senate Bill No. 2028 from the Calendar for Ordinary Business to the Calendar for Special Orders.

COMMITTEE REPORT NO. 61 ON SENATE BILL NO. 2028

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body considered, on Second Reading, Senate Bill No. 2028 (Committee Report No. 61), entitled

AN ACT AMENDING SECTION 2 OF REPUBLIC ACT NO. 10868, OTHERWISE
KNOWN AS THE CENTENARIANS ACT OF 2016 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*.

Thereupon, the Chair recognized Senator Marcos for the sponsorship.

SPONSORSHIP SPEECH OF SENATOR MARCOS

In sponsoring Senate Bill No. 2028, Senator Marcos delivered the following speech:

Today I submit to this Chamber Committee Report No. 61 sponsoring herewith Senate Bill No. 2028, entitled "An Act Expanding the Coverage of the Centenarians Act of 2016, Amending for the Purpose Republic Act No. 10868, and Providing Funds Therefor."

Our senior citizens are an integral part of our society. Their hard work have shaped the country as we know it today. Even in their later years, they continue to make a significant contribution to the labor force, to their families, and to the State.

Recent statistics, well-cited by our Minority Leader and author of this measure, however, showed that many elderly Filipinos do not reach the age of 100 and are, hence, unable to enjoy



the benefits and privileges of the widely-celebrated Centenarians Act of 2016, which awards a P100,000 cash to every Filipino centenarian. Life expectancy is now at 79 years old for men and 83 years old for women.

The rising cost of living and healthcare expenses have made it very difficult for our senior citizens to afford basic necessities and the expensive medications and procedures of heart ailments, diabetes, kidney failure, and other age-related disabilities. They also face mental health issues such as depression and loneliness. Not to speak of the neglectful and sometimes abusive treatment of their younger family members.

Mayroon tayong kasabihan: "Aanhin pa ang damo kung patay na ang kabayo?" Hihintayin pa ba natin na mawala ang ating mga lolo't lola bago mapadama sa kanila ang ating pagmamahal at pagpapahalaga?

Thus, to assist our senior citizens as they approach their late years, this bill seeks to distribute the P100,000 cash gift much earlier and in three tranches—when they reach the ages of 80, of 90, and of 100. The amounts necessary for the implementation of the law shall be included in the Annual General Appropriations Act and will be upgraded by the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA), according to the average annual inflation in the preceding three years.

Sa awa ng Diyos, mabibigyan na tayong lahat ng mas mahabang buhay. Sana ay hindi natin mararamdaman ang pagka balewala sa ating pagtanda. Bigyan natin ng saysay ang mabuting layunin ng batas habang buhay pa ang ating mga lolo at lola, habang may oras pa tayong lahat.

I now ask for the support of my colleagues in passing the proposed amendments because, through this expansion, it is hoped that more of our elderly population may be able to benefit from the Centenarian's Act and that they may be inspired to further prolong and enjoy their lives even beyond a century.

COSPONSORSHIP SPEECH OF SENATOR REVILLA

Senator Revilla delivered the following cosponsorship speech on Senate Bill No. 2028:

I rise today to cosponsor one of the measures closest to my heart—the amendment to the Centenarian Law. It was in this same Hall in 2020 when I first pushed and fought for this measure. However, the fight was momentarily halted because of the pandemic.

Naantala man nang bahagya, alam nating darating ang tamang panahon para rito. And today is that day—so close to my heart. I filed Senate Bill No. 21 as my topmost priority measure this Congress.

Hindi napagod, hindi natinag, because our dear senior citizens deserve no less. Kaya nga nagpapasalamat tayo sa ating chairperson, Sen. Imee Marcos, na talaga namang hinanapan at ginawan ng paraan upang maisakatuparan ang mga adhikain ng panukalang ito.

Hinihimok, hinihikayat ko kayong lahat na bigyan ng suporta ang ating mga mahal na senior citizens.

Let us recognize and value the role that our elders play in our society.

An African proverb says that "those who respect the elderly pave their own road toward success." *Pero, tayong mga Pinoy, normal na sa ating kultura ang paggalang at pagpapahalaga sa mga nakatatanda. Hindi ito bago sa ating pamumuhay, lahat tayo ay ipinanganak at lumaki sa aral na ang mga nakatatanda ay ginagalang, nirerespeto, at pinahahalagahan.*

This legislative measure is a testimony to that special Filipino culture. We acknowledge the very laudable intent of the Centenarian Law, and with this proposal under consideration, we just wish to provide in advance the benefits afforded by the law.

There are accounts that the Centenarian Law beneficiaries are too old to "enjoy" the cash gift they receive. *Mayroon pa ngang salaysay na hindi na naiintindihan ng ating mga lolo at lola kung anuman ang natatanggap nila. Panukala lang natin na may ma-"advance" lang sana ng mga nakatatanda upang kahit papano ay ma-enjoy pa nila ito.*



Habang sinusuportahan natin ang panukalang ito, kalakip nito ang dalanging matamasa nila ito sa lalong madaling panahon, at maihatid natin ang tulong at kalingang damang-dama sa ating mga senior citizens.

In view of all these, this Representation, together with our very able sponsor, Sen. Imee R. Marcos, appeals to this Body to overwhelmingly support this measure.

COSPONSORSHIP SPEECH OF SENATOR GATCHALIAN

In cosponsoring Senate Bill No. 2028, Senator Gatchalian delivered the following speech:

I rise today to cosponsor Senate Bill No. 2028 under Committee Report No. 61, otherwise known as "An Act Expanding the Coverage of the Centenarians Act of 2016."

The cultural value of family and respect for the elderly is deeply ingrained in our Filipino culture. It is common for us to have multigenerational households where grandparents live with their children and grandchildren. We always make sure that our *lolos* and *lolas* are well cared for, and that they never feel abandoned or neglected.

Even in our local communities, we all know that it is too heartbreaking to see elderly people surviving on the streets. That is why in Valenzuela, for example, we established "Bahay Kanlungan" to serve as a home for abandoned senior citizen residents. In fact, with our intent to replicate this initiative nationwide, this representation filed Senate Bill No. 950, known as "Homes for the Abandoned Senior Citizens Act of 2022," which seeks to provide a framework for other local government units to address the plight of a more vulnerable sector of senior citizens.

As we push for such transformative steps for our senior citizens, there is no denying that we wish our aging loved ones could stay with us forever. Unfortunately, as much as we want to, living to reach eighty, ninety, or even a hundred years is quite rare in our country. According to the latest data of the World Bank, the average life expectancy at birth in the Philippines is 72 years.

Given this context, not many Filipinos live long enough to enjoy the benefits of Republic Act No. 10868, or the Centenarians Act of 2016. This also means that only a few centenarian Filipinos enjoy the fruits of this Act, including the P100,000 cash gift, as well as the Letter of Felicitation.

According to the 2020 data released by UK-based care home marketplace Lottie, only two in every 100,000 Filipinos are centenarians. *Sa madaling salita, kaunting senior citizens lamang ang kinikilalang benepisyaryo ng ipinangag Centenarians Act of 2016.*

With this reality, I stand today to cosponsor this measure that seeks to broaden the coverage of the Centenarians Act of 2016. Through this measure, we can further celebrate the contributions of our beloved senior citizens to nation-building by providing more beneficiaries with the necessary support and recognition they deserve.

Once the passage of this bill becomes a reality, our Filipino octogenarians and nonagenarians will also reap the awards of the Centenarians Act. And with this, more senior citizens would benefit from a cash gift of P100,000, as it will be equally distributed in three tranches at ages 80, 90, and 100. This means that around 33,000 will be given to beneficiaries for every 10 years, while also allowing inflationary adjustment of the amounts that they will receive.

The passage of this measure will surely motivate our senior citizens to live longer. The P100,000 cash gift that will be equally distributed in three tranches will support them as they pay their living expenses, medicines, healthcare costs, and other necessities as they reach the milestone ages of 80, 90, and 100.

Sa totoo lang, sa simpleng paggamit ng senior citizen discounts, tuwang-tuwa na ang ating mga lolo at lola. Sa pagpasa ng panukalang ito, paniguradong mas lalong gaganda ang kanilang mga ngiti dahil tiyak na malaking tulong ito lalong-lalo na sa mga may iniindang karamdaman dahil makatutulong ito pambili ng kanilang gamot.

Noong panahon ng aking panunungkulan sa Valenzuela, naging saksi po mismo ako kung gaano nito napasaya ang mga Valenzuelanong centenarians dahil bukod sa pagkilala sa kanila, binibigyan din natin sila ng tigma-sampung libong piso sa kanilang kaarawan. Nakatutuwa ring malaman na ngayon ay umabot na sa P50,000 ang ipinamamahagi sa kanila.



Kaya naman sa mga kapwa kong mambabatas, huwag na sana nating ipagkait ang munting biyaya na ito para sa pinakamamahal nating octogenarians, nonagenarians, at centenarians. Sama-sama nating ipagdiwang ang kanilang pagpupunyagi tungo sa mahaba, masagana, at mayabong na buhay. Para sa ating senior citizens, mabuhay po kayong lahat! Kayo ay buhay na kayamanan ng ating bansa.

To end, allow me to express my gratitude to the sponsor of this bill, Sen. Imee Marcos, and to my fellow coauthors, Minority Leader Sen. Aquilino "Koko" Pimentel, Sen. Ramon Bong Revilla, and Sen. Risa Hontiveros, for their contributions in drafting this significant measure.

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

COSPONSORSHIP SPEECHES

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body approved the insertion of his cosponsorship speech, as well as those of Senators Go, Padilla, and Estrada, on Senate Bill No. 2028, which were deemed read and inserted into the *Journal and Record of the Senate*:

By Senator Villanueva

We thank our esteemed colleague, Sen. Imee Marcos, for sponsoring this measure. It is with great pride and honor to cosponsor Senate Bill No. 2028 under Committee Report No. 61, entitled "Expanding the Coverage of the Centenarians Act of 2016, Amending for the Purpose Republic Act No. 10868 and Providing Funds Thereof."

This measure is aligned with this Representation's advocacy on improving the welfare of our senior citizens. In the 18th Congress, we were able to pass into law Republic Act No. 11916 or the Act Increasing the Social Pension of Indigent Senior Citizens, which will increase the stipend of eligible beneficiaries from P500.00 to P1,000.00. This 19th Congress, we filed Senate Bill No. 360 or the Senior Citizens Employment Incentives Act of 2022; Senate Bill No. 729 on providing free healthcare to senior citizens and persons with disability; and Senate Bill No. 1047 or the Homes for the Elderly Act.

The older we get, the more vulnerable we become. This is why we consider our senior citizens as one of the most vulnerable groups in our society, especially in the aspect of health and safety. Within this group of elderly, only a few reach the age of 100. In 2022, 662 Filipinos were able to reach their centenarian age, according to the Department of Social Welfare and Development.

It is high time that we recognize the need to aid our seniors early into their advanced age. Through this bill, the P100,000.00 monetary benefit will be distributed in three (3) equal tranches – from ages 80, 90, and ultimately, 100 years old. This amount will eventually be adjusted annually to reflect the inflation. Furthermore, this bill seeks to establish the Elderly Data Management System with the goal of promoting efficiency and transparency.

With these amendments in mind, we look forward to celebrating the lives of our elderly Filipinos through the earlier distribution of benefits that may aid their health and motivate them towards a longer life.

Thank you very much, and may God bless us all.

By Senator Go

It is my honor to cosponsor this piece of legislation which honors and give due importance to our senior citizens.

Alam naman po natin na nasa kultura na po ng Pilipino na alagaan ang mga nakakatanda. We are a very family-oriented and caring people. Kaya naman po dapat natin silang suportahan at bigyan din ng pagkilala.

This proposed measure provides a cash gift in the total amount of P100,000 to be distributed in three equal tranches to senior citizens when they reach 80, 90 and 100 years old. *Sa ngayon, ang may cash gift lang po ay yung mga nakakaabot ng 100 years old. Pero alam naman natin*



na hindi naman lahat ay nabibiyayaan na umabot sa ganoong edad. The average life expectancy of Filipinos is around 70 years old.

Kaya naman po, habang kaya pang pakinabangan at ma-enjoy ng senior citizen ang cash gift, ibigay na po natin sa kanila. As stated in the rationale of the Committee Report, it will have a greater impact on more senior citizens if the cash benefit is given at a time when health interventions would have mattered for a better chance of healing and achieving better health outcomes.

Maganda rin po, na may inaasahan ang ating mga senior citizens pag tungtong nila ng 80, 90 at 100 years old. Maliit na halaga ngunit this may already inspire optimism and improve their psychological and physical well-being.

Suportado ko ang anumang hakbang na magpapabuti lalo sa kalusugan at kapakanan ng ating mga senior citizens.

Kilalanin natin ang ating mga senior citizen dahil malaking sakripisyo ang ginawa nila noong mas bata pa sila upang maitaguyod ang kanilang mga pamilya na siyang pundasyon ng ating lipunan. Suklian natin sila ng pagmamahal at pag-aaruga sa kanilang pagtanda.

Bilang isa sa mga vulnerable groups, kailangan ng mga matatanda natin ang tulong at suporta ng pamahalaan. Kaya itong cash gift ay sigurado akong malaking tulong sa kanila.

I thank the sponsor, Sen. Imee Marcos, for pushing for this measure that would benefit most of our senior citizens. In fact, I already expressed my intention to coauthor the bill filed by Sen. Bong Revilla which is considered in this Committee Report.

By Senator Padilla

Assalamu alaikom warahmatullahi wabarakatuhu.

Nais ko pong iparating ang aking buong suporta sa ating iginagalang na Senadora Imee Marcos, gayundin ang aking intensyon upang maging kapwa-sponsor ng Senate Bill No. 2028 na nakapaloob sa Committee Report No. 61.

Malinaw po sa ilang mga probisyon sa ating Saligang Batas ang pagtatangi ng bayang ito sa mga nakatatandang miyembro ng lipunan.

Ayon sa Seksyon 4, Artikulo XV ng ating Konstitusyon, "Ang pamilya ay may tungkuling kalingain ang matatandang miyembro nito, ngunit maaari ring gawin ito ng Estado sa pamamagitan ng makatarungang mga pamamaraan ng kapanatagang panlipunan."

Alinsunod sa ating Saligang Batas, nakatutuwa po na ang ating Kongreso ay patuloy na nagsisikap na mag-akda ng mga batas na higit na magpapatibay sa matagal nang tradisyon ng mga Pilipino na pangangalaga sa mga matatanda at pinakamatandang miyembro ng ating mga pamilya at komunidad. Isa sa mga landmark na batas na ipinasa ng Kongreso ay ang Republic Act No. 10868, o ang Centenarians Act of 2016, na nagbigay ng karagdagang benepisyo na nagkakahalagang isangdaang libong piso (P100,000.00) sa mga aabot sa edad na 100.

Sa panukalang batas naman po na ating paksa ngayong araw, layon nating amyendahan ang Seksyon 2 ng Centenarians Act upang maibigay ang isangdaang libong benepisyo sa ating mga matatanda sa tatlong (3) equal tranches: kapag umabot sa edad na walumpu (80), siyamnapu (90), at isang daan (100).

Sa ganitong paraan, mas maaga nilang matatamasa ang benepisyo ng Centenarians. Tayo ay umaasa na ito ay makakatulong sa kanila na matustusan ang kanilang mga pangunahing pangangailangan at gayon din ay makapagbigay sa kanila ng kagalakan dahil mararamdaman nila na pinahahalagahan ng pamahalaan ang kanilang naging kontribusyon sa pagbuo ng bansa.

At para naman protektahan ang halaga ng nasabing benepisyo, minamandato din ng panukalang batas ang awtomatikong pag adjust ng halaga ng benepisyo, ayon sa inflation, tuwing ikatlong taon.

Inaasahan po natin na sa pamamagitan ng mga amyendang ito, higit nating maipararamdam sa ating mga lolo at lola ang pagmamahal, pagtatangi, at pagkalinga ng ating gobyerno.



Muli po, aking buong suporta sa panukala, at isang karangalan po ang maging bahagi ng isang Senado na lubos ang paggalang at pagbibigay halaga sa mga nakatatanda.

By Senator Estrada

With the indulgence of the author and sponsor, I would like to ask to be made coauthor and cosponsor of Senate Bill No. 2028, entitled "An Act Expanding the Coverage of the Centenarians Act of 2016, Amending for the Purpose Republic Act No. 10868, And Providing Funds Therefor," under Committee Report No. 61.

I commend the efforts of the Committee on Social Justice, Welfare and Rural Development under the able leadership of Sen. Imee Marcos for pushing through with this important piece of legislation.

We are all in agreement that our centenarians deserve the One Hundred Thousand Pesos (P100,000.00) monetary benefit in recognition of their enduring and meaningful existence in this world. That is why we enacted the "Centenarians Act" in 2016.

But in consideration of the vulnerable and precarious state of our centenarians and the rising costs of living due to inflation, it is but proper and prudent for us to let our centenarians enjoy this financial reward earlier on, at ages 80 and 90, even in tranches, while they are still able to truly enjoy, appreciate and make use of this money.

Ito pong ating mga magse-sentenaryo na ito ay iyong mga nabuhay pa mula 1923 onwards. Sila po ang henerasyon na ipinanganak sa panahon ng mga Amerikano sa Pilipinas. This generation have witnessed and survived the horrors of world war ii and they have emerged as the gallant heroes in our nation's history. That is why we are also pushing for the passage of the veterans' disability pension fund.

Sila rin po ang henerasyon na nakasaksi sa pagdating ng radyo, ng telebisyon, ng computer, ng cellular phones, ng internet, ng smart phones at ng artificial intelligence. They have voted for sixteen Philippine presidents. No other generation in this lifetime possesses this much wealth of experience and wisdom. They epitomize this nation's true legacy.

At masakit man pong isipin o sabihin na sila ay nasa takipsilim na ng kanilang buhay ay maganda na pong pabaon sa kanila ang ating agarang pagtugon sa kanilang panawagan na ito.

With the passage of this important piece of legislation, we hope to be able to provide the legal instrument to be able to allocate enough funds for the immediate payment of our qualified beneficiaries as they reach the ages of 80, 90 and 100, respectively.

This measure also intends to establish an elderly data management system to ensure that all our targeted beneficiaries are duly identified and accounted for.

Kaya marapat lamang na habang ang ating mga mahal na centenarians ay malakas lakas pa, ay maipamalas at maiparamdam na natin sa kanila ang ating pagmamahal at pagpapahalaga para sa makabuluhang buhay na inialay nila para sa bansa.

Inaani natin ngayon ang biyaya ng kanilang mga itinanim noon. Mabuhay po ang ating mga nakatatanda! Mabuhay po ang mga Pilipinong sentenaryo!

SUSPENSION OF CONSIDERATION OF SENATE BILL NO. 2028

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

SPECIAL ORDER

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body approved the transfer of Committee Report No. 59 on Senate Bill No. 2021, from the Calendar for Ordinary Business to the Calendar for Special Orders.

COMMITTEE REPORT NO. 59 ON SENATE BILL NO. 2021

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body considered, on Second Reading, Senate Bill No. 2021 (Committee Report No. 59), entitled

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

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 Angara for the sponsorship.

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

SPONSORSHIP SPEECH OF SENATOR ANGARA

In sponsoring Senate Bill No. 2021, Senator Angara delivered the following speech:

Kami po ay tumatayo ngayon bilang chairperson ng Trade subcommittee, with the permission of the chairperson of the Committee on Trade, Commerce and Entrepreneurship, Sen. Mark Villar, para i-sponsor ang Senate Bill No. 2021 sa ilalim ng Committee Report No. 59 na naglalayong ma-institutionalize at palawigin ang Shared Service Facilities (SSFs) project na ipinatutupad ng Department of Trade and Industry (DTI).

We thank Senator Villar for entrusting this to us. At ang panukalang ito ay isa lamang sa mga batas at programa na ating isinusulong sa ilalim ng adbokasiya natin na "Tatak Pinoy" (Proudly Filipino). Dito po, ang pangunahing pakay ay ang makapaglikha sa bawat sulok ng bansa ng mas magandang trabaho at ng mas maraming pagkakataon para kumita, upang mas madaling makaahon mula sa kahirapan ang ating mga kababayan. At buong-buo ang ating paniniwala na ang SSFs program ng DTI ay isang mabisang paraan para maabot ang hangarin na ito.

We all know the cliché, "Give a man a fish and he will eat for a day. But if you teach him how to fish, then he will eat in perpetuity." Pero tama man ang sentimiyento, may kulang pa rin po dito. Kasi ano man ang husay ng mangingisda, wala pa rin siyang mahuhuli kung wala siyang sibat, lambat, pain (bait), o bangka.

Marami po sa kababayan natin, taglay ang galing, talino, diskarte, pagiging malikhain, at lakas ng loob para magtayo ng sariling negosyo, kumita nang malaki, at umasenso sa buhay. Ang problema, madalas wala silang materyales, kagamitan, at kasangkapan para makapaggawa ng mga produkto o maghain ng serbisyo na puwede nilang pagkakitaan, ibenta sa merkado, o i-export sa ibang bansa. Itong kakulangan na ito ay nais punan ng mga SSFs ng DTI.

The DTI started its SSFs program in 2013 as one of the major pillars of the "big push" for its Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) Development Program.

The avowed objective was to provide qualified beneficiaries, also called "cooperators," with machinery, equipment, and tools under a shared system to make them more competitive and to boost their innovativeness and productivity. The hope is that with the transfer of such technological assets to on-the-ground stakeholders, gaps and bottlenecks will be addressed in the value chain of priority industries.



The SSFs project has been allocated in the General Appropriations Acts of the past 10 years up to P4.28 billion, and from this amount, 3,484 SSFs have already been established nationwide to benefit nearly 580,000 individuals and create a little more than 317,000 new jobs in the countryside.

Currently, the SSF project is present in all regions and the facilities established have already benefited at least 24 industry sectors, such as in gifts, decors, and housewares; coconut/coco coir; handicrafts; coffee; bamboo; abaca; and fresh and processed meats. In fact, over 1,000 facilities have already been established for assisting MSMEs in processed foods.

Bukod sa mga kagamitan at equipment na magagamit sa produksiyon ng mga partikular na industriya, kasama din po sa SSFs na itinatayo ng DTI ang mga tinatawag na fabrication laboratories, o Fab Labs, for short. Ito ay ang mga pasilidad na may mga makabagong teknolohiya tulad ng mga computer-aided machines, 3D printers, laser cutters, computer numerical control (CNC) milling machines, CNC routers, at mga desktop computer na puwedeng gamitin ng mga MSME at mga mag-aaral para makapag-test ng kanilang mga imbensiya at makapag-prototype ng kanilang mga produkto. Hinahangad ng mga Fab Lab ang magsilbing suporta sa mga MSME para mas gumaling sila sa innovation at product development.

Ayon sa DTI, as of January 2023, may apatnapu't tatlong (43) Fab Lab ang nakatayo sa labing-anim na rehiyon.

Sa sampung taon na pinapatakbo ng DTI ang SSFs project, napakadami na ang natulungan nito at napakalaki ang ambag sa kapakanan ng ating lipunan.

Ayon sa isang survey ng UP Institute of Small Scale Industries (UP-ISSI), of 485 SSF cooperators and over 3,100 users/beneficiaries between November and December 2022, 52% ang nagsabi na lumaki ang kanilang kita dahil sa SSFs. Twenty-five percent (25%) naman ang nagsabi na nagkaroon daw ng "increase in production" ng kanilang mga produkto, at 18% po ay lumaki daw ang kanilang mga job opportunity.

Example po ang Treelife Coco Sugar sa Pikit, North Cotabato. Noong naging kilala ang coco sugar bilang masarap at masustansiyang alternatibo sa karaniwan na asukal, naisip ng mga miyembro ng Samahang Magniniyog ng Pikit Multi-Purpose Cooperative na pumasok sa produksiyon ng coco sugar. Sa tulong ng SSFs ng DTI, nakapagpatayo ang kooperatiba ng pasilidad na may iba't-ibang kagamitan tulad ng drying oven, granule/powder sifting machine, vertical form fill seal machine, at iba pa. Gamit ang SSF na ito, nakakapag-supply ang kooperatiba ng coco sugar sa ilalim ng Treelife na brand name. Ayon sa datos ng DTI, lumaki ang produksiyon ng coco sugar ng kooperatiba dahil sa SSF. Mula 150 kilograms kada buwan, ito ay naging 500 kilograms hanggang isang tonelada kada buwan. Iyong benta daw po nila, mula P30,000 kada buwan, umabot na raw ng higit sa P180,000 kada buwan.

Sikwate! by Chocolate de San Isidro or CSI (San Isidro, Davao Del Norte)

Meron din po sa bayan ng San Isidro, Davao Del Norte, naisip ng lahat ng mga cacao producers, traders, investors, farmers cooperatives, at household tablea makers na magkaisa sa ilalim ng isang kumpanya. At dito nabuo ang Chocolate de San Isidro, or CSI. Mabagal umusad noong umpisa ang kanilang produksiyon, ngunit noong 2014, sa pangalawang taon ng kanilang SSF project, nabigyan po sila ng mga equipment para sa pagluto ng cacao, sa paggawa ng mga tablea at chocolate candy. Bago nagka-SSF ang CSI, hanggang tatlong kilo lamang ng tablea ang nagagawa nila araw-araw. Pagkatapos mabigyan ng SSF, ito ay naging 180 kilos na po. And they are now exporting overseas. Daan-daang cacao farmers na rin ang mga suppliers nila na nakakabenta ngayon ng kanilang tanim sa halagang P100 kada kilo, hindi hamak na mas malaki sa P40 na dating presyo nila.

Fab Labs As Frontliners

And if we speak of the Fab Labs, or fabrication laboratories, as frontliners, noong nakaraang pandemya, malaki rin ang naitulong nila sa pagresponde sa pandemya. Ayon sa sa datos ng DTI, nakagawa ang Fab Labs ng higit sa 85,000 face shields, 60,000 face masks, 2,000 medical gowns, 250 aerosol boxes, and 4,000 liters of ethyl alcohol. Karamihan sa mga ito ay nagawa simula ng pandemya kung saan hindi pa maayos ang galaw ng mga produkto. Kaya masasabi po natin, parang naging mga frontliner na rin ang mga SSF at Fab Labs bilang mga standby emergency production hub.

The SSFs of the DTI are among the select government initiatives that truly deserve more support because of the demonstrable success they have garnered over the years. The contribution to economic development and poverty alleviation of these packages of equipment and facilities are tremendous and should not be ignored.

An Impact Evaluation Assessment submitted to the UNDP in July 2021 underscored that the “shared” nature of the project makes it a viable strategy and it is expected to have a positive impact on the performance of covered MSMEs. To us, this is a vote of confidence that this project should be institutionalized and ramped up as among our major initiatives at growing our economy and making it more inclusive.

By institutionalizing this project, we assure, among other things, continued financial support from the government, and without this valuable support, it would be difficult to realize the current administration’s avowed goal to transform the economy and make more of our MSMEs be driven by science, technology, and innovation. We hope that with increased government support, bigger SSFs could be established—hopefully, to result in bigger changes not only MSMEs, but to entire industries, resulting in more jobs, more progress across more regions, and reducing poverty in the process.

The tagline of the DTI for this project is, thus”, SSFs equate to shared success for Filipino MSMEs.” But as MSMEs are among the foremost job creators and income generators of the country, we are convinced that a scaled up, well-provisioned, well-coordinated, and institutionalized SSF project will result in shared success for all Filipinos.

COSPONSORSHIP SPEECH OF SENATOR VILLANUEVA

In cosponsoring Senate Bill No. 2021, Senator Villanueva delivered the following speech:

It is my honor and privilege to cosponsor Senate Bill No. 2021 under Committee Report No. 61, Institutionalizing the Shared Service Facilities (SSFs) Project for Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). We commend and thank the Sponsor, Senator Angara, for his hard work on this particular and important measure.

This very important bill will help address the gaps and bottlenecks in the MSME production value chain through the provision of the machinery, equipment, tools, systems, accessories and other items, skills, and knowledge under a shared system.

Since the program’s establishment in 2013, it has funded the creation of 3,473 facilities with about 570,000 MSMEs assisted, generating employment for 312,981 individuals. Government has also allocated a total of P3.19 billion for the program since 2013. The SSF has served key industry clusters such as processed food, coffee, cacao, dairy, coconut, abaca, bamboo, metal and rubber, among others, and is present in all 17 regions.

Indeed, institutionalizing the SSF is a step in the right direction in helping and boosting our MSMEs. In fact, even in its early stages of implementation, the Philippine Institute for Development Studies called the project “promising” and assessed it to have “notable and substantial impact on jobs, jobs, jobs and productivity.”


Muli, maraming salamat po sa ating Sponsor, Senator Angara. We would also like to manifest our intention to coauthor this trailblazing and very promising measure.

COSPONSORSHIP SPEECHES

Pursuant to the manifestation of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body approved the insertion of the following cosponsorship speeches of Senators Go, Estrada, Padilla, Legarda, and Revilla on Senate Bill No. 2021 into the *Journal and Record of the Senate*:

By Senator Go

It is my honor to cosponsor this proposed legislation institutionalizing the Shared Service Facilities project under the Department of Trade and Industry.



As we all know, micro small and medium enterprises or MSMEs are considered growth engines of the Philippine economy. Most especially at this time of economic recovery, MSMEs play a crucial role in our development. However, MSMEs encounter several challenges that hinder their development such as limited financial capacity, poor market information and lack of access to technology.

We must therefore strive to enact measures that would help and support our MSMEs. One such measure is the shared service facilities project.

The SSF project under the DTI aims to assist MSMEs which need it the most. *Target nito na suportahan ang pinakamaliliit na negosyo sa mga probinsya.* These facilities provide entrepreneurial services such as manufacturing equipment, product development and training. They are often located in rural areas, where access to these resources is limited.

The goal of the shared service facilities project is to empower small business owners and provide an avenue for them to improve the quality of their products, increase their productivity, and ultimately, their profitability.

In general, this will not only benefit small businesses but will also help the community through the development of the local economy.

Ang trabaho natin bilang lingkod-bayan ay ang alalayan ang ating mga mamamayan, lalo na sa panahon ng krisis. Tulungan natin silang tulungan nila ang kanilang mga sarili sa pamamagitan ng mas pinabuti at mas pinalakas na mga programa ng gobyerno, katulad ng SSF.

By institutionalizing this program, we seek to economically empower our people *lalo na sa mga probinsya, mahalagang maiangat pa natin ang kanilang pamumuhay, mabigyan ng maayos na kabuhayan, masigurong merong sapat na pagkain at hindi natutulog sa gabi na walang laman ang sikmura, nakakapag-aral ang kanilang mga anak, at nabibili ang mga pangunahing pangangailanan.*

I thank the sponsor, Sen. Sonny Angara, for pushing for this measure and with his indulgence may I request that I be considered as a coauthor of this measure.

By Senator Estrada

Siyamnapu't siyam na porsyento (99%) ng mga enterprises sa ating bansa ay micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs). According to the 2020 list of establishments of the Philippine Statistics Authority, they generated more than five million jobs or 62.66% of the country's total employment. Moreover, they account for 25% of the country's total exports revenue.

Maraming batas ang ipinasa ng kongreso upang matulungan ang mga MSME at maraming programa din ang ipinatutupad ng iba't ibang sangay ng pamahalaan upang tugunan ang kanilang pangangailangan. Sa kabila nito, hindi maitatangi na marami pa ding mga programang kailangang ayusin at paigtingin upang lalong maging mas epektibo at kapaki-pakinabang ang kontribusyon ng mga MSME sa ating ekonomiya.

The Department of Trade and Industry or DTI identified some of the challenges being faced by MSMEs which includes "limited financial capacity, poor market information and lack of access to innovative techniques and advanced technology"

In response to this, the DTI launched the shared service facility or SSF in 2013 to "improve MSME competitiveness by providing machinery, equipment, tools, systems, accessories, and other auxiliary items, skills, and knowledge under a shared system."

DTI's SSF was able to extend invaluable support to the MSMEs in the various parts of the country. As reported by the DTI as of February 2023, "the government has put in place a total of P3.19 billion since 2013 and funded the establishment of 3,249 facilities with over 500,000 MSMEs assisted and 200,000 employment generated nationwide."

Ang programang ito ay karapat-dapat lamang bigyan ng sapat na suporta at lalo pang paigtingin ng ating pamahalaan para sa kapakibangan ng ating mga kababayan.



With the consent of the good sponsor, the Chairperson of the subcommittee on Senate Bill Nos. 761 and 1897, Sen. Sonny Angara, and the chairperson of the Committee on Trade, Commerce and Entrepreneurship Sen. Mark A. Villar, this Representation wishes to be a coauthor and cosponsor of Senate Bill No. 2021 under Committee Report No. 59 or the bill institutionalizing the shared service facilities (SSF) project for micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs).

The institutionalization of the SSF will provide the much-needed support to the enterprises especially in rural areas where tools, equipment and technology are insufficient. It will certainly strengthen the capabilities and widen the market reach of the businesses in our country. In the long run, they will redound to the improvement of the living conditions of our people and to the economic development of our country.

Again, it will be this Representation's honor to be a coauthor and cosponsor of this measure that will definitely improve the lives of the Filipinos.

By Senator Padilla

Nais ko pong opisyal na ipahayag ang aking intensyon upang maging kapwa-sponsor ng Senate Bill No. 2021 sa ilalim ng Committee Report No. 59 – na nagbibigay ng karagdagang suporta sa pagpapalago ng ating mga Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs).

Batid natin ang napakahalagang papel ng ating mga MSMEs sa ating ekonomiya sapagkat sila po ang bumubuo ng siyamnapu't siyam na porsyento (99%) ng mga negosyo sa bansa, at nagbibigay trabaho sa animnapu't tailo (63%) ng ating mga manggagawa.

Ang Shared Service Facilities (SSF) na isinusulong natin ay magiging napakalaking tulong po sa ating mga maliliit na negosyo upang mabigyang solusyon ang mga hamong matagal na nilang hinaharap, partikular na sa produksyon, paggamit ng inobasyon, at pagpapalawig ng kanilang produkto at serbisyo sa merkado.

Bilang utol ng ating mga karaniwang manggagawa dito sa Senado, buong-buo at mainit po ang aking suporta sa amyendang ito sa Magna Carta for Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises.

By Senator Legarda

It is with great pleasure that I register my full and unequivocal support for the passage of Senate Bill Nos. 761 and 1897, both seek to institutionalize the Shared Service Facilities (SSF) project for micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), amending Republic Act No. 6977.

In 2020, the Philippine Statistics Authority recorded nearly a million business enterprises operating in the country. Of these, 99.51% are MSMEs. This makes up 63% of the country's workforce, and 40% of the Philippine GDP.

These figures clearly demonstrate that MSMEs are the backbone of our economy. Democratizing the economy and spreading the benefits of sustainable development would be efficient if done through protection and support to this sector. They are also the most vulnerable to external economic shocks.

This observation is not brand new. As far back as 1991, small enterprises' crucial role in the Philippine economy had been recognized with the passage of R.A. No. 6977 or the "Magna Carta for Small Enterprises." More than a decade later, I authored and principally sponsored Republic Act No. 9501 or the Magna Carta for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Act of 2008, amending the R.A. No. 6977 as well as the Republic Act No. 9509 or the "Barangay Kabuhayan Act."

In 2013, the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) introduced the Shared Services Facilities (SSF) project aimed at enhancing MSME productivity and efficiency through better access to technology.

The Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS) noted that the SSF had a "notable and substantial impact on jobs and productivity" in its 2016 preliminary assessment of the DTI's project.



Ako mismo ay saksi sa kapangyarihan ng mga SSF sa pagtataguyod ng kapakanan ng MSMEs, kahit na sa panahon ng pandaigdigang pandemya. During pandemic, I supported SPARK! Philippines, a non-profit organization whose goal is to reduce gender disparities in the economic, social, and political spheres. I helped the organization establish two (2) DTI shared service facilities (SSF) that housed several high-power sewing machines with the support of the QC-LGU in Brgys. Greater Lagro and Sto. Cristo in Quezon City. In the midst of a global health crisis, they were able to manufacture and help meet the demand for Personal Protective Equipment (PPEs) and face masks using the sewing machines granted through the DTI SSF.

Sa aking probinsiya ng Antique, maraming kooperatiba at livelihood associations ang nabigyan ng tulong sa ilalim ng SSF. Sila ay nakagawa ng sari-saring produkto tulad ng veggie noodles, seaweed-based products, batwan seasoning, pickled vegetables, muscovado sugar, processed tuna, baked goods and products, processed meat, handicrafts, woven bags at mga banig, pati na rin ang mga face masks, hazmats at marami pang iba.

The machinery, equipment, tools, systems, other auxiliary items, skills, and knowledge provided under the shared service facilities (SSF) of the DTI have considerably helped address the gaps in the production value chain, promote innovation and competitiveness among MSMEs, and strengthened their capacities to efficiently produce diversified and export quality Filipino-made products and services.

These investments we make provide the impetus to the go-getter attitudes of these micro entrepreneurs who lift themselves up with their bootstraps and using their creativity, ingenuity and persistence to thrive. So instead of trickle-down economics, supporting MSME's through strategic investments to remove their obstacles and boost their efforts will be a rising tide that floats all boats. The downstream benefits to their families, suppliers, customers, and those who will be inspired by their example, will hopefully pave the way for us to meet sustainable development goals by the people's own energies.

Finally, we envision a million points of light – a blossoming of MSMEs that will lead us through the climate crisis using the flexibility, adaptability and brinkmanship that characterize them.

It is for these reasons that I want to associate myself with the proposed measure of institutionalizing the Shared Service Facilities (SSF) Project for MSMEs.

By Senator Revilla

I rise today to cosponsor the measure institutionalizing shared service facilities for the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises.

Ninety-nine percent of the industries in the country are MSMEs that deliver at least 60% of the employment. *Malaki ang naging tama sa kanila ng pandemya. At sa kanilang pag-ahon, sila ay nangangailangan ng higit na ayuda — mga solusyon na higit na palakasin ang kanilang kakayang makapagnegosyo na maglilikha ng mga panibagong trabaho.*

Ang mga shared service facilities ay konkretong paraan ng pagpapaunlad ng ating mga MSMEs gamit ang dagdag na makinarya, equipment, tools sa isang shared system. Maari natin mahasa ang kanilang kakayahan at mapalawak ang merkado para sa kanilang mga produkto.

Tulungan natin silang makaahon para higit silang maging epektibo sa pagtulong sa ating mga kakabayan na mapalaki ang ating ekonomiya. Bayanihan ang susi sa kaunlaran.

I thank the senator from Aurora, our ever diligent Finance Chair, Sen. Sonny Angara, for leading the passage of this measure that will surely benefit the MSMEs in the country.

SUSPENSION OF CONSIDERATION OF SENATE BILL NO. 2021

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

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

SPECIAL ORDER

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body approved the transfer of Committee Report No. 62 on Senate Bill No. 2034, from the Calendar for Ordinary Business to the Calendar for Special Orders.

COMMITTEE REPORT NO. 62 ON SENATE BILL NO. 2034

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body considered, on Second Reading, Senate Bill No. 2034 (Committee Report No. 62), entitled

AN ACT MANDATING THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION, DEVELOPMENT, TRAINING, ORGANIZATION AND ADMINISTRATION OF RESERVE OFFICERS' TRAINING CORPS (ROTC) PROGRAM IN HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND TECHNICAL VOCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS, APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.

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

The Chair recognized Senator Dela Rosa for the Sponsorship.

SPONSORSHIP SPEECH OF SENATOR DELA ROSA

In sponsoring Senate Bill No. 2034, Senator Dela Rosa delivered the following speech:

Before I start, I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to our chairperson of the Senate Committee on Higher Education, Senator Escudero, for designating me as the subcommittee chairperson on ROTC bills. I would not be standing today to sponsor Senate Bill No. 2034 under Committee Report No. 62, or the ROTC Act, if not for his imprimatur. Truly, our dear colleague from Sorsogon has a big heart for the welfare of our youth and nation. Thank you, Senator Escudero.

"We cannot always build the future of our youth, but we can build our youth for the future." — *Franklin Delano Roosevelt*

This is what we aim to accomplish in proposing Senate Bill No. 2034 authored by Senators Padilla, Estrada, Ejercito, Dela Rosa, Gatchalian, and Tolentino, entitled "An Act Mandating the Institutionalization, Development, Training, Organization and Administration of Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) Program in Higher Educational Institutions and Technical Vocational Institutions, Appropriating Funds Therefor and for Other Purposes." We want our youth to be ready for the future because of their important role in nation-building.

No less than the Constitution recognizes the vital role of the youth in nation-building. Because of such an indispensable role, the State is mandated to promote and protect our youth's physical, moral, spiritual, intellectual, and social well-being. The State shall also inculcate in the youth patriotism and nationalism, and encourage their involvement in public and civic affairs.

As such, as I have mentioned before, there is a need to prepare our youth for the enormous task that they are expected to do — build our nation to its full potential.

Kaakibat po ng pagtataguyod sa bansa ay ang pagtatanggol nito. The Constitution states that "The Government may call upon the people to defend the State and, in the fulfillment thereof, all citizens may be required, under conditions provided by law, to render personal military or civil service." *Wala pong ibang magtatanggol sa Pilipinas kundi tayong mga Pilipino.*

The importance of defending the country was highlighted by former President Carlos P. Garcia in his speech read by then Defense Secretary Alejo Santos during an ROTC Field Day. He said,

and I quote, "Reason and the instinct for self-preservation actuated them (the framers of our Constitution) into unanimously legislating as the first law of the Commonwealth of the Philippines, Commonwealth Act No. 1, otherwise known as the National Defense Act. It provided, among other things, for the creation of a citizen army whose training would be a joint endeavor of the national government and the educational institutions of the country. You belong to that citizen army. You go through systematic military training to prepare yourselves not for war but for peace. You will be a part of a reserve force of officers and noncommissioned officers who, when the need comes, will be called upon to lead the fight in defense of our existence as a free and happy people, should this be endangered by enemies within or enemies outside our own borders."

And so, yes, an important aspect of mandating ROTC for our youth is ensuring that they are fully equipped to heed the call to defend the nation when the need arises. *Ngunit hindi lamang natin ipinapanukala ang mandatory ROTC para lamang pangalagaan ang ating bansa, ngunit para na rin sa kapakanan at kinabukasan ng ating mga kabataan at mamamayan.*

Meron po tayong tinatawag na "parens patriae." Ang pamahalaan po ang tagapagtanggol, ang "legal protector" ng kaniyang mga mamamayan na hindi kayang ipagtanggol ang kanilang mga sarili. Tumatayo pong magulang ng sambayanan ang pamahalaan.

Pero bahagi po ng pagiging isang magulang ang ituro sa kaniyang mga anak kung paano ipagtanggol ang sarili mula sa ano mang mga banta na maaari niyang kaharapin. Madalas po nating marinig sa ating mga nakatatanda: "Paano ka na kung wala na kami?"

Kahit po siguro sa kabilang buhay ay hindi natin mapapatawad ang ating mga sarili kung may mangyaring masama sa ating mga anak. Nasa atin pong mga kamay ngayon ang pagkakataon na mabigyan ang ating mga mamamayan ng kaalaman kung paano nila maipagtatanggol ang kanilang mga sarili at ang ating bayan.

Bahagi ng pagiging magulang ang pagtuturo ng disiplina at kabutihang asal sa kaniyang mga anak. Bahagi ng paggogobyerno ang gumawa ng desisyon na sa tingin nito ay makabubuti sa kaniyang mga mamamayan.

Ngunit hindi lamang po banta ng pananakop ng dayuhan ang nais paghandaan ng ROTC. Hindi lamang po digmaan ang nagdudulot ng hirap at pasakit. May mga sakuna na hatid ng kalikasan. Sa mga pagkakataong ito, inaasahan natin na tutugon ang ating mga kadete.

Sapagkat ang ROTC po ay hindi lamang isang academic requirement ngunit institutionalized na pakikipag-kapwa tao. Higit po sa banta ng pananakop ng ibang mga bansa o mga kalamidad, baka po ay hindi na natin namamalayan na nalupig at nasalanta na ang ating bayan ng kawalang pakialam.

We should not wait for the hearts and minds of our Filipino youth to be invaded by a lack of empathy.

For these reasons, under the proposed measure, our youth shall be mandated to undergo a program that will:

1. Provide basic military and police training for students in order to motivate, train, organize, and utilize for national defense preparedness or civil military operations, and law enforcement;
2. Enhance the students' consciousness in the ethics of service, patriotism and nationalism, respect for human rights, appreciation of the role of national heroes in the historical development of the country, strengthen ethical and spiritual values, and develop personal discipline and leadership;
3. Reinforce in students the values of civic mindedness, volunteerism and genuine service to others in order to be active participants and volunteers for the development and improvement of ecology and environmental protection, human and civil rights awareness and law enforcement; and
4. Provide the students with practical and applicable knowledge and skills that are necessary, essential, and ideal for survival, and providing service in times of emergencies and disasters, including disaster response operations, skills for search, rescue and relief operations, and early recovery activities.

Normal lamang po ang mangamba, lalo na't may mga akusasyon ng korapsyon at pang-aabuso. Ngunit naniniwala po ako na may pagkakatatuto mula sa mga pagkakamali ng nakaraan. Nasa atin po ngayon ang lahat ng oportunidad upang siguraduhin na hindi na ito mangyayari.

In our proposed measure, we are establishing a Grievance Board in every ROTC unit and a National Grievance Committee that will be active in ensuring that no abuse, violence, or corruption in any educational institution implementing the mandatory ROTC program will be committed. *Hindi lang po sila maghihintay ng mga reklamo mula sa mga estudyante o guro, sila na mismo ang magiging masigasig sa pagbabantay ng ating mga ROTC Cadets at Instructors.*

Lahat po tayo ay may mga tungkulin na dapat gampanan. Bilang nakatatanda, obligasyon po natin na akayin ang ating mga kabataan sa landas ng kabutihan. Ipaunawa natin sa kanila na ano mang tinatamasa nila ngayon ay mawawala kung hindi nila ito matutunang pahalagahan.

Hindi natin sinasabi na tayo ang bukal ng karunungan at katotohanan ng buhay. Ang pinanghahawakan natin ay mga aral ng nakaraan. At kagaya ng madalas sabihin sa atin ng ating mga magulang: "Mga anak, ginagawa namin ito para sa inyo."

Why are we doing this, then? Why are we pushing for this measure? It is still a way of fulfilling our responsibility. It is because we understand, through the eyes of experience, the difference between well-prepared and ill-prepared. *Naiintindihan natin na darating ang panahon na tayong mga nakatatanda ay mawawala rin sa mundong ito.* When the time comes, may the younger generations who follow us find that they have been equipped well with all that they need.

Sabi nga ng ating pambansang bayani na si Dr. Jose Rizal, "Ang kabataan ang pag-asa ng bayan." Marahil sa tingin ng iba, gasgas na ang kasabihang ito, overused, kumbaga. But we cannot deny its truth. Sa ating mga kabataan nakasalalay ang pag-asa, dahil sila rin ang may hawak ng kinabukasan. The youth of today will be tomorrow's leaders. If we fail them now, we will also fail as a nation. But if we can prepare them for the unknown future and do what we can to help form them holistically into the leaders they are meant to become—what a victory that would be. *Dito mismo sa aking kinatatayuan, dama ko na ang tagumpay.*

SUSPENSION OF CONSIDERATION OF SENATE BILL NO. 2034

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

MOTION OF SENATOR VILLANUEVA

Senator Villanueva moved that the Body consider the Conference Committee Report on the disagreeing provisions of Senate Bill No. 1850 and House Bill No. 6336, entitled

AN ACT EMANCIPATING AGRARIAN REFORM BENEFICIARIES FROM FINANCIAL BURDEN BY CONDONING ALL PRINCIPAL LOANS, UNPAID AMORTIZATIONS AND INTERESTS AND EXEMPTING PAYMENT OF ESTATE TAX ON AGRICULTURAL LANDS AWARDED UNDER THE COMPREHENSIVE AGRARIAN REFORM PROGRAM.

SUSPENSION OF SESSION

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, the session was suspended.

It was 5:28 p.m.

RESUMPTION OF SESSION

At 5:29 p.m., the session was resumed.



WITHDRAWAL OF MOTION

Upon resumption, Senator Villanueva withdrew his motion to consider the Bicameral Conference Committee Report on the disagreeing provisions of Senate Bill No. 1850 and House Bill No. 6336.

CONFERENCE COMMITTEE REPORT ON SENATE BILL NO. 1849 AND HOUSE BILL NO. 6517

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body considered the Conference Committee Report on the disagreeing provisions of Senate Bill No. 1849 and House Bill No. 6517, entitled

AN ACT FURTHER STRENGTHENING PROFESSIONALISM AND PROMOTING
THE CONTINUITY OF POLICIES AND MODERNIZATION INITIATIVES IN
THE ARMED FORCES OF THE PHILIPPINES, AND AMENDING FOR THIS
PURPOSE REPUBLIC ACT NO. 11709.

The Chair recognized Senator Estrada to sponsor the report.

REPORT OF SENATOR ESTRADA

In sponsoring the bicameral conference committee report on the disagreeing provisions of Senate Bill No. 1849 and House Bill No. 6517, Senator Estrada delivered the following speech:

As your Chairperson of the Committee on National Defense and Security, Peace, Unification and Reconciliation, it is my honor to present the Bicameral Conference Committee Report on the disagreeing provisions of Senate Bill No. 1849 and House Bill No. 6517, amending Republic Act No. 11709 otherwise known as "An Act Strengthening Professionalism and Promoting the Continuity of Policies and Modernization Initiatives in the Armed Forces of the Philippines, By Prescribing Fixed Terms for Key Officers Thereof, Increasing the Mandatory Retirement Age of Generals/Flag Officers, Providing for a More Effective Attrition System, and Providing Funds Therefor."

The House panel, led by Cong. Raul "Boboy" Tupas, graciously came to the Philippine Senate and agreed to use the Senate Bill as our working draft.

Section 1 of Senate Bill No. 1849 was adopted, which provides, among others, for a three-year maximum tour of duty for the AFP Chief of Staff, and two-year maximum tour of duty for the Commanding General of the Philippine Army and Philippine Air Force, Flag Officer in Command of the Philippine Navy, and the Superintendent of the Philippine Military Academy.

Section 2 was amended to adjust the compulsory retirement age to 57 years old. This applies to both the AFP officers and enlisted personnel.

Section 3 was adopted, which amends the existing definition of the term "Active Duty."

Section 4 was also adopted, which increased the maximum tenure-in-grade for Brigadier General and Commodore from 3 years to 5 years, and Colonel/Captain from 8 years to 10 years.

Section 5 which provides for the officer grade distribution based on the AFP's Table of Organization was adopted with amendments to adjust the percentages for the General/Flag Officers to 1.25% and for the grade of First Lieutenant/Lieutenant Junior Grade and Second Lieutenant/Ensign to 42.75%, in line with the modernization program of the AFP.

A new Section 6 was introduced to clarify the application of the proposed legislation. Specifically, the bill shall also apply to the officers and enlisted personnel appointed and/or promoted under Republic Act No. 11709 and other pertinent laws.

I would like to recognize the patience, wisdom, active participation, and significant contribution of our distinguished colleagues as members of the Senate panel—our defense committee Vice



Chairpersons Sen. Ronald “Bato” dela Rosa, Sen. Christopher Lawrence Bong Go, and Sen. Francis “Tol” Tolentino; our Minority Floor Leader Sen. Aquilino “Koko” Pimentel III; Sen. Imee Marcos; and Sen. Sonny Angara.

I would also like to acknowledge our colleagues from the House—Cong. Tupas, Cong. Mercedes Alvarez, Cong. Jorge “Patrol” Bustos, Cong. Divina Grace Yu, Cong. Jurdin Jesus Romualdo, Cong. Lex Anthony Colada, and Cong. Joseph Stephen Paduano, for supporting and prioritizing the passage of this vital measure.

Finally, I would also like to thank the Senate and House Secretariat, tireless committee and legislation staff and stenographers, who stayed until late night to finalize the reconciled bill.

I respectfully move that we adopt and ratify the bicameral conference committee report on the disagreeing provisions of Senate Bill No. 1849 and House Bill No. 6517.

JOINT EXPLANATION OF THE CONFERENCE COMMITTEE REPORT

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body approved the insertion of the Joint Explanation of the Conference Committee on the disagreeing provisions of Senate Bill No. 1849 and House Bill No. 6517 in the *Journal and Record of the Senate*. (See Annex A)

REMARK OF THE CHAIR

Senate President Zubiri noted how Senator Estrada toiled for many hours and many days on the proposed measure. He commended how the latter and Senator Dela Rosa teamed up in order to finish the bill.

APPROVAL OF CONFERENCE COMMITTEE REPORT ON SENATE BILL NO. 1849 AND HOUSE BILL NO. 6517

Submitted to a vote, there being no objection, the Conference Committee Report on the disagreeing provisions of Senate Bill No. 1849 and House Bill No. 6517 was approved by the Body.

COMMITTEE REPORT NO. 62 ON SENATE BILL NO. 2034 (Continuation)

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body resumed consideration, on Second Reading, of Senate Bill No. 2034 (Committee Report No. 62), entitled

AN ACT MANDATING THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION, DEVELOPMENT, TRAINING, ORGANIZATION AND ADMINISTRATION OF RESERVE OFFICERS’ TRAINING CORPS (ROTC) PROGRAM IN HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND TECHNICAL VOCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS, APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.

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

SUSPENSION OF SESSION

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, the session was suspended.

It was 5:36 p.m.

RESUMPTION OF SESSION

At 5:37 p.m., the session was resumed.



SUSPENSION OF CONSIDERATION OF SENATE BILL NO. 2034

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

PRIVILEGE SPEECH OF SENATOR CAYETANO (P)

Availing herself of the privilege hour, Senator Cayetano (P) delivered the following speech on World Water Day:

I acknowledge the graciousness of our colleagues to allow me to deliver my speech. The Majority Floor Leader could attest that I never ask to change the agenda, I never ask to be bumped up, except today. I used the birthday card. But I promise you that this will be short, sweet, and very productive.

March 22, my birthday, is actually World Water Day. And to my recollection, I never celebrated my birthday during session. I mean, my birthday has always fallen during the break. So it is a privilege indeed for me to be able to deliver this speech on World Water Day in session.

I will keep this short. I think all of us can agree that this matter, which I stand up before you on personal and collective privilege, is very important. In the news, and I believe the Majority Floor Leader filed a resolution or filed something on a bill, we have data that shows that 11 million Filipinos do not have clean water. Now, in the recent Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) assembly that I attended on behalf of the Senate, it was established that "women and girls are disproportionately impacted not only by water scarcity, but by climate-related disasters in general, especially when they threaten national and regional peace and security, causing forced migration, displacements and increased poverty. [Women and girls are] more vulnerable to gender-based violence and other violations of women's human rights with often no access to support systems."

So I deliver this speech emphasizing that these are very much connected to our Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).

On SDG 3, Good Health and Well-being, obviously, *kung walang malinis na tubig*, it's hard to be healthy. If I am not mistaken, the major cause of infant mortality is diarrhea, which is caused by lack of access to clean water.

On SDG 5, Gender Equality, I already explained that there is enough evidence, and it was the topic of discussion in the entire IPU, that women and girls are disproportionately affected. *Kasi alam ninyo*, girls usually *ang inuutusan mag-igib ng tubig*. Even in the Bible, *pinapakita doon na na-meet ni Jesus ang isang babae sa well*, *kasi* it is a gender role. Not to say *na hindi naman tumutulong ang mga lalaki*. But it tends to be a gender role.

SDG 6 is specific to Clean Water and Sanitation. And SDG 10 is Reduced Inequalities.

The Philippines, being a signatory to the United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, is committed to integrate the SDGs into our national development plans and policies. So as I said, 11 million families lack access to clean water in the country, according to the National Water Resource Board.

When I was not yet a senator, I lived in Bagumbayan, Taguig, where our colleague, my brother, Senator Alan Cayetano, and his wife, Taguig City Mayor Lani Cayetano, still live. And would you believe, I found out, much to my distress, I was a young lawyer at the time, that many homes did not even have the basic water facilities. *Kasi wala palang tubig*. So why will they bother investing in a sink when *wala palang tubig*? *Wala ring flush*. But now, *meron na*. Thank God, *mayroon naman tayong tubig sa Taguig City* but there are still many places in the country where there are no direct sources of water.

I will move on, I will submit my full speech for the record. But I am just emphasizing the important points.

A gender-segregated space for women and girls is not only about sanitation, but it is also about safety. Sharing facilities with the opposite gender puts women and girls at risk of abuse and assault. So that's something to be considered in our planning. *Lalo na iyong kulang na kulang*



ang facilities, share-share, tapos sa gabi, can you imagine, madilim sa gabi, magpupunta nang mag-isa doon ang batang babae. Meron talagang risk po rito. A clean and functional bathroom with access to sanitary products is necessary for women and girls to manage their menstrual hygiene and pregnancy as well.

So it is important that when we think of clean water and sanitation, we must also see it through a gender lens. Like most crises, the effects are never gender-neutral, and the effects on women are proportionally higher than men. The water crisis today is worsened by the climate crisis and global warming.

To address water insecurity in the country, the national government has taken steps to mitigate it and provide a sustainable water supply to all. NEDA in 2019 released the Philippine Water Supply and Sanitation Master Plan. This serves as the national action plan to achieve universal access. DOH as well has in its 2023 Environmental and Occupational Health Line Item, P86.1 million is allotted under this line item in 2023.

I must end simply by saying that all of you who work on the budget can attest that we must do more in terms of budgetary support for access to clean water and not just that. I speak as your chairperson of the Committee on SDGs, Innovation, and Futures Thinking. *Ano ang future ng Pilipinas kung wala tayong sapat na tubig?*

When I was the chairperson of the Committee on Environment, in my first term in the Senate in 2004, I had the privilege of doing a study visit in Singapore where they showed me their complete plan for water security. This included desalination, importation of water through the use of big pipes, and finally, it included cleaning sewage water. I assume it's still there, and I invite all of you to go. Let's go on a field trip because it was very educational for me. If I recall correctly, it was called NEWater. New, *bagong tubig. Pero galing po ito sa sewage. Baka malakas lang ang loob ko, pero ang mga kasama ko, they were scared to drink it. But I drank it because I trust the process. I trust science, technology. Ang tanong ko is, are we doing any of those? Any? Do we have serious desalination programs? I don't know if we need to go to the extent of importing water. Are we cleaning our water? So ang dami-dami pa nating pwedeng gawin.*

And I hope forever *na matatak sa ating kaisipan ang kahalagahan ng tubig. Lalo na kapag naalala ninyo ako, on March 22, my birthday, it is World Water Day. I will end on that note. Thank you for the greetings and your support.*

MANIFESTATION OF SENATE PRESIDENT ZUBIRI

Senate President Zubiri stated that he filed Senate Bill No. 310 or the Potable Water in Every Barangay Act because many provinces, including his home province of Bukidnon, have no potable water source.

Senator Cayetano (P) expressed his appreciation to the Senate President for the bill he filed, and that she offered her services to take the lead in conducting the committee hearings on all bills relating to the SDGs, especially on the issue of water.

For his part, Senator Villanueva stated that he also filed Senate Bill No. 1048 or the Safe Drinking Water Act, which seeks to ensure the provision of potable water, cognizant of the report of the National Water Resource Board which stated that 11 million Filipino families or almost half of Filipino families lack access to clean water. Further, he said that he filed Senate Bill No. 2013 or the Integrated Water Resources Framework as he found the problem on access to clean water as unacceptable considering that the country has the fifth longest shoreline in the world at 36,000 kilometers. He averred that the speech of Senator Cayetano (P) was related to SDG No. 6 which was about clean water and sanitation.

REFERRAL OF THE SPEECH TO COMMITTEE

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Chair referred the privilege speech of Senator (P) and the manifestations thereon to the Committee on Sustainable Development Goals, Innovation and Futures Thinking.

REQUEST OF SENATE PRESIDENT ZUBIRI

Senate President Zubiri requested that the bill he filed which was Senate Bill No. 310 and that of Senator Villanueva, be referred to the Committee on Sustainable Development Goals, Innovation and Futures Thinking.

COMMITTEE REPORT NO. 62 ON SENATE BILL NO. 2034

(Continuation)

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body resumed consideration, on Second Reading, of Senate Bill No. 2034 (Committee Report No. 62), entitled

AN ACT MANDATING THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION, DEVELOPMENT, TRAINING, ORGANIZATION AND ADMINISTRATION OF RESERVE OFFICERS' TRAINING CORPS (ROTC) PROGRAM IN HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND TECHNICAL VOCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS, APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.

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

Thereupon, the Chair recognized Senator Ejercito for his cosponsorship speech.

COSPONSORSHIP SPEECH OF SENATOR EJERCITO

At the outset, Senator Ejercito requested that his cosponsorship speech on Senate Bill No. 2034 be inserted into the *Record of the Senate*. He expressed his support for the ROTC measure, saying that he was a product of it and that every Saturday for two years he reported at the De La Salle and at Fort Bonifacio for the ROTC training. He stressed that ROTC does not involve military training alone but also training on discipline, patriotism or love for country, as he noted the feeling of having the Philippine Flag on one's chest or in the arms. He added that ROTC training also teaches respect for authority and, more importantly, on how to become a responsible citizen.

Senator Ejercito stated that the bill filed by Senator De La Rosa did not require pure military training but also included disaster response and other activities aimed at helping the youth do their part in serving the nation. He said that there were those who had bad experiences in the ROTC but the experience that he had for two years made him realize and value more the love for the country or patriotism and the lessons he learned about discipline and respect for authority.

Senator Ejercito added that he could have easily asked for exemption in the ROTC because his father was a senator and later became Vice President but he opted not to. He said that he worked hard in the ROTC that he would still report for training even if he had hangover from gimmicks on Friday night. He said in jest that the reason he had dark complexion was because of the long exposure to sunlight during the training. He admitted that the training was hard but it molded the kind of person he was.

Upon his request, the Body approved the insertion of the cosponsorship speech of Senator Ejercito to the *Journal and Record of the Senate*.

The following is the full text of Senator Ejercito's cosponsorship speech:

More than three decades ago, I am one of the ROTC cadets who undergo military leadership, disaster response, map reading, rope course and jungle survival skills, infantry weapons, rappelling, small unit tactics, communications, field artillery training, self-defense and first aid. And I can say that I am a product of the Reserve Officers' Training Corps.



Today, I am elated that this august body is taking a leap to revive and reinstitute the mandatory Reserve Officers' Training Corps Program for higher education institution.

It is for this reason, that I am standing this afternoon to co-sponsor, Senate Bill No. 2034 under Committee Report No. 62 or the Reserve Officers' Training Corps Act.

This early, I would like to congratulate the Chairperson of the Subcommittee on ROTC Bills of the Committee on Higher Education, Technical and Vocational Education, Senator Bato Dela Rosa, for a job well done in taking the lead in shepherding this notable measure.

I fully agree with the principal sponsor of this measure, Senator Dela Rosa when he quote Miguel De Cervantes during the first committee hearing of the bill: "To be prepared is half of the victory".

Totoo po ito, walang nagtatagumpay sa anumang bagay nang walang paghahanda.

I am one in acknowledging the vital role of our youth not only in nation building but also in defending and serving our country in times of disasters, calamities, and emergencies, man-made or not.

With the passage of this proposed measure, the Basic ROTC program is institutionalized as mandatory for all students in higher education institutions and technical vocational institutions. In addition to this, the measure aims to increase of our pool of reservists that can be tapped during emergencies.

Naiintindihan ko ang pag-aalinlangan at pangamba ng ilan nating mga kababayan sa pagbabalik ng ROTC dahil sa mga hindi magandang pangyayari noon. We do not discount these unscrupulous and vile deeds with the pushing of this measure. What we want to stress and highlight is the good purpose, objectives and intention of this measure. More importantly, we trust this august chamber that whatever version we will approve on 3rd and final reading, our utmost consideration will be the safety and security of our youth.

Section 5 of the bill provides that the mandatory Basic ROTC Program aims to provide basic military and police training in order to support the law enforcement strategy of the government for national defense preparedness and civil military operations; to boost and strengthen the ethics of service, patriotism, nationalism, volunteerism and service to others; and to train our students in order to support in disaster response operations, search and rescue and relief operations.

Walang masamang intension ang panukalang batas na ito kundi para sa mabuting kapakanan ng ating bansa. Huwag po nating kalimutan na mismong ang ating Saligang Batas ang nagmandato na himukin ang ating kabataan na maging makabayan at maging matulungin sa kapwa.

As we are coming closer in passing this proposed measure, I am hopeful that after all the debates, we can all come to an agreement that love for country will always remain supreme in our hearts. At the end of the day, we are all Filipinos.

REMARK OF SENATE PRESIDENT ZUBIRI

Senate President Zubiri stated that he was also a product of the ROTC program of UP and that he learned a lot about discipline and love for the country, aside from the military training. He said that he is what he is now because of the two years training in the ROTC.

COSPONSORSHIP SPEECH OF SENATOR GATCHALIAN

In cosponsoring Senate Bill No. 2034, Senator Gatchalian delivered the following speech:

Discipline is a fundamental attribute that our youth must acquire as the future leaders of our nation. The revival of the Mandatory Basic ROTC Program and the Voluntary Advance ROTC Program will instill such discipline in our youth through the reinforcement of leadership, camaraderie, and sacrifice for the realization of our nation's vision and share of that objectives towards peace and progress. In fact, it was in the Sixteenth Congress when our lobbying effort



to reinstate basic military and officer training for our tertiary students began when we filed House Bill No. 2338, while I was still a member of the House of Representatives.

Sharing the same vision up to now, it is my goal to provide our youth with the appropriate training to ensure their readiness to respond to the call of service. Here in the Senate, the original proposal of this Representation sought to reinstate ROTC program in the senior high school level. However, due to the following intervening events and circumstances, mandating the basic ROTC program at the tertiary level would be the most viable track for this proposal.

First of all, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused learning loss among our learners. Learning recovery such as through streamlining, the basic education curriculum should be the top priority of the basic education sector. Secondly, as the country is reeling from the negative effects of the economy due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the cost implications of basic ROTC program in senior high school are undesirable based on the estimates provided by the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the Department of Education. The total cost to fully implement the basic ROTC program in senior high school on a national scale in the first year alone would amount to P9.3 billion. And lastly, a substantial number of senior high school graduates will be captured under the basic ROTC program at the tertiary level.

In the past four years on average, about 81% of those who graduate senior high school proceeded to enroll in college. Given this context, I stand today to cosponsor Senate Bill No. 2034, also known as the Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) Act, which seeks to reinstitutionalize the mandatory basic ROTC program on all public and private universities, colleges, vocational schools, and other tertiary education institutions. The ROTC Act will be instrumental in raising student's awareness on the importance of civic duty, patriotism, and most of all discipline in building a prosperous and progressive nation.

In a nutshell, the program will emphasize the youth's critical role in national-building while also promoting and protecting their holistic well-being. One of the objectives of the program is to train students in basic military training. In critical times when we need to produce the needed workforce, it is important that our youth receive such training for national defense readiness, civil military operations, and law enforcement.

The benefits of the ROTC program also go far beyond basic military training. Our archipelagic nation lies in the path of tropical storms from the world's largest ocean and is also situated in the so-called ring of fire. This makes our country vulnerable to catastrophes like typhoons, earthquake, and volcanic eruptions. According to the World Risk Index 2022, the Philippine ranked first in the world in risk among 193 countries worldwide. With this reality, there is definitely a need to cultivate community crisis managers and leaders that can provide practical and applicable knowledge and skills necessary for survival and resilience. As such, the ROTC program will cover the mechanisms to prepare during actual disaster respond operations on needs assessments, improve skills for search, rescue and relief operations, and early recovery activities.

There is no way of knowing what sort of unexpected events or catastrophes may occur in the future. We do know, however, that certain events have tested the readiness of our nation. A super typhoon like *Yolanda*, which hit our country and caused damage to nearly 1.5 million homes and killed more than 6,000 people, is one such example. Apart from this, we can also recall how super *Typhoon Odette* impacted about 11 million people and resulted in over 400 deaths. More lives lost due to lack of preparedness simply cannot be tolerated. The arrival of the ROTC program will open doors and opportunities to our youth to manifest and realize their desire to make positive and proactive change in our nation. By helping them reach their full potential, we can strengthen our country's ability to produce the workforce it needs in times of crisis such as calamities, disasters and wars.

This Representation is also highly conscious of safeguarding concerns with the ROTC program. For the record, it cannot be overstated how the subcommittee has already contemplated putting up measures to safeguard students from hazing, corruption and other forms of abuse ever since we first filed this measure. In particular, the provisions of the "Anti-Hazing Act of 2018" and the "Anti-Graft and Corrupt Practices Act" will be adopted in the implementation of this Act.

Further, every ROTC unit will also have an independent investigative body known as the ROTC Grievance Board to be set up to formulate a system and prescribe a process that promotes and encourages the reporting of any incident of hazing, violence, abuse, and corruption. In a broader scope, a National Grievance and Monitoring Committee will also be established to



guarantee that the law is being carried out as intended, that training is being administered properly, and that there is no room for any form of abuse.

Truth be told, my experience as a reserve officer has allowed me to further deepen my commitment to public service through the inculcated values and principles. By carrying out the ethics of service, patriotism and nationalism, this Representation has become more driven to fulfilling the ultimate duty of serving our nation and our fellow Filipinos. Now, it is up to us to help the next generation reach their full potential by passing this significant measure.

Sa ating mga kabataan: panahon na upang mas maitanim sa inyong puso at isipan ang pagmamahal sa ating bayan at disiplina. Gamitin ninyo ang inyong lakas bilang isang kolektibong puwersa sa pagsulong tungo sa kaunlaran ng ating bansa. Dahil kung hind ngayon, kailan pa tayo magiging handa sa pagharap sa mga paparating na hamon.

Lastly, allow me to express my gratitude to the sponsor of this bill, Sen. Ronald "Bato" dela Rosa, and to my fellow coauthors—Sen. Joseph Victor "JV" G. Ejercito, Sen. Jinggoy Ejercito Estrada, Sen. Imee Marcos, Sen. Robinhood C. Padilla, and Sen. Francis "Tol" N. Tolentino, for their keen insights in drafting this important measure.

SUSPENSION OF CONSIDERATION OF SENATE BILL NO. 2034

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

COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIPS

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body elected the following senators as members of the Joint Congressional Energy Commission on the Electric Power Industry Reform Act of 2001 (EPIRA) Law, as amended by Republic Act No. 11571 (the JCEC Enhancement Act): Senator Tulfo as the chairperson; Senator Gatchalian as vice chairperson; and Senators Dela Rosa, Lapid, Escudero and Angara on the part of the Majority, and Senator Hontiveros on the part of the Minority as members.

CONFERENCE COMMITTEE REPORT ON SENATE BILL NO. 1850 AND HOUSE BILL NO. 6336

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body considered the Conference Committee Report on the disagreeing provisions of Senate Bill No. 1850, entitled

AN ACT EMANCIPATING AGRARIAN REFORM BENEFICIARIES FROM THE
DEBT BURDEN ARISING FROM THE AWARD OF AGRICULTURAL LANDS
UNDER THE COMPREHENSIVE AGRARIAN REFORM PROGRAM AND FOR
OTHER PURPOSES,

and House Bill No. 6336

AN ACT EMANCIPATING AGRARIAN REFORM BENEFICIARIES FROM
FINANCIAL BURDEN BY CONDONING UNPAID AMORTIZATIONS AND
INTERESTS AND EXEMPTING PAYMENT OF ESTATE TAX ON AGRI-
CULTURAL LANDS AWARDED UNDER THE COMPREHENSIVE AGRARIAN
REFORM PROGRAM.

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

REPORT OF SENATOR VILLAR (C)

On behalf of the Senate panel to the bicameral conference committee, composed of Senators Marcos and Hontiveros, on the disagreeing provisions of Senate Bill No. 1850 and House Bill No. 6336 or the New Agrarian Emancipation Act, Senator Villar (C) reported the successful outcome of the bicameral conference, to wit:

1. The Conference Committee agreed to adopt the Senate version as the working draft of the discussion.
2. The short title of the House version was adopted as Section 1 of the consolidated bill.
3. The phrase "Indebted to the government as of December 31, 2022" in Sections 1, 2, and 3 of the Senate version was replaced with the phrase INDEBTED TO THE GOVERNMENT AS OF THE EFFECTIVITY OF THIS ACT.
4. Section 1 provides for the list to be submitted by LANDBANK and the Department of Agrarian Reform within the three-year period from the effectivity of this Act. Such list shall come from the collective CLOAs which shall be processed within the three-year period.
5. The title of the House version was adopted with modification by the addition of the phrase "all principal loans."

We acknowledge the work of the bicameral members in the Senate and the House of Representatives and, of course, the Department of Agrarian Reform Secretary Estralla and staff.

I move that the bicameral conference committee report be ratified by this Body.

JOINT EXPLANATION OF THE CONFERENCE COMMITTEE

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Joint Explanation of the Conference Committee on the disagreeing provisions of Senate Bill No. 1850 and House Bill No. 6336 was deemed read and inserted into the *Journal and Record of the Senate*. (See Annex B)

APPROVAL OF THE CONFERENCE COMMITTEE REPORT

Submitted to a vote, there being no objection, the Conference Committee Report on the disagreeing provisions on Senate Bill No. 1850 and House Bill No. 6336 was approved by the Body.

EXPLANATION OF VOTE BY SENATOR HONTIVEROS

Senator Hontiveros explained her affirmative vote, to wit:

I support in principle the bill and its objectives, and while I do, I wish to put on record my position already expressed earlier, that there should be no distinction between CLOAs granted before the passage of this law and CLOAs granted after. *Sana po lahat ng CLOA beneficiaries ay libre na ang lupa sa ilalim ng repormang panakahan. Hindi naman po kasi nila kasalanan na delayed ang pag-release ng CLOA nila.*

Secondly, I hope that this measure is accompanied by support services for our farmers. My fear is that this might lead to the unintended consequence of farmers being allowed to sell their lands much more easily because there is no more lien or indebtedness holding them back.

Therefore, I urge our implementers to craft the IRR taking into account these concerns and ensuring that there are still meaningful safeguards against land selling.

Panghuli po, the goal of agrarian reform is not just land sovereignty but food security. I hope that incentives will be given for these lands to remain agricultural so they will continue to be cultivated and produce food for all of us. *Ano't anupaman*, this is a positive development for our agrarian reform beneficiaries and I congratulate our sponsor for its passage.

SUSPENSION OF SESSION

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, the session was suspended.

It was 6:08 p.m.



RESUMPTION OF SESSION

At 6:08 p.m., the session was resumed.

COMMITTEE REPORT NO. 60 ON SENATE BILL NO. 1615

(Continuation)

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body resumed consideration, on Second Reading, of Senate Bill No. 1615 (Committee Report No. 60), entitled

**AN ACT RECOGNIZING THE MUNICIPALITY OF BALER IN THE PROVINCE
OF AURORA AS THE "BIRTHPLACE OF PHILIPPINE SURFING."**

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

Thereupon, the Chair recognized Senator Angara, sponsor of the measure, and Senator Pimentel for his interpellation.

INTERPELLATION OF SENATOR PIMENTEL

Asked by Senator Pimentel if the bill was the first to claim that a locality was the "birthplace" of something, Senator Angara cited that previous Congresses had passed laws declaring certain places in the Philippines as "Abaca Capital," "Chocolate Capital," "Marching Band Capital," "Pilgrimage Capital," "Carving Capital," and "Rodeo Capital," among others.

As to the documents supporting that the Municipality of Baler in the Province of Aurora was the birthplace of Philippine surfing, Senator Angara said that as mentioned in his sponsorship speech, there was a mix of facts, testimonies, and documentary evidence showing that in the 1980s, the Philippines fielded to sporting competitions a surfing team sourced from the town of Baler. He also noted the account of an American surfer living in Subic Bay, who used to surf in Baler in 1969, and the fact that it was the location of the famous film "Apocalypse Now."

On whether there was no other place in the Philippines claiming to be the birthplace of surfing, Senator Angara stated that based on research, the time when surfing originated in the town of Baler predated other claims since surfing in Catanduanes began in 1979; Siargao and La Union in the 1980s; and Zambales in the late 1990s or early 2000s, according to Quiksilver Surf School's manager and coach. However, Senator Angara stated that nothing would prevent future Congresses from repealing the measure under consideration. In this connection, he affirmed that other provinces or municipalities could apply for the title "Surfing Capital of the Philippines," in fact, the House of Representatives passed bills declaring Camarines Norte as the Surfing Capital in the Bicol Region, and La Union as the Surfing Capital of the Northern Philippines, although such were not approved in the Senate in the past Congress.

Senate President Zubiri surmised that the measure was not claiming that the Municipality of Baler was the only surfing capital, to which Senator Angara replied in the affirmative, saying that there were many other beautiful surfing spots nationwide, like Siargao, Daet in Camarines Norte, Calicoan Island in Eastern Samar, Zambales, Pagudpud in Ilocos Norte, and Lanuza in Surigao del Sur. Since surfing is seasonal, he noted that there are months when waves in certain places are not as conducive to surfing as in Baler, so surfers transfer to other surfing circuits during such months. He agreed with Senate President Zubiri that surfing conditions depend on trade winds and season, *amihan* (Northeast monsoon) or *Habagat* (Southwest monsoon).

On Senator Pimentel's query as to the benefits of being conferred the title "Birthplace of Philippine Surfing," Senator Angara explained that it would give positive publicity and good

marketing for the province. He stated that for two years, there were hardly any tourists in the province due to pandemic policies being implemented by the local government; hence, the locals' livelihood not just in Baler but also in seven other towns were really affected. He also disclosed that even the hotel owned by his family had to lay off 120 out of 200 employees, which situation was also experienced by hundreds of establishments in Baler. But he confirmed that the title would place a seal of official approval to the claim that Baler was truly the birthplace of Philippine surfing.

Asked if other places could no longer use the same title, Senator Angara said that it could still be used by other LGUs since there would be no penal sanction for using the title except that from the people's view, Baler's claim would have greater weight with the passage of the law.

Thereafter, Senator Angara invited the senators to attend the Philippine-Spanish Friendship Day in Baler on June 30.

Senate President Zubiri remarked that it would be a welcoming attitude if the senators would propose measures that support countryside development and promote tourism which gives more income for micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) all over the country.

TERMINATION OF THE PERIOD OF INTERPELLATIONS

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

COMMITTEE AMENDMENT

On page 1, as proposed by Senator Angara, there being no objection, the Body approved the insertion of a new Section 3, which reads:

SEC. 3. *REPEALING CLAUSE.* – ALL OTHER LAWS, ACTS, PRESIDENTIAL DECREES, EXECUTIVE ORDERS, PRESIDENTIAL PROCLAMATIONS, ISSUANCES, RULES AND REGULATIONS, OR PARTS THEREOF WHICH ARE CONTRARY TO OR INCONSISTENT WITH ANY OF THE PROVISIONS OF THIS ACT ARE HEREBY REPEALED, AMENDED, OR MODIFIED ACCORDINGLY.;

and to renumber 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.

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 SENATE BILL NO. 1615 ON SECOND READING

Submitted to a vote, there being no objection, Senate Bill No. 1615 was approved on Second Reading, subject to style.

SUSPENSION OF CONSIDERATION OF SENATE BILL NO. 1615

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 6:25 p.m.

RESUMPTION OF SESSION

At 6:26 p.m., the session was resumed.

SPECIAL ORDER

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body approved the transfer of Committee Report No. 57 on Senate Bill No. 2019 from the Calendar for Ordinary Business to the Calendar for Special Orders.

COMMITTEE REPORT NO. 57 ON SENATE BILL NO. 2019

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body considered, on Second Reading, Senate Bill No. 2019 (Committee Report No. 57), entitled

**AN ACT INSTITUTING POLICIES FOR THE PROTECTION AND WELFARE
OF CAREGIVERS IN THE PRACTICE OF THEIR PROFESSION.**

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 Estrada for the sponsorship.

SPONSORSHIP SPEECH OF SENATOR ESTRADA

In sponsoring Senate Bill No. 2019, Senator Estrada delivered the following speech:

I am honored to sponsor Senate Bill No. 2019, entitled "An Act Instituting Policies for the Protection and Welfare of Caregivers in the Practice of their Profession," under Committee Report No. 57.

This substitute bill is a consolidation of the bills filed by Senators Legarda, Angara, Tolentino, Revilla, and yours truly, taking into consideration House Bill No. 227.

Your Committee on Labor, Employment and Human Resources Development conducted the committee hearing on December 12, 2022, the Technical Working Group meeting last February 22, and another consultative meeting last March 2.

We have worked closely with the Department of Labor and Employment and (DOLE) through the Bureau of Local Employment (BLE) and the Bureau of Working Conditions (BWC), and the Technical Education, Skills and Development Authority (TESDA) along with the Department of Migrant Workers (DMW).

We have also coordinated with various organizations of caregivers such as the Caregiver of the Philippines Association Incorporated (CPAI) and the Philippine Caregivers Association-



Alliance of Health Workers (PCA-AHW), a private employment agency, the EED-EDC Elderly Care Services, the Employers' Confederation of the Philippines (ECOP), the Philippine Nurses Association (PNA), along with other stakeholders, in crafting a finer and better version of this proposed measure.

With the passage of our Caregivers' Welfare Act, we intend:

1. To cover all duly certified caregivers employed in private homes, nursing or care facilities, other residential settings, and those employed by private employment agencies;
2. To provide an inclusive and official definition as to who a caregiver is, as well as their duties and responsibilities;
3. To formalize the working arrangement between the caregivers and employers by mandating a notarized contract which shall include, among others, duties and responsibilities of the caregiver, period of employment, work arrangement, and compensation;
4. To provide that the minimum hours of work of a caregiver is eight (8) hours and any work rendered in excess of this will be paid as overtime. This is in compliance to the basic standards set forth in the Labor Code of the Philippines.

This is also to address the current and actual practice where caregivers are working for a minimum of twelve (12) hours. At present, a caregiver's salary is determined by the severity of the client's case. For ambulatory and ordinary cases—*iyon pong nakakalakad naman ang pasyente, ang actual rate po ng ating caregiver ay hindi bababa sa walong daang piso (P800) para sa labindalawang (12) oras ng trabaho.*

5. To grant thirteenth (13th) month pay to our caregivers who have rendered a minimum of one (1) month service;
6. To entitle caregivers who have rendered a minimum of one (1) year in service with service incentive leave of at least five (5) days with pay;
7. To entitle our caregivers to the benefits of SSS, PhilHealth, and PAG-IBIG;
8. To protect our caregivers, hired through private employment agencies, by defining the responsibilities of these agencies;
9. To establish an official registry of Filipino caregivers; and
10. To impose penalties for the issuance of fake certificate, clearance, or any other document for purposes of fulfilling the requirements under this bill.

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

According to the record of TESDA, from 2017 up to February 28, 2023, there are 145,342 Filipinos certified in caregiving. *Ito lamang po iyong mga caregiver na may newly-issued National Certificate II. Wala pa po sa datos na ito iyong mga licensed health care professional na nagtrabaho bilang caregivers.* From this, we can infer that we have more than a hundred thousand Filipino families dependent on the income derived from the practice and profession of caregiving.

To emphasize the importance of this measure, it will be noteworthy to look at the realities of a global ageing population. According to the World Health Organization:

1. All countries face major challenges to ensure that their health and social systems are ready to make the most of this demographic shift;
2. By 2050, 80% of older people will be living in low and middle income countries, *at makikinabang po ang Pilipinas dito;*
3. The pace of population ageing is much faster than in the past;
4. In 2020, the number of people aged 60 years and older outnumbered children younger than five years;
5. Between 2015 and 2050, the proportion of the world's population over 60 years will nearly double from 12% to 22%.

Dito po sa atin, according to the PSA Census of Population and Housing conducted in 2020, senior citizens constitute 8.5% of the household population and that there are 9.22 million Filipinos ages 60 years and above.

We are already aware that there has been a constant demand for Filipino caregivers abroad. *Dahil mahusay, magalang, mapagmahal, at may malasakit ang "alagang Pinoy," maraming bansa ang mas pinapaboran ang mga Pinoy caregivers, gaya ng preference nila sa mga Pinoy nurses. May mga Filipino nurse na nga rin po tayo na nagke-caregiving.*

We must, therefore, endeavor to institute policies in the practice of caregiving whose standards of professional service is excellent and globally competitive.

As pointed out, the industry of caregiving has already emerged as a viable option for Filipinos, not only for migrant workers, but for local workers as well.

The Philippines is already positioning itself as a top destination hub for retiring foreigners. Because of lower costs of living in the Philippines and with English as our secondary language, along with other factors, we might be competing against foreign retirees transferring residence here. In the not so distant future, we might find ourselves with a shortage of caregivers to take care of our children, our elders, and our loved ones with special needs.

As we recognize and act on the need to protect the rights of our caregivers toward decent employment and income, we also institutionalize a policy of protecting them against abuse, harassment, violence, and economic exploitation.

We need to create a favorable working environment conducive and supportive to the welfare and interests of our caregivers. We are trying to establish an alternative choice for our caregivers where they are not forced to work overseas, endure the pain of being away from their families and loved ones, and take the many risks of working and living abroad.

With the passage of this Caregivers' Welfare Act, we give due recognition to the important role of our caregivers in national development.

Panahon na po upang alagaan natin ang ating mga tagapag-alaga at maprotektahan ang sektor ng ating mga caregiver. I enjoin all your help and support in passing our Caregivers' Welfare Act this Nineteenth Congress.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR VILLANUEVA

Senator Villanueva stated that Senators Angara, Revilla, Go, and Legarda would submit their cosponsorship speeches on Senate Bill No. 2019 for insertion into the *Journal and Record of the Senate*.

In response, Senator Legarda, being the principal author of the bill, expressed her gratitude to the sponsor, Senator Estrada, for giving priority to the measure. Additionally, she stated that she had filed the bill in previous Congresses as well.

COSPONSORSHIP SPEECHES

Pursuant to the manifestation of Senator Villanueva, following are the cosponsorship speeches on Senate Bill No. 2019:

By Senator Angara

Magandang hapon, Ginoong Pangulo at sa lahat ng ating mga kasamahan sa plenaryo. Tumatayo po tayo ngayon para sumuporta kina Senate Pro Tempore Loren Legarda at kay Labor Committee Chair Senator Jinggoy Estrada sa pagtulak sa isang panukalang batas na tiyak na mangangalaga at sisiguro sa kaligtasan at kapakanan ng ating mga caregivers.

Matatandaan po na noong Oktubre 2019 ay isinulong po ng inyong lingkod ang katulad na panukalang batas na isinailalim sa Senate Committee on Labor, Employment and Human Resources Development. Kahalintulad na panukala rin ang inaprubahan ng Mababang Kapulungan noong taong 2020, kung saan, sa naturang taon, ayon sa Department of Labor and Employment ay tumaas ang pangangailangan ng home-based caregivers sa bansa.



Our caregivers, according to a 2010 study by Japanese researchers, are the most sought caregivers compared to our neighboring overseas workers of the same profession. The main reason: our cultural values. We are known for our hospitality, endearment, hard work, high respect to the elders and of course, our 'pakikisama' as noted by the study.

Kung sa ibayong dagat nga ay mas ginugusto nila ang mga Filipino caregivers, dapat, mas mahalín at mas pahalagahan natin sila dito mismo sa atin. At ito po ang isinusulong ng panukalang ito – ang pagpapatupad ng mga alituntuning titiyak na hindi magdaranas ng anumang pagmamalupit, pang-aabuso, panganib at iba pang suliranin ang ating caregivers sa kanilang mga pinapasukan dito sa ating bansa.

As I have mentioned earlier, our caregivers are the most preferred among their peers because of their deep affection to their wards of any age. They treat them not only as their clients or patients but their own "alagas." They give their all even if it means sacrificing their own health.

Despite this, there are instances where these caregivers are subjected to abuses. Our caregivers are human beings who have all the right to be protected from any form of harm or abuse.

Sa ilalim ng panukalang ito, binigyang-diin ang mahahalagang punto tulad ng pagkakaroon ng kontrata sa pagitan ng caregiver at ng kanyang employer. Dito, malinaw na nakasaad ang detalyadong trabaho ng isang caregiver; ang kanyang mga matatanggap na kompensasyon; ang mga pinapayagang deductions sa kanyang sweldo; ang kabuuang oras ng kanyang trabaho; mga araw na maaari siyang magpahinga o allowable leaves; board, lodging at medical attention. Napapaloob din dito ang iba pa nilang mga benepisyo, termination of employment at iba pang mga usaping legal na may kaugnayan sa kanilang trabaho.

Nililina din ng panukalang batas, ang sakop na trabaho ng ating caregivers tulad ng pagbibigay ng personal care support at iba pang tulong sa kanyang ward. Our proposed measure clarifies that a caregivers' work includes providing assistance to clients, helping them with their daily activities and mobility restrictions, providing basic health-related services, preparing food, accompanying clients to appointments and errands, assisting in housekeeping tasks and many more.

Sakali namang nais makasiguro ng isang employer na hindi kuwestiyonable ang katauhan ng kukuning caregiver, ayon pa rin sa panukalang batas na ito, maaari niyang atasan ang aplikante na magbigay sa kanya ng kopya ng national certificate galing sa TESDA; caregiver's training certificate mula sa TESDA at iba pang accredited school or institution; medical or health certificate; NBI, police at barangay clearance.

Kung mapatutunayan namang peke ang mga iprepresentang dokumento ng isang aplikanteng caregiver, base pa rin sa iniaatas ng panukalang ito, siya at ang lahat ng tumulong sa kanya sa tiwaling paraan ay maaaring makasuhan ng falsification of public document sa ilalim ng Revised Penal Code at iba pang batas na sumasakop dito.

The bill also outlines how a caregiver's contract ends. Neither the caregiver nor the employer can terminate the contract before the expiration of term except in certain cases like abuse, maltreatment, disobedience and neglect of duty. However, under the bill, both parties may mutually agree to pre-terminate the contract of employment. Unjustly dismissed caregivers are entitled to paid compensation plus the equivalent of 15 days of work by way of indemnity.

Filipino caregivers are evidently very empathic and very patient with their charge. Not only do they provide mobility assistance or monitor their client's medicine schedules, they also provide emotional support, companionship, and even friendship.

Hindi po biro ang makisama, makisimpatya at magtaguyod ng isang indibidwal na kahit hindi mo kadugo ay kailangan mong bigyan ng pansin, atensyon at pagmamahal.

Kaya't sa pamamagitan po ng panukalang ito, sana po'y mabigyan natin ng karampatang pangangalaga at proteksyon ang ating mga caregiver. Tayo po'y umaasa na maipapasa ang panukalang ito sa lalong madaling panahon. Marami pong salamat.

By Senator Revilla

We stand here for every Filipino caregiver in the country that deserves not only a pat on the back for their invaluable contribution to society and our economy, but more importantly, protection against abuse, harassment, violence, and economic exploitation.



The Filipino caregivers are undoubtedly among the best in the world. We are known for our warmth and genuine concern. *Hindi natin maitatanggi ang kalidad ng kalinga mula sa ating mga Filipino caregivers. Kung kaya't habang sila ay kinikilala ng mundo sa nasabing kagalingan, nararapat lamang na ating bigyan ng pansin ang mga caregivers sa mismong bansa natin.*

Tumataas ang bilang ng populasyon na nangangailangan ng kalinga mula sa mga caregivers—dito man sa ating bansa o sa ibang bansa. Their numbers continue to rise. And although this measure is beyond statistics, it is the recognition of the quality of care that is compassionately reliable and exceptionally kind.

Wika nga nila, saan mang sulok ng mundo, subok na ang mga Pilipino hindi lamang sa husay, ngunit lalo na sa hindi mapapantayang kalinga at malasakit. They truly epitomize the "care" in caregivers. Echoing the iconic 2018 Filipino Film "Caregiver," they do not only care about their jobs, they care about their patients. Hindi nila basta ginagawa ang kanilang trabaho dahil lang tungkulin nila ito, ngunit higit pa dito ay dahil inaalala nila talaga ang kalagayan at kapakanan ng kanilang mga inaalagaan.

I laud the Senator from San Juan, my *kumpare*, Sen. Jinggoy Estrada, for taking the lead in this timely measure. *Bigyan natin ng atensyon ang sektor na ito na labis ang kontribusyon sa lipunan. We are one with our colleagues in pushing for measures that will not only give them protection, but will ultimately empower them. Salamat din na kasama ang Senate Bill No. 1430 ng inyong lingkod sa inaral at tinalakay ng Komite.*

By Senator Go

I stand before this august Body to cosponsor the measure seeking to institutionalize policies for the protection and welfare of Filipino caregivers.

Kilala po ang ating mga kababayan sa mundo dahil sa kanilang dedikasyon at husay sa trabaho. Naka-marka sa ating pagka-Pilipino ang pagmamahal at malasakit sa iba, kahit sila ay hindi natin kadugo o kapamilya. Ganyan po magtrabaho ang ating mga caregivers, katumbas ng pagmamahal sa kanilang pamilya ang ibinubuhos nilang pangangalaga.

As the chairperson of the Committee on Health and Demography, I would like to take this opportunity to recognize the invaluable contribution of our Filipino caregivers to the healthcare industry.

Hindi natin maikakaila ang hirap ng trabaho ng isang caregiver. Madalas ay iniitwan nila ang kanilang mga pamilya upang suportahan ang kanilang mga mahal sa buhay. Kasama sa kanilang pagsusumikap sa buhay ang kalungkutang mawalay sa kanilang pamilya.

This proposed measure provides protection to locally-employed caregivers for decent employment and income and against abuse, violence, and economic exploitation. The bill mandates the execution of an employment contract between the employer and the caregiver and the grant of minimum wage that shall not be less than the applicable minimum wage in the region.

The bill also reiterated the grant of 13th month pay, leave benefits, and other benefits provided by law; and basic necessities for the caregiver. Protection is also provided in case of unjust dismissal or termination of service by the employer of the caregiver; and a mechanism on the settlement of disputes.

I congratulate the Committee on Labor, headed by its chairperson, Senator Jinggoy Estrada, for coming up with this measure that will give due recognition to caregivers for their service to our society.

On that note, with the indulgence of the sponsor, I request that I also be made coauthor of this important piece of legislation.

By Senator Legarda

It is an honor to cosponsor and principally author the "Caregivers Welfare Act."

All over the world, Filipinos are praised for their exceptional caregiving service. A study by Taiko Imamura and Isamu Saito of Rissho University, and Mariko Miyagi of Hosei University in



Japan, found that Filipino caregivers are highly sought after because they possess values deeply rooted in culture, such as respect for the elderly, close family ties, hard work, and *pakikisama*. These unique traits and cultural values are further enhanced by the various programs of the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA).

Even domestically, there is an emergence of caregivers tending to the elderly and the sick. Based on the Census of Population and Housing conducted in 2020, there are 9.5 million Filipinos between the ages of 60 years and above. Together with the increase in the number of children born with medical issues and prevalent illnesses, the demand for caregivers continues to grow.

In recognition of the vital work of our caregivers in nation-building, it is only fitting that the government recognizes their profession in order to protect their rights and promote their welfare by ensuring decent and safe working conditions.

This bill, therefore, seeks to institute policies for the protection and welfare of caregivers in the Philippines and enumerate the specific benefits that are due to them.

Bilang pagkilala sa papel ng caregivers, mahalagang maitatag ang kanilang hanay bilang mga propesyonal na manggagawa, upang maitaguyod ang kanilang mga karapatan at kapa-kanan tungo sa disentang trabaho. Higit pa rito, dapat mapangalagaan ang caregivers laban sa pang-aabuso, panliligalig, at karahasan. Ang mga iminungkahing panukalang ito ay dapat na maging batas upang mapanatili ang mga pamantayan para sa mga propesyonal na serbisyo ng mga Filipino caregiver.

For these reasons, I wish to associate myself with the sponsor, Sen. Jinggoy Estrada, for the passage of this measure.

SUSPENSION OF CONSIDERATION OF SENATE BILL NO. 2019

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

PRIVILEGE SPEECH OF SENATOR GATCHALIAN

Availing himself of the privilege hour, Senator Gatchalian urged the Body to carefully consider the social costs of Philippine Offshore Gaming Operations (POGO) in the country vis-à-vis its economic benefits.

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

The Philippine Offshore Gaming Operations (POGOs) has been a controversial sector of our economy over the past several years.

Originally promoted as a robust source of tax and licensing revenues for the government, the Philippine government has allowed offshore gaming to flourish within our borders. At the height of POGO operations in 2019, just before the pandemic struck, 63 licensed POGOs were operating in the country, employing more than 118,239 workers—20,956 were Filipinos while 97,283 were foreigners. Thus, at the height of the POGO boom, roughly four out of five POGO employees were foreigners.

Sa umpisa pa lamang, mas naging matimbang na ang mga banyagang manggagawa kaysa sa sarili nating mga kababayan dahil, base sa nabanggit kong pigura, di hamak na mas maraming Chinese nationals ang nakikinabang noon pa sa trabahong ibinibigay ng POGO na nag-o-operate sa bansa.

Between January 2018 and September 2022, the Philippine Amusement and Gaming Corporation, or PAGCOR, collected an estimated P20.64 billion in terms of offshore gaming operations revenue. Meanwhile, the Bureau of Internal Revenue reported tax collections from POGOs amounting to P24.97 billion between January 2018 and September 2022.

Based on these figures alone, it seems that the POGO industry has contributed to the Philippine economy. However, this is only part of the equation.



POGOs have also been linked to alarming criminal activities in the Philippines. Some of these crimes are violent in nature, such as kidnap for ransom or even murder. Other POGO-related crimes, such as money laundering, empower criminal syndicates to disrupt public order here at home and abroad.

Some have argued that the reputational damage resulting from POGO-related crimes had cost the Philippine economy more than it had gained from economic activity and government revenue generated by these enterprises.

The legality of POGO operations catering mostly to Chinese nationals has also at times strained our diplomatic relationship with China—a major regional ally and top Philippine trading partner.

Kung matatandaan natin, mismong China na noon ang humihimok sa atin na ipagbawal ang online gambling dito sa bansa, lalo na at mga kapwa rin nilang Chinese ang karamihan sa mga customer ng POGO, habang iligal sa kanilang bansa ang lahat ng uri ng online gambling.

Amid the conflicting data and passionate arguments for and against POGOs, a critical question arises: Do the economic benefits provided to the Philippines by POGOs outweigh the economic and social costs?

The Senate Committee on Ways and Means, jointly with the Committee on Public Order and Dangerous Drugs, conducted an inquiry in aid of legislation to answer this question. The inquiries were triggered by Proposed Senate Resolution Nos. 225, 227, and 229 authored by Majority Leader Joel Villanueva, this representation, and Sen. Grace Poe, respectively.

After four hearings, where government agencies, think tanks, and private sector stakeholders provided a wealth of testimony and research on the topic, the answer is clear—the costs of POGOs outweigh their benefits.

The Filipino people stand to lose more than they will gain from allowing POGOs to continue operating in the Philippines. In light of this, we recommend the permanent banning of offshore gaming operations in the Philippines.

The recommendation to ban POGOs is premised squarely on the detailed findings of the legislative inquiry, which are discussed in great detail in the Chairperson's Report submitted for consideration of this Body. For the convenience of this Body, I will synthesize and summarize the most important points of the report in this speech.

As the Chairperson's Report has been incorporated by reference in this speech, I respectfully request that the Chairperson's Report be included in the *Record* as an annex to this speech, pursuant to the second paragraph of Section 57, Rule 20, and Section 102, Rule 37 of the *Rules of the Senate*.

Now, on to the finding of the legislative inquiry.

For one, the POGO business model is inherently unstable due to the outsized foreign regulatory and political risks involved.

By triangulating POGO spending figures by currency and foreign national employment figures, the committee found substantial basis to conclude that a sizeable majority of customers placing bets through POGO operators are Chinese nationals.

At the height of POGO operations in 2019, before the pandemic, almost half of all bets placed through POGOs were in Chinese yuan. Meanwhile, 57.64% of POGO workers employed at the time, or 68,156 of the total 118,239, were Chinese. According to a statement of former PAGCOR CEO and Chairperson Andrea Domingo, these Chinese nationals were employed for their language skills, as they were responsible for communicating with their compatriots overseas who play POGO games through voice or video chat.

Using the currency and employment data as proxies, we can safely assume that Chinese nationals are the most prolific POGO consumers. This is problematic because gambling is illegal in China according to Article 303 of the Criminal Law of the People's Republic of China. The prohibition also covers online gaming websites and gambling agents as per the May 12, 2005 decision of the Supreme People's Court and the Supreme People's Procuratorate.

In essence, Chinese nationals are using offshore gaming operations based in the Philippines as a loophole to circumvent Chinese Criminal Law.



It is no surprise that the Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Philippines has released several public statements in relation to its citizens involved in gambling in the Philippines, on September 27, 2021, September 22, 2022, and October 11, 2022. The strongest statement was the most recent, when the spokesperson of the Chinese embassy said:

Crimes induced by and associated with POGO not only harms China's interest and China-Philippines relations, but also hurt the interests of the Philippines. It is therefore widely believed that social costs of POGO far outweigh its economic benefits to the Philippines in the long run; and POGO should be tackled from root so as to address the social ills in a sweeping manner.

I can imagine the Philippine government would react in a similar way if a foreign ally was allowing Filipinos to bet on prohibited games like *jueteng* or *e-sabong* through online casinos housed in another country.

The risks inherent to the POGO industry were well-summarized by the Philippine Institute for Development Studies in its position paper dated October 10, 2022, which stated:

POGO faces more than the usual business risks, making POGO-related investment inherently unstable, particularly if one views it against reported views and sentiments of the political leadership of the main source/partner country.

In addition, the POGO industry poses troubling social risks here in the Philippines. According to the report submitted by the Philippine National Police during the investigation, there were at least 102 POGO-related crimes reported within the period of January 1, 2017 and January 23, 2023. Three hundred sixteen people were victimized by these crimes. Of the vast majority of victims, 214 were Chinese, while 28 were Filipinos.

The most common crime reported in connection to the POGO industry was the heinous crime of kidnap-for-ransom, with 30 cases recorded during the five-year period. Fourteen cases of trafficking of persons were also recorded, along with 13 violations of the Access Device Regulation Act and 10 cases of kidnapping and serious illegal detention.

Saksi mismo ang ating mga kapulisan sa mga kinakasangkutang krimen ng POGO. Hindi na rin ito bago sa pandinig nating mga mambabatas. Sa katunayan, ang usaping ito ay ilang beses na ring natalakay sa Senado. Sa mga nagdaang pagdinig, naging saksi tayo mismo sa pagkakasangkot ng POGO sa iba't ibang krimen dito sa bansa.

According to a letter received on March 17, 2023 from PBGen. Jose S. Hidalgo Jr., the Regional Director of Police Region III, the PNP Anti-Kidnapping Group led an entrapment operation at the premises of POGO operator Lucky South 99 in Angeles City, Pampanga on September 14, 2022. This led to the rescue of Wu Jia Ming, a Chinese national, and 42 other foreign nationals. Arrested in this operation was Chen Yi Ben, a Chinese national, and human resource staff of Lucky South 99.

As a result, an information for kidnapping for ransom was filed against Chen Yi Ben and two other Chinese nationals still at-large—Qi Xi Chen and Hao Nan. An information for Qualified Human Trafficking in Persons was also filed against Chen Yi Ben and Gao Jie.

Meanwhile, in a letter dated March 9, 2023, the National Bureau of Investigation Director Atty. Medardo G. De Lemos revealed that the Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Philippines has filed on February 16, 2023 a request for assistance with the NBI to rescue a Chinese national, Cao Xialong, who is allegedly being illegally detained at the premises of Brickhartz Technology, Inc., a licensed POGO service provider, at ShuangMa Industrial Park in Bacoar, Cavite. According to the letter, NBI is still gathering leads to facilitate the rescue of this individual.

Brickhartz is the same POGO service provider implicated in a separate kidnapping and human trafficking case by Sen. Grace Poe in a privilege speech last December 2022.

Notably, Lucky South 99 and Brickhartz are licensed by the government to operate in the Philippines. In other words, it appears that legal POGOs are also involved in criminal activities in the Philippines, along with their illegal counterparts.

The POGO industry also appears to be a potent source of financial crime. In a study, the Anti-Money Laundering Council reported that POGOs and their service providers are highly vulnerable

to money laundering, given that financial transactions of internet-based casinos are generally remittance-based, and non-cash, regulators and authorities have limited access to their transactions, making POGO operations highly risky and susceptible to abuse.

This is backed up by the findings of compliance checks conducted by the AMLC on 27 POGOs between 2020 to 2022. The compliance of 20 of these entities with AMLC issuances was rated "grossly inadequate," one entity was rated as "vulnerable," and six entities were considered non-cooperative. AMLC revoked the registration of the six non-cooperative entities and posted their names online on April 21, 2022. We will return to this point later.

Meanwhile, data provided by the Bureau of Internal Revenue and PAGCOR also suggest that POGO operators are committing tax evasion.

Under the Tax Code, as amended by Republic Act No. 11590, POGOs must pay a five percent tax on all gross gaming revenue or receipts derived from their gaming operations. The same law allows PAGCOR to collect regulatory fees equivalent to two percent of gross gaming revenue.

According to the BIR, the indicative gross gaming revenue (GGR) of POGOs for the period January to September 22 was P32.5 billion, based on the amount remitted to them by licensed POGOs to satisfy the five percent gaming tax requirement. However, based on larger PAGCOR collection number from January to August 2022, the actual GGR appears to be P66.67 billion.

This implies that licensed POGOs underreported their gross gaming revenue by P34.2 billion during the eight-month period alone, resulting in unpaid taxes amounting to P1.7 billion due to under-declaration.

On this issue, the BIR said in its October 17, 2022 submission to the Committee on Ways and Means: "It seems that there is a discrepancy between the collection of the BIR and the PAGCOR. The numbers convey that indeed POGOs are not declaring their revenues properly to the BIR."

Napakalaking sampal naman ito sa mga kababayan natin. Kung sa mga maliliit na taxpayers napakahigpit ng paniningil, paano naman sa mga kumpanya ng POGO na bilyong piso ang hindi binabayaranang buwis? Hahayaan na lang ba natin silang makalusot sa pangil ng batas?

On this issue, we recommend that the Bureau of Internal Revenue be directed to review the tax liabilities of POGO licenses, service providers, and the embattled third-party auditor, and subsequently report to the Congressional Oversight Committee created under RA 8424, or the Tax Code, the action taken thereof, particularly on the amount that BIR was able to collect to fund priority development projects and programs in the GAA unprogrammed funds.

Moving on to another point, various government stakeholders such as the DOF have discussed the social costs of POGOs. Their continuing operations in the country pose a reputational risk that could dissuade foreign firms from investing in the Philippines, discourage foreign tourists from visiting our shores, and result in severe economic consequences for our country.

Kung ang Pilipinas ay patuloy nilang gagawing pugad ng kabi-kabilang krimen, walang duda na makakaapekto ito sa imahe ng ating bansa. Sino ba naman ang gaganahang mamuhunan sa isang bansa kung saan patuloy na umiiral ang kriminalidad tulad ng kidnapping-for-ransom and human trafficking?

The sentiments of our people on POGOs illustrate their reputational risks involved. In a November 27 to December 1, 2022 survey commissioned by my office from *Pulse Asia Research, Inc.*, respondents were asked whether POGOs are beneficial or harmful to the country.

Fifty-eight percent of respondents who are aware of POGOs said that they are somewhat harmful or extremely harmful to the country. Only 19% believe that POGOs are beneficial to the country.

It seems that POGOs are damaging the reputation of our country in the eyes of our very own citizens.

Ultimately, the merits of the POGO industry rest on whether the economic benefits provided outweigh the economic and social costs borne by the Filipino people due to their continuing

operation. After all, the promised economic benefits were the main selling points of POGO legalization during the previous policy discussions. In this regard, we can rely on the comprehensive cost-benefit analysis conducted by the Department of Finance as an empirical benchmark to weigh the merits of the POGO industry.

The partial direct and indirect economic costs produced by the POGO industry are valued by the DOF to be at P143.30 billion in 2021. Some of the more onerous costs include the estimated decrease in foreign direct investment due to crime amounting to P26.23 billion and a decrease in inbound tourism due to crime amounting to P28.62 billion.

In contrast, the direct and indirect economic benefits derived from POGOs, including tax revenue, real estate activities, consumer activities, and others, amounted to P134.9 billion in 2021. This is only 0.7% of the Gross Domestic Product. In terms of the amount of tax collected from POGOs compared to the total tax collection, POGOs contributed only 0.09% in 2018, 0.23% in 2019, 0.29% in 2020, 0.14% in 2021, and 0.21% for the months of January to September 2022.

Sa madaling salita, katiting lamang ang kitang naitaambag ng POGO sa ating ekonomiya. Kaya naman hindi sapat na dahilan para sabihing malaki ang mawawala sa ating ekonomiya kapag binuwag ang mga POGOs.

The net result of the cost-benefit analysis of the POGO industry, when comparing the economic benefits to the economic and social costs, is negative (-) P8.44 billion. In a nutshell, the DOF analysis shows that POGOs are actually costing our economy more than the benefits they generate, at an estimated ratio of 0.04% of GDP.

Meanwhile, the 2022 estimates from the National Economic and Development Authority suggest that the economic benefits of POGO are further declining. NEDA estimates that the Gross Value-Added (GVA) by POGOs to the economy in 2022 was P58.3 billion. This is only 0.26% of the country's Gross Domestic Product.

The numbers are clear: the costs of POGOs outweigh the benefits. This implies that banning POGOs will not have an adverse impact on the economy, even considering foregone tax and licensing revenues. In fact, banning POGOs may result in a net positive for our economy when taking into effect the potential benefits of improved investor and tourist confidence.

In summary, our conclusion is that the POGO industry has proven to be more of a liability than an asset to the Philippine economic and social order.

In line with this conclusion, this Representation formally recommends that the Executive department and its concerned agencies immediately ban POGO operations in the Philippines.

The Department of Labor and Employment is likewise urged to help the estimated 16,736 Filipino workers affected by the proposed closure of POGOs find work in other industries such as IT-BPO and manufacturing.

Sa mga kababayan nating nagtatrabaho sa mga POGO, huwag po kayong mag-alala kung mabuwag na ang POGO. May plano po ang gobyerno para sa inyo. Maglalagay tayo ng mekanismo upang matugunan ang mga mawawalan ng trabaho.

Lastly, our investigation has revealed serious lapses on the part of PAGCOR in fulfilling its mandate to regulate the POGO industry.

For one, PAGCOR has failed to develop an industry road map five years after the legalization of POGOs. PAGCOR does not even know how its own POGO third-party auditor operates. It does not know how Gross Gaming Revenue (GGR) is computed. It cannot even say that it is familiar with the business of offshore gaming, a business that it is expressly mandated by law to regulate for the benefit of the Filipino people.

Significantly, PAGCOR has also failed to act on the April 2022 request of the Anti-Money Laundering Council to revoke the gaming licenses of five POGOs deemed uncooperative with its issuances: MG Universal, Inner Strong, Smarc, new Wave, Shaw Global, and Winherld.

PAGCOR has likewise failed to act on reported POGO-related crimes. At the final committee hearing on this matter last January 23, PAGCOR admitted that it had yet to revoke the license of Brickhartz Technology, an accredited POGO service provider implicated in POGO-related crimes through the privilege speech of Senator Poe last December.

Five weeks after the ordeal had been exposed on the Senate Floor, PAGCOR has done nothing but impose a modest penalty of US\$10,000 dollars equivalent to P500,000 on the service providers. What is worse is that it appears that Brickhartz is still involved in kidnapping activities as late as this February, according to the March 9 letter of the NBI. And yet, Brickhartz is still accredited to operate in the POGO industry.

Clearly, PAGCOR'S dual purpose as both operator and regulator of gaming industries poses a clear conflict of interest. As an operator that seeks to maximize gaming profits, PAGCOR is incentivized to turn a blind eye to the failure of its licensees to comply with gaming regulations or even Philippine criminal laws. Therefore, it is evident that PAGCOR must be restructured to separate its dual functions as operator and regulator. This is necessary to avoid regulatory capture and uphold the interests of the State and the Filipino people.

Klarong-klaro na bigo ang PAGCOR sa mandato nitong pangasiwaan ang mga POGO. Huwag na sana nating hayaang magpatuloy pa ang kanilang mga kapalpakan.

As such, it is recommended that Congress pass legislation separating the functions of regulation and operation in PAGCOR's charter. It is recommended that a new entity be created to perform solely regulatory functions, such as authorization and licensing of games of chance and other forms of gambling. Meanwhile, PAGCOR will now function solely as a gaming operator.

The POGO experiment has failed to provide the promised economic benefits to the Filipino people. Instead, POGOs have created new avenues for crime and corruption, damaging our country's reputation among diplomatic allies, foreign investors, potential tourists, and even our own countrymen.

The data and evidence on hand all point to the same conclusion: Enough is enough. It is time to ban offshore gaming operations in the Philippines, once and for all.

Kung susumahin ang lahat ng mga ebidensiya at datos na naisiwalat na kaugnay sa operasyon ng POGO, lumalabas na puro perwisyo lamang at walang pakinabang sa bansa ang mga POGO. Panahon na para buwagin ito!

In line with the foregoing, I am submitting for consideration a Proposed Senate Resolution urging the Executive department to immediately ban all POGO operations in the country.

The resolution also contains other recommendations crafted from the legislative inquiry, such as providing DOLE assistance to affected Filipino POGO workers in finding alternative employment; the collection by BIR of the outstanding tax liabilities of POGO licensees, service providers, and the third-party auditor; and the cancellation of working visas and Alien Employment Permits issued to foreign POGO workers to facilitate their deportation back to their respective home countries.

I hope we can all join hands to do what needs to be done. It is game over for the POGO industry.

INQUIRY OF THE CHAIR

Asked by Senator Legarda whether Senator Gatchalian had already filed a resolution concerning POGO operations, Senator Villanueva replied that the senator was intending to do so.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR VILLANUEVA

Senator Villanueva associated himself with the privilege speech of Senator Gatchalian and thanked the latter for his invaluable efforts and hard work in bringing the problem to light.

He stated that he has been exerting efforts since 2016 to shed light on the societal costs associated with the proliferation of POGOs. He also disclosed that his prior investigations as former chairperson of the Committee on Labor, Employment and Human Resources Development, had yielded other discoveries, such as the Next Games Corp., an online gambling operator that employs around 1,546 foreign workers and only 11 Filipinos. He disclosed that their hearing also led to the investigation and subsequent arrest of Bureau of Immigration Commissioner Al Argosino and Michael Robles for receiving bribes.



He stated that the committee also learned that the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) had issued 115,652 Alien Employment Permits (AEPs) between 2015 and 2017, while the Bureau of Immigration issued 185,099 Special Working Permits (SWPs) from January to November 2018. He added that the findings led to the creation of the Inter-Agency Task Force to monitor foreign workers in the POGO industry and to declare that AEPs are mandatory for all foreign workers in the country. He recalled that it was Senator Legarda who chaired the Committee on Finance when his committee came up with the said provision in the General Appropriations Act (GAA).

He also disclosed that his office discovered that the BI's satellite office at the SM Aura mall issued SWPs within a day for an additional P5,000 fee, and that the applicant is not even given a receipt for it. Moreover, he noted that by multiplying the number of applicants the BI processed over a period of 11 months by the expedite fee of P5,000, erring BI officials might have earned a total of P900 million. He reported, however, that the BI leadership had taken action and relieved the involved personnel, which included some security guards.

He then recalled calling PAGCOR's attention in March of 2019 to the existing double standards in the issuance of gaming employment licenses. He stated that at the time, only non-online casino employees were required to obtain such a license, while POGO workers were not. He stated that as a result of the inquiry, PAGCOR has required POGO workers to secure the same license. He stated, however, that as of October 2022, only 75% of POGO workers have secured the license.

On the effect of POGO operations on the Philippine economy, Senator Villanueva said that according to the Department of Finance, the POGO sector only accounted for 0.03% of the country's GDP from 2021 to August of 2022, whereas the National Economic and Development Authority NEDA estimated the number to be between 0.28% and 0.34%.

He then called on the Chamber to take decisive action on state policies regarding POGOs, as he believed the industry did more harm than good to the country.


Relative thereto, he stated that he had filed Senate Bill No. 1281, also known as or the Anti-Online Gambling Act, which covers POGO operations. He then expressed his support for the measure which would put a stop to online gambling in the country.

INTERPELLATION OF SENATOR HONTIVEROS

At the outset, Senator Hontiveros expressed her support for Senator Gatchalian's recommendations and called for the permanent prohibition of offshore gaming operations in the country. She recalled that the matter came to light when the Senate Committee on Labor, Employment and Resources Development, then chaired by Senator Villanueva, conducted an investigation into tax evasion and illegal employment practices of the POGOs.

She further stated that since then, the Committee on Women, Children, Family Relations and Gender Equality has investigated the sector for POGO-related prostitution, illegal recruitment and detention, the "Pastillas Scam," human trafficking, and cryptocurrency fraud. She stated Senator Gatchalian's privilege speech was invaluable in the fight against the sector due to such issues.

Asked why the POGO business model was inherently unstable, Senator Gatchalian stated that, for one, China, the POGOs' primary revenue source, had been enacting policies to prevent its own citizens from gambling. He stated that Chinese law enforcement officers had informed him that, despite the rapidly-evolving technology employed by POGOs such as Virtual Private Networks (VPNs) that allow Chinese gamblers to be virtually invisible, Chinese authorities continue to enact laws to penalize Chinese nationals who bet, work, and invest in POGOs.



Moreover, he stated that he had learned from Chinese authorities that only individuals with a propensity to commit a crime, invest in and operate POGOs. He noted that historically, such gaming operators attempted to operate their businesses in China, but were forced to find offshore hosts when authorities cracked down on their illegal operations. He noted that they were the same personalities who established their businesses in the Philippines.

He further pointed out that it was during the committee hearings when they learned that incidents of kidnapping occurred even in licensed and PAGCOR-registered POGOs. In this regard, he stated that for the most part, PAGCOR's recognition of registered POGO companies' legitimacy was largely irrelevant.

Senator Hontiveros pointed out the irony in the fact that the Philippine government permitted POGO operations within its borders, despite the fact that the Chinese POGO companies themselves, their operations, and their clientele were considered criminals in their home country.

She also highlighted the significance of how technology helped POGO operators avoid detection by law enforcement authorities. Thus, she stated that it was no surprise that criminal activities such as kidnapping were also occurring in the country, given the operators' inherent propensity to commit crimes.

Asked to further elaborate on the notion that Chinese nationals are using POGOs as a loophole for illegal gambling, Senator Gatchalian cited Article 303 of the Chinese Criminal Code, which states that gambling is illegal and anyone who invests, works, or gambles in an online gambling platform is subject to imprisonment. He said that because of China's strict laws, online gambling operators have sought out jurisdictions with more flexible legal frameworks, such as the Philippines.

Relative thereto, he stated that when offshore gambling operators began entering the country, national government agencies such as the Department of Finance, the Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR), and Department of Justice (DOJ) held divergent views on how to tax POGOs. He added that only after the enactment of RA 11590 in 2021 that an official taxation regime governing POGOs was put in place.

Senator Hontiveros acknowledged the complexity of the phenomenon caused by POGOs and reaffirmed her support for the proposal to ban their operation in the country. She emphasized, however, the importance of the recommendation urging the Department of Labor and Employment to assist the more than 16,000 Filipinos employed in the POGO industry who would be impacted by such a ban.

Senator Gatchalian subsequently emphasized that the Philippines is the only country that has hosted offshore gaming operators. He pointed out that even Cambodia had already restricted online gaming because of the averse social effects the industry had on its people.

In conclusion, he recounted the Ambassador of Thailand's response to his question about why Thailand decided not to host POGOs. He said that according to the Thai ambassador, the Thai government had studied the industry and found out that the social cost of hosting POGOs was too high.

INTERPELLATION OF SENATOR PIMENTEL

Senator Pimentel noted that the committee's recommendation was for the Republic of the Philippines to immediately stop POGOs. He pointed out that as far as the Constitution is concerned, gambling is illegal in the Philippines unless authorized by law.



Senator Gatchalian stated that RA 11590 legalized POGOs, specified their operations and attendant entities or service providers, and provided a tax regime of 5% tax on gross gaming revenue to be collected by the BIR.

Senator Pimentel stated that by taxing the activity, the State impliedly recognized its validity or legality. He then inquired as to whether the speech was a call to repeal RA 11590. Senator Gatchalian replied in the affirmative. Senator Pimentel stated that repealing the law would be an outcome of the privilege speech, and that the Body should file a bill that would repeal it.

Senator Gatchalian stated that such legislation should specifically ban POGOs, which have been in existence since 2017, or prior to the law's enactment in 2021. He noted that the State did not know how to tax it or give it a personality at the time. He opined that the taxing scheme was the reason why it was enacted.

Senator Pimentel stated that it has become clear that the law did not make POGO lawful, and that the government was merely turning a blind eye to an illegal activity because the State's default position was that gambling is illegal, hence, there must be a law to authorize it.

Senator Gatchalian stated that when POGO first began, it was placed under PAGCOR, which was tasked with regulating all forms of gaming. He stated, however, that it did not know how to treat POGOs because they were offshore activities, despite the fact that they had service providers operating in the country, and the State did not know how to tax them. He stated that because it regulated the POGOs, PAGCOR charged the operators gaming fees.

Asked if the presidential decree that established PAGCOR anticipated online gambling, Senator Gatchalian stated that PAGCOR regulates all games of chance, regardless of form. He believed that when E.O. 13 was issued in 2017, POGOs were expressly assigned to PAGCOR to serve as its regulator because of the influx of said activities.

Senator Pimentel stated that a brick-and-mortar regulator, such as PAGCOR, was identified to regulate a new form of gaming, noting that in 2021 Congress passed a law that merely taxed POGOs. He concluded that there was no specific law enabling a new form of gambling like POGO.

Senator Gatchalian averred that under PD 1869, or the PAGCOR Charter, the agency was mandated to regulate, operate, authorize, and license games of chance, games of cards, games of numbers, particularly casino gaming in the Philippines. He believed that POGO was under the category of "games of chance," and hence, the EO was issued.

Senator Pimentel opined that, if the administration had been opposed to POGO, it would have argued that the PD never meant for the PAGCOR to be a regulator over games that did not yet exist.

Senator Gatchalian surmised that offshore gaming brought with it the promise that POGOs would be a huge revenue generator. He added that instead of challenging it in court, PAGCOR was made to govern it. He also recalled that both DOJ and DOF held divergent views on how to tax POGOs, which was why Congress devised its tax structure.

Senator Pimentel believed that, more than repealing RA 11590, it would be necessary to amend PD 1869 as well in order to make the case against POGOs airtight, not simply by banning but prohibiting it.

Senator Gatchalian stated that he would defer to the wisdom of the Body. Senator Pimentel stated that Senator Gatchalian's responses and input on the relevant statutes led him to the conclusion that the social costs of POGOs outweighed their economic benefits.

Regarding the economic benefits from POGOs, Senator Gatchalian stated that, according to the DOF, the government would spend P143 billion on reputational risk in the form of decreased inbound tourists and FDIs, multiplied several times. He stated that a tourist who foregoes visiting the country due to its negative reputation has a multiplier effect.

Senator Hontiveros interjected, saying that some of the social costs have tangible impact on foreign direct investments, crime, tourism, and corruption perception. She lamented, however, that measuring the social cost of prostitution, human trafficking, illegal recruitment, and detention of foreign women in the Philippines, as revealed and recommended by the Committee on Women, Children, Family Relations and Gender Equality, was difficult.

Senator Gatchalian stated that, according to the DOF, the country gained P134 billion in 2021, and that the direct benefits are corporate income tax from POGOs and personal consumption and income tax from their employees. He pointed out, however, that deducting the cost from the benefit would result in negative P8 billion.

Senator Pimentel stated that, while he does not need a number for social costs, it had been established that, despite inadequate data, they are significantly more than the economic benefit. He stated that he felt compelled to interfere and interpellate because it pained him to see that those involved in POGOs have turned the Philippines into their playground. He emphasized that the cohorts could not perpetrate crime in their country because their laws were strict; however, they are liberated, protected, and powerful in the Philippines. He stated that the POGO is an act of human slavery, and that its victims are their own nationalities, with the notion that they are not covered by Philippine laws and will not receive any assistance. He said that by tolerating POGOs, the government is endangering foreign guests and visitors because the country has become a haven for criminal activities, criminality has become ingrained in the system, and, in time, Filipinos could become victims when there are no more of their own to be utilized. He then stated his full support for the committee's position.

Senator Gatchalian agreed with Senator Pimentel that POGO operators are gradually infiltrating law enforcement agencies. He noted human-trafficking incidences involving illegal Chinese employees conniving with people from the Bureau of Immigration, as well as the *pastillas* scam, as revealed by Senator Hontiveros. He said that corrupt officials in enforcement have taken advantage of the POGO operators. He expressed concern that if the operators are successful in penetrating law enforcement authorities, it would be difficult to regulate them, as indicated by the investigation involving the Bureau of Immigration and other agencies. He recalled an occasion when the Chinese Embassy sought the NBI's assistance regarding one of its citizens who was being held against his will. He said that the incident was not mentioned in the media, but it occurred right under the government's nose. He urged the Body to act on the matter immediately while that situation was still manageable.

SUSPENSION OF SESSION

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, the session was suspended.

It was 7:46 p.m.

RESUMPTION OF SESSION

At 8:38 p.m., the session was resumed.

INTERPELLATION OF SENATOR PIMENTEL

(Continuation)

Senator Pimentel stated that on the last session day before the month-long adjournment



of session, it was important for the Body to discuss the findings of the well-written report and the competently handled investigation on the POGOs as it concerned the future of the country. He said that employment record of POGOs showed that 82% were mostly Chinese foreigners and 18%, or 16,000, were Filipinos. He surmised that the Chinese nationals most likely left their country of origin without securing employment visas and also most likely got their visas in the Philippines.

As to which agency was responsible in giving visas to them, Senator Gatchalian replied that it was the Bureau of Immigration. He recalled that the granting of visa upon arrival in the country used to be allowed but was already revoked. Despite the revocation, Senator Pimentel noted that thousands of foreigners were still working in POGOs. Senator Gatchalian clarified that it was the case in 2019 but that it dwindled in the succeeding years at about 40,000, 50% of which were foreigners and the other half were Filipinos. He said that the COVID-19 pandemic, the series of lockdowns, and travel restrictions into the country contributed to the decrease in the number of foreigner workers while the number of Filipino workers increased.

As to whether there had been an increase in the number of foreign workers given the easing of the COVID-19 restrictions, Senator Gatchalian replied that it was too early to say because travel and tourism only started to recover in early 2023. However, he said that he was anticipating that the number would eventually reach the pre-pandemic levels.

On another matter, Senator Pimentel suggested that the Body ask the PNP in the next budget cycle on the findings of the committee that allegedly, some PNP personnel were complacent with POGO-linked crime syndicates and were even in cahoots with them. Senator Gatchalian agreed, saying that the Body could also ask the PNP the status and updates of the filed cases of POGO-linked kidnap-for-ransom and serious illegal detention, as some of the persons involved still remained at-large.

Senator Pimentel said that the Body should also look into the policy of allowing policemen to be deployed as bodyguards of foreign owners of POGOs. He questioned how the POGO owners have enjoyed the privilege of having two, or even more, police security details who were paid by the Filipino taxpayers' money. He noted that some senators did not even have police security escorts detailed to them. Senator Gatchalian recalled that the topic of police security protection had been the sticking point among the senators in many committee hearings. He surmised that policemen were also lured to allow themselves to be assigned as security escorts because of the extra money they earn from the job.

As to whether AFP personnel were also assigned as security details of POGO executives and owners, Senator Gatchalian replied that he could not answer the question with certainty. Senator Pimentel said that he would be asking the same directly to the AFP itself in future hearings.

At this point, Senator Pimentel stated that the PAGCOR chairman and the president did not appear in the hearings of the Committee on Ways and Means on the investigations regarding the revenues generated from, and the social costs attributed to, the operations of POGOs. He suggested that the Body explore ways that would make PAGCOR's high-ranking officials attend Senate proceedings and investigations that involve them, particularly because two POGO-licensed entities, Brickhartz Technology, Inc. and Lucky South 99, were proven to have been involved in criminal activities. He said that the Senate had no chance to personally ask PAGCOR officials since the latter did not appear in the budget cycles. He surmised that PAGCOR had been impudently ignoring the Senate's invitations to attend hearings.

Senator Gatchalian recalled that during the previous hearing he confronted the PAGCOR representative and found that only P500,000 was imposed on erring licensees that still remained operational and were actually duly licensed by the PAGCOR. He noted that there was a conflict

of interest because PAGCOR, as the regulator, refused to punish the erring licensee, such as POGOs and other games of chance, because it was earning money from them.

Senator Pimentel stated that he and Senator Gatchalian were waiting for the action of the chairman of the Committee on Accountability of Public Officers and Investigations (Blue Ribbon) on their filed resolutions to investigate POGOs' contract with a third-party auditor. Senator Gatchalian said that he would continue to tackle in his committee the matter of the third-party auditor which is mandated by law to audit and determine the real gross gaming revenue as declared by the POGO licensees. In the absence of a third-party auditor, however, he stated that he had to ensure that PAGCOR is capable of determining the gross gaming revenue, the basis for the BIR to collect the right taxes, in the event that the POGO entities would not declare the right gross gaming revenue. He disclosed that it has been established that POGOs had actually been evading taxes by declaring 50% less than what PAGCOR has been receiving from them and that it has been confirmed that there were huge disparities in their declarations with PAGCOR and with the BIR.

Senator Pimentel pointed out that the Senate Committee on Ways and Means and other government agencies, except PAGCOR, have been the ones exerting the extra effort to investigate spurious bank certifications submitted before PAGCOR and regulate and determine whether the taxes paid by POGOs were accurate. Senator Gatchalian observed that PAGCOR did not take a proactive approach and simply waited to receive revenue from POGOs.

Senators Pimentel and Gatchalian agreed that they would act on the matter. Senator Gatchalian, for his part, said that the BIR collection hinged on the gross gaming revenue, such that the national government would not be able to collect properly if it would be underdeclared. In addition, he warned that the entire POGO business was quite unstable because of the following: the government could not determine the real gross gaming revenue; the main customer has been imposing restrictions; and the operation was also being operated by entities connected to crimes. He pointed out that the involvement of POGOs in criminal activities has been creating a lot of negative perception of the country.

Senator Pimentel recalled the statement of Justice Secretary Crispin Remulla that the closure of POGOs might result in a "humanitarian crisis" if the government would send 40,000 Chinese online gambling workers as China made it hard for its citizens to return to their country after working in POGOs. Senator Gatchalian stated that the DOJ was tasked to raid and close all unlicensed POGO operations in the country. He admitted that it would be difficult for the department to deport a significant number of foreign POGO workers, who are mostly Chinese, due to the technicality of the process, so the justice secretary should have worded his statement as "It would be difficult to send them home," instead of calling it a "humanitarian crisis," which seemed to be an excuse for the department not to deport the Chinese nationals.

Senator Pimentel maintained that the Chinese nationals, whether legally or illegally staying in the Philippines, have the duty to go home to their country of origin or face deportation. In agreement, Senator Gatchalian said that once the Philippines banned POGOs, its foreign workers, who were granted visas and permits to work in the county, would have to go back to their country since one of the recommendations of his committee was to revoke all the visas and permits granted to them. Nonetheless, Senator Pimentel assured that the foreign workers would be treated fairly, humanely, and in a dignified manner as they are sent back to their country of origin.

Senator Gatchalian, however, acknowledged the complication of sending the Chinese nationals back to China because under their law, persons convicted or caught working in a POGO business could be prosecuted. He said that he had received information that POGO workers have been devising ways to stay in the Philippines and even resorted to paying one million pesos just to secure

their permits to stay and take jobs not necessarily connected to POGOs, in fear of prosecution and detention if they return to China.

While he acknowledged the difficulty of the situation, Senator Pimentel stated that the DOJ should not own the problem because it is not the Philippines' "humanitarian problem." He opined that a Chinese adult knowingly violated his homeland's law, and would be prosecuted once the Philippine government sends him/her back to China.

Senator Gatchalian, however, also expressed his fear that corrupt government officials would take an opportunity to ask or extort money from desperate Chinese nationals in exchange for a permit to stay. Senator Pimentel then suggested that the government should take the correct perspective based on the public pronouncements, to which Senator Gatchalian agreed.

Thereafter, Senator Gatchalian said that his committee would continue to hold hearings in order to find out more negative effects of POGO in the country.

INTERPELLATION OF SENATOR POE

Senator Poe asked Senator Gatchalian to categorically state that the POGO industry was not something that the Philippine government should allow to continue operating in the country. Senator Gatchalian affirmed that the committee report recommended the permanent ban of POGOs because their social costs exceeded economic benefits, aside from the fact that government was generating very minimal revenues from their operations.

Senator Poe remarked that the committee hearings presented the following values: (1) that PAGCOR had employed as its third-party auditor, the services of an unqualified auditor, that was not even in the list of competent companies to perform auditing, and (2) that there are other industries better than POGOs, that deserve encouragement and would actually contribute to the country's reputation.

She then thanked Senator Gatchalian for his hard work and for conducting hearings immediately, thoroughly, courageously, and intelligently. She expressed confidence that her future concerns would be addressed if referred to his committee.

REFERRAL OF SPEECH TO THE COMMITTEE ON RULES

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

SPECIAL ORDER

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body approved the transfer of Committee Report No. 63 on Senate Bill No. 2035 from the Calendar for Ordinary Business to the Calendar for Special Orders.

COMMITTEE REPORT NO. 63 ON SENATE BILL NO. 2035

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

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



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

Thereupon, the Chair recognized Senator Villanueva for the sponsorship.

SPONSORSHIP SPEECH OF SENATOR VILLANUEVA

In sponsoring Senate Bill No. 2035, Senator Villanueva delivered the following speech:

I am greatly honored to sponsor a bill that will benefit all Filipinos for generations to come, one that will outlive us all, Senate Bill No. 2035 under Committee Report No. 63, entitled "An Act Establishing the National Employment Master Plan to be Known as the Trabaho Para Sa Bayan Plan, Appropriating Funds Therefor, and For Other Purposes."

Before I begin, I would like to thank our dear colleague, Sen. Grace Poe, the chairperson of the Committee on Economic Affairs, who is still here with us to listen to the sponsorship speech, who allowed this representation to head the sub-committee hearings.

Masakit pong balikan ang naging kalagayan ng ating mga manggagawang Pilipino noong kasagsagan ng pandemya. We reached our worst unemployment rate in April 2020 at 11.7%, equivalent to 7.3 million unemployed Filipinos. During that time, all regions in the country reported double digit unemployment rate, especially in BARMM with 29.8% unemployment rate. In our region, Central Luzon or Region III had 27.3% unemployment rate and the Cordillera Administrative Region had 25.3% unemployment rate.

Pandemic man o hindi ay tila hindi tayo makaalpas sa seasonality ng trabaho lalo na po tuwing "ber" months at school opening. Just last year, we have seen a downward trend in unemployment rate starting August 2022 at 5.3% to 4.3% in December of 2022. *Ngunit bigla naman po itong umakyat ng 4.8% sa January 2023 matapos ang "ber" months.*

Aside from unemployment rate, it is also important to discuss the quality of jobs in the country. Notably, our underemployment rate has remained high from 13.8% in 2019 to 14.1% as of January 2023, according to Philippine Statistics Authority. *Kung titingnan po natin ang datos ng PSA, marami po sa mga trabaho sa bansa ay nasa service sector na nagrerepresenta ng 60.7% ng kabuoang trabaho sa bansa nitong January 2023. Malayo po ang agwat nito sa agrikultura na nasa 22.2% at sa industry sector na nasa 17.1%.* Clearly, we need to diversify and increase opportunities in the other sectors if we are to become a self-sustaining and prosperous country.

It is hard to rejoice at the 2022 GDP growth of 7.6% and the projected 5% GDP growth in the next 15 years if our citizens do not feel it. We currently have an inflation rate of 8.7% as of January 2023. Meanwhile, our unemployment rate is 4.8% equivalent to 2.37 million unemployed Filipinos. Our underemployment rate remains at double digits at 14.1% equivalent to 6.65 million Filipinos desiring to work longer hours.

Sa likod po ng mga numerong ito ay mga manggagawang inaasahan ng kanilang mga pamilya. Sila po ay may mga anak na pinapaaral o hindi na mapaaral sa hirap ng buhay. Sila po ay may mga magulang, mga magulang na inaalagaan at hindi maipagamot dahil kapos ang salapi. Ang iba naman ay may kapansanan, may edad, o may sakit. May mga bagong graduate naman na puno ng pag-asa at inspirasyon ngunit wala namang trabaho na mapasukan. That is why we need an employment policy that is resilient, comprehensive, coherent, future oriented, progressive, and easily adapts to the ever-changing nature of work and emerging trends in the labor market.

Employment should not just be an incident to economic development. Generating more decent and permanent employment should be the objective of economic growth to make growth inclusive and a reality for all.

In 1976, we ratified the International Labor Organization Convention No. 122. Forty-seven years ago *ito*. This is the employment policy convention. The convention states that each member shall declare and pursue as a major goal an active policy that is designed to promote full productive and freely chosen employment.



One of the commitments under this convention is to have a master plan on employment. It is unfortunate, however, that the Philippines is not completely compliant with respect to this particular commitment.

Thus, this measure seeks to create a *Trabaho Para Sa Bayan* (TPB) plan which will be the country's employment master plan. This measure builds on the national employment recovery strategy implemented by the NERS Task Force. The formulation and contents of that *Trabaho Para Sa Bayan* plan shall be undergirded by the following objectives: Job-led economic growth; worker development through skills training and enhancement and active labor market efforts and other services; support and incentives to business; and enhanced industry collaboration.

The TPB plan shall be formulated by an interagency council headed by the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) as the chairperson with the Department of Trade and Industry and the Department of Labor and Employment as co-chairpersons.

The interagency council shall also harmonize all existing policies, all plans, programs, and projects and shall work together with existing interagency councils engaged in efforts that aim to provide an enabling environment for employment and enterprises to grow. The overarching objective is to avoid duplication of functions to ensure effective use of limited resources, and converge and compliment all government efforts.

During our discussions in the committee, we discovered that there are so many councils which appear to work on their own with very little coordination with other agencies. For example, we have the Philippine Skills Framework Executive Committee; the Interagency Investment Promotion Coordination Committee; the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Development Council; the Innovation Council; and the Creative Industries Development Council.

Pagdating naman po sa mga plano, tila бага hindi rin nag-uusap-usap ang mga ahensiya natin sa gobyerno. Tingnan po natin ito—ang DOLE ay may Philippine Labor and Employment Plan at Career Guidance Advocacy Plan. Ang local government naman ay may Workforce Development Plan; ang Department of Trade and Industry ay mayroon naman pong Philippine Skills Framework; ang National Youth Commission, may Philippine Youth Development Plan; ang TESDA ay mayroon din po namang National Technical Education and Skills Development Plan.

The goal of the *Trabaho Para sa Bayan* plan is to harmonize and synergize all these efforts a coherent and cohesive employment policy. *Isang plano po na magiging direksyon ng lahat ng polisiya, proyekto, programa, at iba pang mga inisyatibo upang patuloy na bumuo at gumawa ng de-kalidad na trabaho para sa bayan.*

Again, we urge our colleagues to support us in the passage of this measure, which was recognized as one of the priority measures of the President and this present administration. *Ang atin pong panawagan: trabaho sa bawat Pilipino; trabaho para sa bayan.*

And before we end, again, I would like to thank our dear colleague, Sen. Grace Poe, the chairperson of the Committee on Economic Affairs, for allowing this Representation to be the chairperson of the subcommittee. We likewise thank Senators Imee R. Marcos, Win Gatchalian and Maria Lourdes Nancy S. Binay for coauthoring this very important measure.

COSPONSORSHIP SPEECH OF SENATOR ANGARA

Senator Angara recalled that it was during the open forum after the presentation of the Medium-Term Fiscal Framework of the fourth quarter LEDAC sessions in Malacañang, where he attended as a rotational member, that Senator Villanueva expressed his idea that the country needed to have a more robust policy regarding the creation of jobs. He said that he commended Senator Villanueva to be the right man to come up with an employment strategy given his track record as the former chair of TESDA. He said that Senator Poe, head of the Senate Committee on Economic Affairs, was not mistaken to give to Senator Villanueva the authority to lead the subcommittee to hear the measure because he has a promise to fulfill not only to the President but to the Filipino people.

Senate President Zubiri stated that the President himself asked Senator Villanueva for help regarding the matter.

COAUTHORS

Upon their request, Senate President Zubiri and Senator Angara were made coauthors of Senate Bill No. 2035.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR POE

Senator Poe expressed his appreciation to Senator Villanueva for leading the subcommittee. She said that she was confident of the expertise of Senator Villanueva as he was also the chair of the Committee on Labor, Employment and Human Resources Development and that the TESDA performed at its peak during his leadership. She added that he was exactly the person needed by the workers in the labor sector because he was really hardworking and very passionate to fight for their rights for them to have a better life.

COAUTHORS

Upon their request, Senators Go and Revilla were made coauthors of Senate Bill No. 2035.

COSPONSORSHIP SPEECHES

At the instance, upon request of Senators Go and Revilla, upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Body approved the insertion of their cosponsorship speeches into the *Record of the Senate*, as follows:

By Senator Go

I stand before this august Body to cosponsor Trabaho Para sa Bayan Act which establishes the National Employment Master Plan to be known as the Trabaho Para sa Bayan Plan.

Kabalikat ng tungkulin natin na magserbisyo sa publiko ang isulong ang mandato ng Saligang Batas na maglaan ng maayos na trabaho at pantay na oportunidad para sa lahat na magkaroonng maayos na kabuhayan.

Sa nagdaang taon, marami sa mga kababayan natin ang nawalan ng trabaho dahil sa pandemya. Marami sa mga business sectors natin ang nahinto at nagsara kaya't marami sa kanila ang nawalan ng ikabubuhay.

According to the Philippine Statistics Authority, the unemployment rate in January 2023 rose to 4.8 percent from 4.3 percent the previous month. *Katumbas itong 2.37 milyong Pilipino na walang trabaho.*

That is why, I cosponsor this very important measure which will strengthen and expand our country's labor force. This measure will stimulate national and local economic growth and development through aligning investment and other incentives provided by law for decent job generation, including reintegration of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs).

Dapat po talaga may sapat na pagpapalano at stratehiya para makalikha tayo ng sapat na trabaho. Through the Trabaho Para sa Bayan Plan, we will promote the employability, competitiveness, wellness, and productivity of workers.

This measure also seeks to provide support and incentives to existing and emerging businesses, specifically MSMEs to enhance their access to finance and capital, self-reliance, employment creation, employment security and protection.

I would like to congratulate the sponsor, our Majority Leader, Sen. Joel Villanueva, and the chairperson of the Committee on Economic Affairs Sen. Grace Poe for advocating for this measure.

On that note, with the indulgence of the sponsor, I request that I also be made coauthor of this important piece of legislation.



By Senator Revilla

I rise today to cosponsor this very needed measure, an Act Establishing a National Employment Master Plan. The "Trabaho Para sa Bayan Plan."

Batid naman po natin na labis na naapektuhan ng nagdaang pandemya ang sektor ng ating mga manggagawa. Record breaking ang unemployment rate ng mga panahon na iyon. We saw a lot of our countrymen suffer from the loss of their jobs.

This is what prompted the then Duterte Administration to issue Executive Order No. 140 which adopted the National Employment Recovery Strategy as a response to the devastating effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic to our jobs and labor sector. This Executive Order contributed immensely in the recovery and revitalization of our employment sector after the pandemic.

We may no longer be in lockdowns and the pandemic might be over, but we still feel its effects.

I congratulate our Majority Leader, Sen Villanueva, for this timely measure, to establish the "Trabaho Para sa Bayan Plan" which aims to:

1. Stimulate national and local economic growth and development;
2. Promote the employability, competitiveness, wellness and productivity of our workers;
3. Provide support and incentives to existing and emerging businesses specifically our MSMEs; and
4. Provide incentives and support to our employers and other industry stakeholders.

Jobs give people dignity. It does more than provide us income, our jobs provide us a sense of fulfillment, productivity and purpose.

I thank our Majority Leader, TesdaMan, Mr. Trabaho, Sen. Joel Villanueva for leading the passage of this measure. *Kaisa nyo po ako sa pagsulong ng adhikaing ito*, that is why I am also requesting the good sponsor if I can be made coauthor on this measure.

SUSPENSION OF CONSIDERATION OF SENATE BILL NO. 2035

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

CHANGE OF REFERRALS

Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Chair referred the following bills to the committees hereunder indicated:

1. Senate Bill No. 16 (*Water Sustainability Act*), which was originally referred to the Committee on Public Services, to the Committee on Sustainable Development Goals, Innovation and Futures Thinking as the primary committee and to the Committees on Public Services and Finance as secondary committees;
2. Senate Bill No. 310 (*Construction of a Potable Water Supply System in Every Barangay*), which was originally referred to the Committee on Local Government, to the Committee on Sustainable Development Goals, Innovation and Futures Thinking as the primary committee and to the Committees on Local Government, and Finance as secondary committees; and
3. Senate Bill No. 1048 (*Safe Drinking Water Act*), which was originally referred to the Committee on Health and Demography, to the Committee on Sustainable Development Goals, Innovation and Futures Thinking as primary committee and to the Committees on Health and Demography, and Finance as secondary committees.



MANIFESTATION OF SENATOR VILLANUEVA

At this juncture, Senator Villanueva stated that the Bible says honor must be given to whom honor is due. He then commended Senate President Zubiri for being "Zubiri" good, and gave his assurance that the support of the senators to the Senate President was "Zubiri" strong contrary to reports in the media. He said that Senate President Zubiri has made the Senate an institution that is stronger, more innovative and more inspiring.

Senator Villanueva stated that the record of the present Senate would not lie as it was able to pass landmark legislative measures. He said that he was a living witness to how workaholic Senate President Zubiri was. He then expressed appreciation to the Senate President for his leadership and for taking care of the Senate secretariat. He reiterated that the Senate would continue to march behind him, who "with upright heart, shepherded them and guided them with his skillful hand." (Psalm 78:72)

Senator Villanueva also expressed his appreciation to the Senate secretariat and senators' staffs, who stayed late to render overtime work for the country. He thanked the Senate sergeant-at-arms, General Ancan, for working tirelessly to maintain security in the Senate.

Finally, he commended the Minority Leader, Senator Pimentel III; the Deputy Minority Leader, Senator Hontiveros; the Deputy Majority Leader, Senator Ejercito; and Senators Binay, Angara, Poe and Gatchalian for staying until the adjournment of the session that night.

MANIFESTATION OF SENATE PRESIDENT ZUBIRI

Senate President Zubiri stated that he always emphasized that the achievements of the Senate were the result of team effort of all the senators. He commended Senator Villanueva, whom he called the energizer bunny of the Senate, for being so active and always on his toes; Minority Leader Senator Pimentel and his deputy, Senator Hontiveros, for their patience and hard work in scrutinizing the bills on the floor; and Senators Ejercito, Binay, Angara, Poe and Senator Gatchalian for staying late that night.

Senate President Zubiri noted that the Senate was able to muster an almost perfect attendance of all the 24 senators in the last few weeks of the sessions. He said that with the help of Senator Villanueva as Majority Leader, the Body was able to ratify two bicameral committee reports, with one conference committee report pending; approved 19 bills on Third Reading; and had 22 measures pending for Second Reading, including the measure on Baler as the birthplace of Surfing in the country. He gave his assurance that the Senate would continue to pass legislations that would be good for the country and people. He asked the Senate family to put the institution always in the heart as the Senate would always be a place of democracy, not just a bastion of democracy but also a strong influencer of it.

Also, Senate President Zubiri acknowledged the work done by Senate Secretary Bantug, the Legislative department, the OSAA, and the senators' staffs who were in the session hall everyday to help in the crafting of important legislations.

REMINDERS

Senator Villanueva reminded the senators of the standing Senate resolution, Senate Resolution No. 21, authorizing all regular standing committees, oversight committees, and special committees of the Senate to conduct hearings, meetings, and consultations during every recess of the Senate to have continuity in the process of passing pending proposed legislation and to conduct investigations on issues of national interest to aid in crafting relevant legislation.



Likewise, Senate President Zubiri noted that the Muslim community would be starting the Ramadan the following day, while the Christian community would be observing the Holy Week starting April 2.

ADJOURNMENT OF SESSION

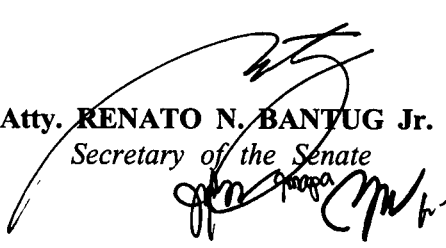
Upon motion of Senator Villanueva, there being no objection, the Chair declared the session adjourned until three o'clock in the afternoon of May 8, 2023.

It was 9:25 p.m.

I hereby certify to the correctness of the foregoing.

Approved on May 8, 2023

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





Senate

Office of the Secretary

**NINETEENTH CONGRESS OF THE REPUBLIC
OF THE PHILIPPINES**

First Regular Session

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23 MAR 22 P 3 :27
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**JOINT EXPLANATORY STATEMENT OF THE
CONFERENCE COMMITTEE
ON THE DISAGREEING PROVISIONS OF
SENATE BILL NO. 1849 AND HOUSE BILL NO. 6517**

The Conference Committee on the disagreeing provisions of Senate Bill No. 1849 and House Bill No. 6517, after having met and fully discussed the subject matter, hereby report to their respective Houses the following that:


1. The conferees agreed to use the Senate version as the working draft;
2. Section 1 of the Senate version was adopted as an amendment to Section 2 of R.A. 11709 or the section on "Tour of Duty of Key Officers";
3. Section 2 of the Senate version was amended and adopted as an amendment to Section 6 of R.A. 11709 or the section on "Compulsory Retirement for Military Personnel";
4. Section 3 of the Senate version was adopted as an amendment to Section 9 of R.A. 11709 or the section on "Definition of Terms";

5. Section 4 of the Senate version was adopted as an amendment to Section 10 of R.A. 11709 or the section on "Forced Attrition of Officers";
6. Section 5 of the Senate version was amended and adopted as an amendment to Section 15 of R.A. 11709 or the section on "Officer Grade Distribution";
7. Section 6 of the Senate version on "Application" was amended and adopted to read as follows:

SEC 6. *Application.* – The provisions of this Act shall also apply to the officers and enlisted personnel appointed and/or promoted under Republic Act No. 11709 and other pertinent laws.
8. Sections 7, 8, 9, and 10 of the Senate version on "Implementing Rules and Regulations", "Separability Clause", "Repealing Clause", and "Effectivity Clause" respectively, were adopted; and
9. The title of the House version was adopted and amended to read as follows:

**AN ACT
FURTHER STRENGTHENING PROFESSIONALISM AND
PROMOTING THE CONTINUITY OF POLICIES AND
MODERNIZATION INITIATIVES IN THE ARMED FORCES OF
THE PHILIPPINES, AND AMENDING FOR THIS PURPOSE
REPUBLIC ACT NO. 11709**

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



RAUL "BOBOY" TUPAS
Chairman
House of Representatives Panel



JINGGOY EJERCITO ESTRADA
Chairman
Senate Panel



NINETEENTH CONGRESS OF THE)
 REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES)
 First Regular Session)



Senate
 Office of the Secretary

23 MAR 22 P5:55

**JOINT EXPLANATION OF THE CONFERENCE COMMITTEE ON THE
 DISAGREEING PROVISIONS OF SBN 1850 AND HBN 6336**

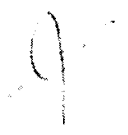
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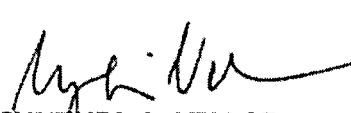
The Conference Committee on the disagreeing provisions of Senate Bill No. 1850 and House Bill No. 6336, after having met and fully discussed the subject matter in a conference, hereby report to their respective Houses the following:

1. The conferees agreed to adopt the Senate version as the working draft;
2. The *Short Title* of the House version was adopted as Section 1 of the consolidated bill;
3. The phrase "indebted to the government as of December 31, 2022" in Sections 1, 2 and 3 of the Senate version has been replaced with the phrase "indebted to the government as of the effectivity of this Act";
4. Under Section 1, the proviso on the list to be submitted by LBP and DAR within the 3-year period from the effectivity of this Act, such list shall come from the collective CLOAs which shall be processed with the 3-year period;
5. The title of the House version was adopted with modification through the addition of the phrase "all principal loans".

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

Approved,


SOLOMON R. CHUNGALAO
 Chairperson
 House of Representatives


CYNTHIA A. VILLAR
 Chairperson
 Senate