



THE FORUM

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"OUTRAGEOUS!"



LOCSIN

RANKING House members expressed disgust at senators for claiming their full adoption of the House-approved 2005 General Appropriations Act (see related story below) prevented congressmen from restoring their pork barrel deductions in the bicameral conference committee.

Rep. Teodoro Locsin (1st Dist., Makati City), a member of the Appropriations

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RRID Photo

HOUSING INITIATIVE. Vice President Noli de Castro, concurrent Housing Secretary, and the House of Representatives led by Speaker Jose de Venecia, other government agencies forge an agreement to finalize a nationwide housing program to build some 1,000 housing units in each congressional district with seed money of P10M annually from an initial 100 participating congressmen belonging to the Lakas-CMD and other parties in the majority coalition in the House of Representatives. De Venecia said the Land Bank and the Development Bank of the Philippines agreed to participate in the financing of the project to spur economic recovery since every one-peso investment would have a multiplier effect for the economy equivalent to 16 times the investment.



RRID Photo

CSC chair urges House employees to persevere, shine under fire

HOUSE workers should not be afraid to push the limits of professionalism and excellence in their jobs, even while laboring under a highly political climate prone to media criticism.

Civil Service Commission Chair Karina Constantino David shared this message with House employees as guest speaker during flag-raising rites last January.

David noted the extraordinary situation of House Secretariat workers who labor under seemingly difficult conditions, such as answering to more than 200 House Members who all need to be pleased, and at the same time, perennially under fire.

If politics and politicians undermine the independence and self-worth of the bureaucracy, it is not because this is intentional but it is because this is the nature of the game, David said.

The solution lies in recovering the confidence and independence of the public servant. Career civil servants too often imbibe the skills of being "political diplomats, who learn to say yes when they mean no." In some cases, even the most dedicated, well-meaning and intelligent individuals become victims of their own fears of losing their job.

"The bureaucracy should not be viewed as just a group of followers, but an important aspect of governance that could also be a source of expertise," she exhorted, pointing out that too often the bureaucracy has been taken for granted as a machinery of people who are

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ENHANCED VAT LAWS TO SAVE COUNTRY

Low rates for basic food items, gas and power

By Diony P. Tubianosa

THOSE who have less in life will not be unduly burdened under the revised value-added tax (VAT) laws passed by the House of Representatives to raise new money for the cash-strapped government, which provide safety nets for socially sensitive products.

Speaker Jose de Venecia announced the approval of House Bill 3705, revising the list of VAT exemptions, shortly before midnight of March 1, following intense debates and emotional voting, saying the measure is an antidote to the gaping budget deficit, a means to prevent another international credit downgrade of

the Philippines, and a move towards attaining a balanced budget by 2008.

The revised VAT exemptions measure is a companion bill of HB 3555, passed by the House in January, increasing the current standard VAT rate from ten percent to 12 percent.

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Senate adopts House-approved budget

THERE will be no tedious bicameral deliberations on the budget this year. A first in Philippine lawmaking history, the Senate unanimously passed on final reading the House-endorsed P907-Billion national budget without amending any of its provisions.

Speaker Jose de Venecia declared that the historic act of the Senate "proves the supremacy of the House of Representatives in budget-making and the wisdom of the House position."

At the same time, de Venecia expressed his thanks to the upper chamber "for adopting the House

position *en toto*."

He added that the Senate decision effectively bypassed the bicameral conference panel and the budget could be signed into law in the next seven days by President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo.

De Venecia and House Appropriations Committee Chairman Rolando Andaya, Jr., revealed there had been no similar action by the Senate since the convening of Congress after World War II.

The P907-Billion 2005 outlay is 5.3 percent higher than the 2004 budget, which stemmed from a re-enacted 2003 GAA.

The Speaker said "this is a reformist and spartan budget designed to help government manage and arrest the huge budget deficit while not sacrificing the delivery of basic services and making way for an economic turnaround."

He recalled and lauded the diligence and hardwork by members of the majority coalition and the House leadership ladder that include Deputy Speakers Emilio Espinosa, Gerry Salapuddin, Raul del Mar and Benigno 'Noy' Aquino III, Majority leader Rep. Prospero

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What cost vanity?



REP. Abraham Kahlil B. Mitra (2nd District, Palawan), seeks to impose a 20 percent excise tax on non-essential services or procedures and non-essential goods.

Items like perfumes, toilet waters, yachts and other vessels intended for pleasure or sports; rare and antique goods or those handmade by artisans, or made of expensive metals or exquisite designs, custom-made or with exceptional feature created by well-known persons/companies and non-essential services or procedures such as but not limited to cosmetic surgeries and body

enhancements, shall be subject to excise tax.

Mitra filed House Bill No. 2831 to expand the list of non-essential goods and services subject to excise tax, which shall be reviewed and revised annually. He further added that, all over the world today, the tax base is being redefined, broadened and enlarged in response to the rapid evolution of the society.

Under the law, medical practitioners are exempted from paying value added tax (VAT). Through this bill, medical practitioners performing medical services for aesthetic reasons shall be subjected to VAT. The 20 percent tax is based on the gross receipts derived from the sale or exchange of services, net of excise and value added taxes.

Mitra said, the vanity tax, will enhance the progressivity of the tax system because it places the tax burden on those who have the means to pay for luxury goods and services. © Michelle M. Sapnu

House-approved budget

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Nogralas and his deputies—Reps. Harlin Abayon, Del de Guzman, Hussin Amin and Arthur Defensor, among others, and Chairman Andaya and his vice chairmen for steering the budget through sometimes emotional and heated debates.

He also acknowledged the “critical cooperation and constructive fiscalization” by the opposition led by Minority leader Rep. Francis Escudero and minority stalwarts, including Reps. Ronaldo Zamora, Rolex Suplico, Agapito Aquino, Darlene Antonino-Custodio and Jacinto Paras.

Key budget beneficiaries of the budget remain to be the Department of Education (DepEd) with P111-Billion; Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH), P49.5-Billion; Department of National Defense (DND), P46.2-Billion; Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG), P43.9-Billion; and the Department of Agrarian Reform (Dept. of Land Reform), P14.7-Billion.

Education got the most of the top five sub-sectors with P135.5-Billion; followed by infrastructure, including roads, communication, energy, water and flood control, P56.5-Billion; public order and safety, P54.3-Billion; social security and development, including pensions and gratuities, P40.1-Billion; and agriculture and agrarian reform, P25.9-Billion.

The Department of Budget and Management revenue projections were conservative and considered only the yields from existing tax measures.

“They are expected to reach P758.5-Billion, P677.7-Billion or 89.3 percent, which will come from taxes, while the remaining P80.8-Billion will be derived from non-tax sources such as fees and charges, income and foreign grants,” Boncodin said.

The anticipated collections from the revenue measures proposed to Congress—sin taxes law, attrition law, VAT revisions, and others, which may total more than P80-Billion—were not factored in the budget and would be the subject of a supplemental law to be submitted for approval by Congress. © Diony P. Tubianosa

“Outrageous!”

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Committee, took the floor March 2 to make a “manifestation of outrage” against the “vicious attack” made by the Senate against the House. The angry congressman said the Senate’s surprise charges of pork-barrel insertions was to divert public attention from the Senate’s own “padding” of their allocations to the tune of P1.3 billion, by grabbing the President’s intelligence funds.

“Just because they [senators] were caught—and caught by one of their members—the only way they can divert attention from their own shame is to slap us with dirt that should properly cling to their faces,” Locsin fumed.

“These people keep insulting us every time we catch them stealing or refusing to work or just slacking around. Every time we catch them refusing to act like senators, they slap us in the face,” he said.

Appropriations committee chairman Rep. Rolando Andaya (1st Dist., Camarines Sur) told

CONGRESSIONAL MEDAL.

Dr. Taro Nakayama (center, with medal) of the Japanese Diet receives the Congressional Medal of Achievement from Speaker Jose de Venecia in dinner ceremonies January 14 at the Mandarin Hotel. Dr. Nakayama is chairman of the Japan-Philippine Parliamentary Friendship Group. Also in photo are (from left) Rep. Raul del Mar, Sen. Edgardo Angara, Diosdado Macapagal Jr., and Reps. Lorna Silverio and Roque Ablan.



PRID Photo

ROSY YEAR AHEAD, ECONOMISTS SAY

“**T**HINGS are really looking up.”

Economic experts gave this optimistic picture at the “Joint CPBD-PIDS Economic Forum Series on the Economic Outlook for 2005” sponsored by the Congressional Planning and Budget Department (CPBD), with the Philippine Institute of Development Studies (PIDS).

Main speakers Rep. Joey Sarte Salceda (3rd District, Albay), Chairman of the Economic Affairs Committee, and Dr. Josef T. Yap, a Senior Research Fellow of the PIDS, agreed that the economy in 2005 stands to gain from fresh investments and renewed business activity in selected sectors. Both also summed up 2004 as a “banner year” for the economy.



SALCEDA

The mining sector shall start to bloom this year, Yap noted. Foreign direct investment in this sector is one reason why the peso will strengthen and average about P54.50 against the US dollar. The manufacturing sector, however, will be adversely affected by lower agriculture growth due to El Niño, and the downturn in the global economics industry. Overall, Yap expects growth to remain relatively strong at 5.4 percent this year.

Meanwhile, Rep. Salceda predicted that the fiscal crisis will be substantially resolved this year. He sees the healthy momentum of policy reform as a stimulus for positive news, which will cause a resurgence of foreign investment inflows in information technology, mining, infrastructure, and energy.

He said an uptrend in property and construction is expected, while telecommunications faces cyclical fatigue. He added that corporate profits will be on the rise, and a new credit cycle could boost bank profits. Small and medium-sized enterprises, housing, and tourism will be the focus of government support.

With the 6.2 percent GDP in 2004, the highest in 15 years, Rep. Salceda expects the economy to remain healthy in 2005 with a 5 percent growth rate.

Gains of 2004

Salceda observed that the economy finished strong at the end of 2004 due to many policy reforms, such as the implementation of austerity measures in GOCC’s and government agencies.

At the same time, Yap noted that Philippine economic performance in 2004 exceeded all forecasts, with real GDP growth at 6.2 percent compared to the 5.9 percent forecast reported by the Asia Economic Monitor of the Asian Development Bank.

Consumption expenditures powered much of the economic activity in 2004, reaching its highest growth rate since 1988. The fastest growing sectors were transportation and communication followed by food and beverages, with election spending contributing to the latter. However, spending on fuel, light and water experienced lower growth due to higher fuel prices

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Bright forecasts

Dr. Yap predicted that more fiscal measures are likely to be enacted in the first half of 2005, with the momentum of policy reform spilling over to other areas.

Public investment will be contributing to the economy, given the public investment projects in the pipeline such as the North Rail, Subic-Clark-Tarlac Expressway, and the extension of existing light rail transit systems. Yap also mentioned that the tourism industry will receive a boost—albeit an unwelcome one—from the tsunami disaster that befell tourist destinations along the Indian Ocean.

attempt of some opposition senators to look good before the public at our expense. They’re gloating that this is a sign of statesmanship. If it were true, they should have done it earlier and spared us the *zarzuela* of going through the budget with angst only to say yes to the House version later,” Andaya said.

Minority leader Rep. Francis Escudero (1st Dist., Sorsogon), for his part, was also puzzled as to what took the Senate so long to adopt the House version. “Why didn’t they do it last year?” he asked. ©

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HOUSE GIVES AID Speaker Jose de Venecia turned over donations from the House of Representatives to several leading media fund drives for the typhoon victims in Quezon and Aurora provinces. A large portion of the donations came from savings generated largely by the cancellation of the House Christmas party last year. Photos below show Speaker de Venecia during the check turnover rites:

PRID Photos



SAGIP BUHAY. Philippine Daily Inquirer president Sandy Prieto Romualdez and Catholic Media Network representative Fr. Francis Lucas (2nd and 3rd from right) accept a P250,000 donation on behalf of the Sagip Buhay Fund, as Rep. Amelita Villarosa (left) looks on.



SAGIP KAPAMILYA. ABS-CBN Foundation managing director Gina Lopez (center) receives P100,000 on behalf of the Sagip Kapamilya Fund, in the presence of (from left) Deputy Speakers Benigno Aquino III and Emilio Espinosa and Minority Leader Francis Escudero.



KAPUSO. GMA-7 Kapuso Foundation board member Rod Cornejo (right) accepts the check as Rep. Herminio Teves and Deputy Speaker Raul del Mar (1st and 2nd from left) stand witness.



DAMAYAN. Philippine Star editor-in-chief Isaac Belmonte (3rd from left) gets P250,000 for Operation Damayan as Deputy Speaker Raul del Mar, Minority Leader Francis Escudero, Majority Leader Prospero Nograles, Reps. Juan Miguel Zubiri and Augusto Baculio witness the turnover.

Solons lobby Tokyo for moratorium on visa restrictions

THE JAPANESE government has neither rejected nor accepted the Philippine position for a moratorium or transition period before the revised visa rules on Filipino overseas performing artists (OPAs) take effect this. Reps. Edcel C. Lagman (1st District, Albay) and Roseller L. Barinaga (2nd District, Zamboanga del Norte), Chairmen of Special Committee on Overseas Workers Affairs and Committee on Labor and Employment respectively, made the report after an official fact-finding trip to Japan in January.

The Japanese government seeks to impose on OPAs a visa requirement of two years experience or two years formal schooling in a particular performing art such as dancing or singing, both outside of Japan. Although this requirement is already part of the immigration rules on the issuance of entertainer visas, the enforcement was earlier suspended in favor of

certification by the country of origin like the present Accreditation Card formerly known as Artist Record Book (ARB).

Speaker Jose de Venecia instructed Lagman and Barinaga to allay the concerns of Filipino entertainment industry workers and make appropriate representations with the Japanese government in Tokyo.

“Even if Japanese authorities are saying that the new requirements do not impose an immigration quota, if the new regulations are enforced immediately, in effect this would drastically reduce the number of OPAs qualified for entertainers visas even if no quota is set,” Barinaga and Lagman said in a report to the Speaker.

Lagman and Barinaga further recommended that, “The Philippine government must steadfastly pursue at least a two-year transition period so that we can qualify OPAs under either of

the two requirements of two years experience or two years formal schooling.”

The Japanese Ministry of Justice is still finalizing the ministerial ordinance which is expected to be implemented in March 2005, the solons noted. But the Japanese government is still open to further official dialogues between the two governments. Senator Keishiro Fukushima, Parliamentary Secretary for Foreign Affairs and a member of the House of Councilors of the Japanese Diet, suggested an official communication and negotiation respecting the Philippine position on the part of Philippine Foreign Affairs Secretary Roberto Romulo.

The two committee chairmen cited a public opinion poll on the revised visa requirements indicating that the Japanese people were overwhelmingly against stricter visa rules. © Michelle M. Sapnu

Future Muslim Mindanao leaders in House internship

TWENTY young Muslim leaders from Mindanao recently acquired hands-on exposure and experience in the legislative process through the 2004 Congressional Internship Program for Young Muslim Leaders (CIPMYL). The four-month internship program initiated by the House of Representatives, in cooperation with the Mindanao State University and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) through the Growth with Equity in Mindanao (GEM) Program.

The CIPMYL aims to enable the “best and brightest” among future Muslim leaders to acquire practical knowledge and perspectives on policy-making and governance. This program allows them to work with various congressional committees and offices, as well as the House Members themselves, attend special training programs, and join field visits to local governments and executive agencies.

The interns, aged 21 to 30, recently completed the internship program. They are: Adam Acmad, Abdulkhair Alibasa, Aliah Cali, Hijasmin Maruhom, Zehabudin Guro, Mohaimen Potawan and Normidah Pangandaman (all of Marawi City); Zarah Kathleen Alih, Hanie Bud and Kharsum Mohammad (Bongao, Tawi-Tawi); Anathalia Bonsing Angare

and Abdulkarim Beltran (Zamboanga City); Norhana Kamid and Jaimelyn Lomboy (Cotabato City); Bayangkong Guiano (Lambayong, Sultan Kudarat); Abdulgani Lappang (Lantawan, Basilan); Nurhatra Sadderani (Jolo, Sulu); D. Habib Sarifuddin Maulana and Sambai Ukom (Datu Odin Sinsuat, Maguindanao); and Abdul Kadotog Silongan (General Santos City). They comprise the second batch of interns.

Upon completion of the program, each intern is given the chance to assist the ARMM by working with local institutions and participate on short courses designed to reinforce knowledge and skills gained from their stay in the House of Representatives.

Aside from receiving a certificate of completion, participants were provided with round trip fare from their provincial residence to Manila, accommodation, food and transportation allowance, and accident and medical insurance for the duration of the internship.

The young Muslims were identified as future leaders by university chancellors, thesis advisors, and political and civic leaders. Dr. Macabangkit Ati, Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, Mindanao State University in Marawi City made the initial screening. The third batch of Muslim interns are expected to arrive on April 2005. © Jacqueline Rey-Juliano



PRID Photo

YOUNG MUSLIM LEADERS. Speaker Jose de Venecia meet 20 participants in the four-month Congressional Internship Program for Young Muslim Leaders to expand Muslim participation in community affairs and political governance. Now on its second year, the internship program is being undertaken jointly with US government aid and its Growth and Equity in Mindanao (GEM) program. Joining the Speaker are Reps. Faysah Dumarpa, Abdullah Dimaporo, and Benasing Macarambon with Deputy Secretary General Rodolfo Vicerra of the Congressional Planning and Budget Department, the host office. De Venecia urged the Muslim interns to help promote peace, stability and good governance in the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao.

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VAT laws

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The VAT exemptions measure takes into account the expected 2 percent increase but introduces VAT reductions in the following products:

- 6 percent on locally manufactured generic medicine and basic foods (sardines and mackerel, cooking oil, refined sugar, packed noodle-based instant noodles, *miki, misua, bihon, pancit canton* and *sotanghon*);

- 8 percent on imported generic medicine and basic processed foods; and

- 4 percent on petroleum products including the raw materials used in the manufacture thereof, and services rendered by power generation companies, which shall be increased to 6, 8 and 12 percents on the 2nd, 3rd and 4th year of implementation, respectively.

De Venecia and Nograles underlined a "no pass-on" provision of HB 3705 which makes it a crime for petroleum companies and power generation firms to pass on the tax burden to consumers.

It also removes the 1.5 percent presumptive input tax on agricultural purchases of agro-processors.

HB 3705 also exempts the following from VAT: (a) importation or lease of passenger or cargo vessels and aircrafts for domestic or international transport, including engine, equipment and spare parts; (b) sale of power or fuel generated through biomass, wind and solar energy; (c) importation of fuel, goods and supplies by vessels or aircrafts for use in international transport operations; (d) sale or importation of liquified petroleum gas; (e) sale of *pan de sal*; (f) services rendered by doctors to indigent patients as certified by the DSWD; and (g) services rendered by lawyers to workers, labor unions, subsistence farmers and fishermen, urban poor, students, agrarian reform beneficiaries, senior citizens and members of indigenous cultural communities as certified by appropriate government agencies. Services of doctors and

Rosy year ahead

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and the hike in power rates.

Many sectors experienced strong growth, exemplified by the services sector with a leading 7.3 percent growth rate. Agriculture, manufacturing, and the construction industry sectors had growth rates of 6.1 percent, 5 percent, and 8.9 percent respectively.

Growth agenda

Salceda suggested a 10-point agenda for sustained economic growth - (1) create 6-10 million jobs in 6 years; (2) upgrade the

lawyers to unexempt parties will be charged 12 percent VAT.

HB 3705 explicitly repeals the VAT exemption of the National Power Corporation and the independent power producers (IPPs). It mandates the BIR, ERC, DoE and DTI to jointly monitor and regulate the pricing of petroleum products and electricity and also provides for the separate billing of the VAT in the invoice.

"The inclusion of more goods and services in the VAT ambit will reduce distortions in the VAT chain, administrative efficiency will improve and the potential for tax evasion and avoidance will be minimized," the authors said.

Principal authors of HB 3705 include Ways and Means Chairman Jesli Lapus, Reps. Salacnib Baterina, Herminio Teves, Eric Singson, Teodoro Locsin Jr., Henedina Abad and Benasing Macarambon Jr.

The country's leading economists declared: "VAT is not a perfect tax. It is just a better tax."

The Foundation for Economic Freedom, Inc. (FEF), through members Ramon del Rosario, Roberto de Ocampo, Felipe Medalla, Cayetano Paderanga, Jr., Alexander Magno, Romulo Neri, and Cesar Virata, among others, describe VAT as "superior" to all other revenue-raising measures being made.

The superiority of the VAT, they noted, is twofold: "it is uniform and transparent in application, which reduces discretion and the scope of corruption; and it is neutral in its incidence, which minimizes the inevitable economic distortion caused by any tax."

President Macapagal Arroyo sent messages to the House and Senate leaderships stressing that the proposed VAT laws would "meet the public emergency arising from the urgent need to introduce appropriate revisions in the VAT system in line with the government's pursuit of fiscal stability and to generate fresh domestic funds for the country's development programs and projects."

Both bills are now pending in the Senate. ©

public school system; (3) balance the budget by 2010; (4) develop a network of transport and digital infrastructure; (5) provide power and water to all barangays; (6) decongest Metro Manila; (7) develop Clark and Subic as international service and logistics centers; (8) computerize the elections; (9) complete the peace process, and (10) settle conflicts arising from EDSA 1, 2 and 3.

In line with his 10-point agenda, the congressman proposed some ambitious targets, such as the reduction of poverty from 28.4 percent to 17.9 percent by 2010 and annual GNP growth of 7-8 percent. © Raymond G. Pasillao



Rep. Juan Edgardo "Sonny" M. ANGARA (Lone Dist. - Aurora, LDP)

The log ban issue is complicated. A lot of Congressmen want to present the total log ban but I doubt if DENR has the ability to



Rep. Antonio H. CERILLES (2nd Dist. - Zamboanga del Sur, NPC)

Let's start by saying there are two kinds of forests: production and protection.

Protection forests are areas under the National Protected Areas Systems (NIPAS) Act of 1992 (RA 7586) including virgin, mangrove and mossy forests (which are 1,000 meters and above in elevation, *kaya matagal tumubo ang mga puno dito*), national parks (examples are Bataan National Park and Apo National Park) and watershed reservations, where we get potable water, water for irrigation and sometimes hydro-electric generation.

These are the areas where a total log ban is being

adequately police our forest. As it is, we already have the quarantine. We are short of manpower. There is lack of political will. There is also the problem of transportation. Imagine only one forest guard for every 4,000 hectares.

Mabigat. So kung magkakaroon ng total log ban there must be a budget infusion and major revamp or overhaul of the current DENR set-up. We have to arm them kasi kalaban nila may pera, may baril, may transportation.

I was thinking of filing a bill to increase the penalty on illegal logging because the present penalties are light. But it's just one aspect of the problem. We are not tackling the long term causes. The underlying, deeper causes of illegal logging are poverty and lack of alternative

implemented. Production forests are areas where holders of TLA (Timber License Agreement), IFMA (Integrated Forest Management Agreement) and CBFMA (Community-Based Forest Management Agreement), including ISF (Integrated Social Forestry) projects are found.

The government allows in these areas scientific and sustainable harvesting of timber in natural second growth forest. This harvesting method allows the harvest only of very mature trees per hectare of forest, leaving thousands of trees—from seedlings to poles to co-dominant trees—protected and tended so that at the right time, say 25 to 30 years, matured trees are harvested from the same hectare of forest.

This whole relocating system is called sustainable forest management, thus, the perpetuation of the growth cycle and harvest of a multi-storied natural forest.

Production forest lands are also areas wherein trees are planted and grown in scientific methods in the form of tree plantations, tree farms and agro forestry farms to ensure that we have more wood material for legitimately operated sawmills, plywood mills, pulp and paper

livelihood. *Pag inalisan mo sila ng mapagkukunan ng trabaho, saan sila pupunta? Pag nakakakita sila ng puno, iniisip nila pagkain sa hapag kainan nila.* The partial solution to the problem is to increase the penalties.

I agree with imposition of a time-bound log ban. It has to be time-bound. But there have to be some exceptions like in private commercial lands. Government should properly delineate forest lands. There should be a total inventory of forest and agricultural lands, and a delineation should be made bearing in mind the need to conserve our forests for the benefit of future generations, as well as the need to provide for the livelihood and wood requirements of our people. © Interview by Abigail Macabeo

mills and furniture factories.

A total log ban is not a solution because the substitute of lumber is steel, which is more expensive, does not regenerate and causes permanent damage to the earth's surface, especially when it is an open pit mining. Trees regenerate and are, thus, sustainable, especially if the production forest is effectively managed.

Finland, Sweden, Norway and other Northern European countries, because of their temperate weather, have to wait for at least 70 years before they can harvest. If a farmer plants a tree today, he does not expect to harvest in his lifetime but his sons or his grandchildren.

In tropical countries like ours, one only has to wait for seven to 10 years to harvest because trees here grow faster.

There are provinces in the Philippines with successful programs on reforestation. Let me cite Surigao del Sur, with the most number of TLA holders, the PICOP (Paper Industries Corporation of the Philippines), which has more than a thousand hectares even going beyond the boundaries of Davao Oriental and Compostela province.

Surigao Development Corp. and Aras Arasan Development Corp., whose combined forest cover is

IS A LOG BAN THE SOLUTION?

As a natural treasure-house, the forest must be continually preserved and replenished to reap its dividends—like diverse flora and fauna, wood, water and soil stability. Loss of forest cover can accurse inhabitants as the root of many environmental disasters.

Recall the worst flash floods and landslides that claimed lives of the unwary thousands in recent history: Ormoc (2,000 fatalities, 1991), Camiguin and Panaon Islands (more than 500 dead, 2003), and Quezon and Aurora (over 1,000 dead, 2004). Gaining strength in the wake of these tragedies is the outcry for a log ban in various forms be it selective, total, total commercial, and temporary.

Estimates of the current Philippine forest cover range from 6.5 million hectares (FAO, 2001) to 13.6 million hectares (NAMRIA), out of a total land area of 29.2 million hectares. The government machinery to protect forests includes a moratorium or ban on logging in 61 localities—many dating back to the Marcos era—as well as

perennial reforestation programs. To its credit, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources has done its best to set the foundations for long-term community forestry projects and to convert the controversial timber license agreements to integrated forestry management agreements. Still, gaps between policy and implementation are sorely revealed in continued illegal logging, the murky history of legal logging, and periodic deforestation-related disasters.

The log ban is a burning issue that rouses the logging industry and the environmentalist advocates into frenzy. Logger industrialists, long a fixture in the Philippine economy, consider a log ban as counter-productive and beyond logic while nature-saving groups think it is the last hope of our diminishing forests.

In what context should we think about a log ban? Is it an alternative policy, an environmentalist fantasy, or is it an imperative for our times? If we must ban logging, how should we go about it? The Forum asked five Members of the House to share their thoughts.



Rep. Mauricio G. DOMOGAN (Lone Dist. - Baguio City, LAKAS-CMD)

I believe that log ban is partly a solution to forest denudation. I do not agree on a total log ban, especially in privately-owned, sustainable, planted

more than 60% of the land area of the province of Surigao del Sur.

Government should muster enough political will to punish slash and burn *kaingeros*, gatherers of firewood and illegal loggers, to include government employees like the military and police, who tolerate these illegal activities.

If government says that we don't have funds to implement reforestation programs, I think that's a wrong attitude because we can forge partnerships with citizens for them to plant, either fruit or rubber trees without cutting or while the trees are growing, or allow the tree planter to use the forest for agriculture.

During my stint as DENR Secretary, we had a program, usufruct—the right to use the land short of owning it—with a 25-year contract renewable for another 25 years with the right to harvest the fruits or latex from their trees or cut bamboo or rattan. The program gives livelihood and also re-greens the forest.

I strongly suggest that the present and succeeding DENR leadership retain and sustain (usufruct) to bring back the greenery of the Philippine countryside at no expense to Juan de la Cruz. © Interview by Melissa M. Reyes

properties *kasi* they manage and cut their own trees subject to regulation by government. *Kung pagbabawalan mo sila, talagang there is a problem.*

But I am in favor of a log ban on public forests, because they are being abused. *Yung problema kasi diyari, meron tayong binibigyan ng license to cut, kahit na specified sa lisensya na it's only in this area, ginagamit nila in another place.* Compared to a privately owned forest, at least *meron silang guwardiya*. So you cannot just enter their own property. *Kung babawalan mo silang mag-harvest ng kanilang sariling tanim, malaking problema yan.* But not on a public forest; I am really supportive of a total log ban on public forests.

Sa tingin ko, the individual



Rep. Leovigildo B. BANAAG (1st Dist. - Agusan del Norte, LAKAS-CMD)

A total log ban will not solve but somehow mitigate the



cooperation of every Filipino citizen should be the starting point in preventing forest denudation. *Unang-una*, if all of us are really concerned about our environment then for sure, we will plant and we will protect. *Kung meron mang illegal logging I'm sure you will complain and you will report it. Ang problema kung wala kang forested areas, talagang they really preserve their own forests.* That's why we encourage communal forest systems in some of our own areas in the Cordilleras. We assign certain barangays or families to protect a forest as well as plant and sustain the trees existing in this forest. It is very helpful and effective for the protection of our environment. That's an example of how the LGU, the local residents and the police can team up with the DENR in implementing our environmental laws to protect our environment. © Interview by Jackie Rey-Juliano

The starting point really is, No.1, the individual cooperation of every Filipino citizen. No.2, of course, is the well-planned and sustainable implementation of our own environmental laws by task agencies, specifically

problem of illegal logging. The Constitution mandates that Congress may prohibit logging in endangered forests, that is why we have to save whatever it is left of our natural forests. We are not saying that log ban is the final solution. As a matter of fact, we are balancing it by deliberating on complementary measures to achieve sustainable forest management and reforestation. So if we impose a log ban, it should be area-specific, not a total log ban for the whole country. With a log ban, there shall be no more cutting of endemic or natural trees. Exempted from log ban are private tree plantations, and harvesting of planted trees in production forests.

The log ban will augment the

Rep. Abraham Kahilil B. MITRA (2nd Dist. - Palawan, LP)

I feel that now is the time for us to really conserve our forest. A log ban would be a very good option. Speaking from experience in the province of Palawan, there we have a total log ban thus, we have the biggest forest cover. And we're happy with the results, although there are some complaints that we cannot use



the DENR to be complemented by the LGUs and PNP. That is what should be done. *Gaya sa ibang lugar na maganda ang pagtutok ng LGUs sa kanilang forested areas, talagang they really preserve their own forests.* That's why we encourage communal forest systems in some of our own areas in the Cordilleras. We assign certain barangays or families to protect a forest as well as plant and sustain the trees existing in this forest. It is very helpful and effective for the protection of our environment. That's an example of how the LGU, the local residents and the police can team up with the DENR in implementing our environmental laws to protect our environment. © Interview by Jackie Rey-Juliano

To make log ban more effective, it is necessary to delineate the ground of the Final Forest Line in each and every province. This delineation is now on-going in the 79 provinces of the country as undertaken by the DENR. In Congress, bills delineating the Final Forest Line on the ground, as mandated by the Constitution are being consolidated by the Technical Working Group (TWG) into a final draft for submission to the House Committee on Natural Resources for approval on committee level, and for preparation of the corresponding Committee Report to the Plenary for Second and Third Reading in due time. © Interview by Abigail Macabeo

We will not, however, be content with the imposition of a log ban in specific areas. We must pursue the Billion Trees Reforestation Program initiated by Speaker Jose C. de Venecia which the House Committee on Natural Resources and the Special Committee on Reforestation already approved.

As I have said, the log ban will not cover private tree plantations and production forests. Hence the DENR must review the 17 existing TLAs and

our own logs. We eventually moved to other materials such as cement or steel to build our houses which of course are more expensive, but we're happy we have a healthy population. With a lot of trees the children and the population can breathe better.

There should be enough conscious efforts in the different congressional districts. There should be a very strong environmental education campaign not just in the government radio and TV

other permits issued over the production forests. *Titingnan natin kung sino sa mga existing TLA holders and permittees ang good or bad performers.* The bad performers shall face cancellation of their TLAs or permits. The area involved shall be placed under log ban for rehabilitation and/or reforestation. As to the good performers, their TLAs or permits shall be respected until expiry date, and thereafter, they may be issued such Forest User's Permits as may be provided for by law, taking into consideration their good track record.

To make log ban more effective, it is necessary to delineate the ground of the Final Forest Line in each and every province. This delineation is now on-going in the 79 provinces of the country as undertaken by the DENR. In Congress, bills delineating the Final Forest Line on the ground, as mandated by the Constitution are being consolidated by the Technical Working Group (TWG) into a final draft for submission to the House Committee on Natural Resources for approval on committee level, and for preparation of the corresponding Committee Report to the Plenary for Second and Third Reading in due time. © Interview by Abigail Macabeo

stations but even the public sector should participate. Meaning it can also be included in the educational system, DepEd should include it in their curriculum—how to take care of the forest, how valuable are the natural resources—also, the local chief executives should include it in their program for environmental protection. They can probably set up a program or *Bantay-Dagat, Bantay-Gubat*, where there will be close monitoring. They can also set-up probably a communication listening post, they can have at least one coordinator in every barangay that can report any environmental destruction or also conservation efforts. So that there will be a quick action force where illegal loggers and illegal activities can be stopped right away. © Interview by Jackie Rey-Juliano

The Haven gives hope for streetchildren

By Christian F. D. Pamintuan



ONE and half million homeless children roaming the streets in the Philippines are concentrated in urban centers. Their condition

makes them prone to crime, violence and abuse. In Alabang, Muntinlupa, the Haven—first known as the Haven for Women—has expanded to accommodate streetchildren, mostly boys, as part of the solution to this growing social malady.

“At their tender ages, these boys have experienced more cruelty than we will ever know in our lifetimes yet by the grace of God, this stops today,” said Gina de Venecia, wife of Speaker Jose de Venecia and president of the Congressional Spouses Foundation Inc. (CSFI), when the Haven opened its doors to the homeless youth in 2003. As CSFI leader for most of the past decade, her efforts led to the landmark opening of the first Haven facility for women victims of abuse in Alabang in 1995.

“This will be a place where the miracle of renewal will replace the misery of rejection,” the Speaker’s wife stressed.

The Haven now aims to provide temporary shelter for homeless children who live in the rubble of Metro Manila. It also rehabilitates the children from their physical and emotional needs and provides livelihood and vocational trainings in order for them to cope up with outside life.

At present, the Haven for Women is composed of 15 regional centers for Women with one main center at Alabang, Muntinlupa.

The Haven for Children, whose main center is also in the same area, will soon inaugurate three regional centers in Dagupan, Cagayan and Tarlac City.

Social Welfare Secretary Corazon “Dinky” Soliman lauded the effective partnership between the CSFI and the DSWD in the establishment and operations



abuse / maltreatment and neglect remains the top three cases of

of The Haven for Women, and now, The Haven for Children. The DSWD head revealed that children who are involved in substance abuse are anywhere from 7 to 9 years old. The incidence of rape among children is at an all-time high and the young perpetrators of rape are between the ages of 9 and 15. She also revealed that their studies proved a definite correlation between teenage pregnancy and substance abuse.

Soliman said there are 10,044 reported cases of child abuse. Sexual abuse, physical

child abuse.

There were also a total of 9,329 youth offenders around the country, wherein NCR tallied 1,775 followed by Regions XI and III with 1,449 and 844, respectively.

The Haven for Children, and its future satellite centers around the country, seeks to provide street children therapy and release from abuse. By providing them with a suitable place that they may call home, they will be able to recover from the hardships that they underwent GDV said.©

The necessity of inquiries in aid of legislation

By Raymond G. Pasillao

THE 1987 Constitution granted the Legislative Department the power to conduct legislative inquiries. Section 21, Article VI of the 1987 Constitution provides that:

The Senate or the House of Representatives or any of its respective committees may conduct inquiries in aid of legislation in accordance with its duly published rules of procedure. The rights of persons appearing in or affected by such inquiries shall be respected.

Legal commentators, however, hold the view that the power of legislative investigation does not even have to be expressly granted for the power of Congress to conduct investigations is inherent in the legislative process. Congressional inquiries serve as a useful and even indispensable aid for the Legislature to better carry out its primary duty of lawmaking.

If the abovementioned Constitutional provision had been incorporated in the fundamental law, it was not so much to authorize as in fact to limit the conduct of legislative inquiry.

Scope of inquiry

The power of Congress to conduct inquiries or investigations is intended to be in aid of legislation. Thus, the subject matter of any legislative inquiry must be one on which Congress can legislate. It is important to note, however, that the power of the Legislature to enact laws is said

to be plenary, meaning that it can legislate on almost any subject under the sun.

The scope of the power of inquiry is as penetrating and far-reaching as the power of Congress to enact and appropriate. As stated by the United States Supreme Court in the case of *Watkins v. United States* (1957), the subject matter of legislative inquiry encompasses inquiries concerning the administration of existing laws as well as proposed or possibly needed statutes. It includes surveys of defects in our social, economic or political system for the purpose of enabling Congress to remedy them. It also comprehends probes into departments to expose corruption, inefficiency or waste.

Broad as the power of inquiry is, it is not unlimited, for the power may be employed only in aid of the legislative function. Congress cannot, for example, make an inquiry into the private affairs of citizens. Congress cannot also inquire into affairs which are outside its jurisdiction. Thus, if the scope of inquiry is more properly for the Executive or Judicial Departments to address, Congress may not use its power of conducting investigations to usurp the executive and judicial functions.

Limitations on the power of inquiry

The power of congressional investigation, broad and all-encompassing as it may be, is subject to certain recognized limitations.

There are three limitations enumerated by the 1987



Constitution on the exercise of the congressional power of inquiry, namely: (1) it must be “in aid of legislation”; (2) it must be “in accordance with its duly published rules of procedure”; and (3) “the rights of persons appearing in or affected by such inquiries shall be respected.”

The most fundamental limitation on the power of inquiry is that inquiries are limited to matters of legislation. Probably due to the sheer number of inquiries conducted by Congress and widely publicized by the media, there is a growing perception that congressional investigations often have no legislative purpose. Chief Justice Warren of the U.S. Supreme Court, however, made it clear that Congress has “no power to expose for the sake of exposure.”

Courts of Justice have often given Congress the benefit of a presumption that its object of inquiry is legitimate and related to the possible enactment of legislation. Moreover, Courts cannot inquire into legislators’ motives but will look only to the exercise of their power. As stated

in *Barenblatt v. United States* (1959); “So long as Congress acts in pursuance of its constitutional power, the Judiciary lacks authority to intervene on the basis of the motives which spurred the exercise of that power.”

The second limitation under the 1987 Constitution is that the legislative inquiry must be “in accordance with its duly published rules of procedure.” The rules of procedure governing legislative investigation must be duly published in order to afford the public their constitutional right to procedural due process. The Rules of Procedure Governing Inquiries in Aid of Legislation was adopted by the House of Representatives on September 15, 2004, to be effective seven days after publication.

While it is generally true that courts do not interfere with the internal procedure of Congress affecting its members in line with the doctrine of separation of powers, it cannot however be excluded when legislative rule affects private rights. Legislative methods or procedures, it has been held, are purely of legislative

cognizance except when so arbitrary as to be violative of the constitutional rights of the citizens.

The third limitation is aimed to protect or secure the “rights of the person appearing in or affected by such inquiries.”

When Congress does not possess needed information, recourse must be had to others who possess it. Experience has taught that mere requests for such information often are unproductive, and also that information which is volunteered is not always accurate or complete. Therefore, some means of compulsion are essential to obtain what is needed.

The power of Congress to compel the attendance of witnesses, issue *subpoenas duces tecum* for the production of documents, and punish for contempt is counterbalanced by the vigilant enforcement of the rights of witnesses guaranteed by the law.

In the face of biting criticism on this much-maligned power of Congress, it becomes important that more people are made aware of the scope, purpose, limitations, and results of Congressional Inquiries, for congressional inquiries are an incumbent part of the legislative process. As stated in *McGrain v. Daugherty* (1927), “[t]he power of inquiry, with process to enforce it, is an essential and appropriate auxiliary to the legislative function... A legislative body cannot legislate wisely or effectively in the absence of information respecting the conditions which the legislation is intended to affect or change.”©

Education is key

By Melissa M. Reyes

District FOCUS

DAVAO del Sur Rep. Douglas RA. Cagas, known for his pro-

“pork barrel” stance, is determined to show that the Priority Assistance Development Fund (PDAF) is truly an effective tool for progress. Using his PDAF, Cagas is building a modern and up-to-date educational system. Each year, he gets the latest educational equipment and supplies here and abroad, for use in classrooms from the day care to the college level.

Six components

The educational improvement program has six components.

One, his schools have multi-media computers for English,

mathematics and science courses with three-dimensional systems of sound, sight and touch. The students don't just sit and listen to lectures, they also interact. They have videotapes, colored charts, graphs and computers.

His district's students are winning national contests—Aristotle Erasmo in the Asian Quiz Bee in Manila (college level); another in journalistic writing in Baguio City (secondary level). A magna cum laude graduate topped the engineering board exam. A niece, a UP graduate, copped the No. 8 slot in the 1999 bar—another product of Cagas' emphasis on education since becoming representative in 1998.

Cagas formally launched the revolutionary system in 2001 using PDAF with help from DepEd. About 16 high schools are now



equipped with the multi-media educational system, with 200 computer units and television sets hooked up.

About 60% of all elementary schools of the district's 162 *barangay* have modern teaching aids.

Two, Cagas is constructing more school buildings and

classrooms with multi-purpose covered courts and, three, day care centers managed with the help of his wife, Mercedes, a teacher and provincial board member. He is targeting three to five centers per *barangay*.

Four, a scholarship program with TESDA and CHed has helped more than 500 students

taking up law, technical and vocational courses, and bachelor's degrees in cooperative development.

The Central Nakayama Corp., a half-billion enterprise assembling export materials, has hired 100 computer graduates. The SM brewery also hires graduates for its agri-sugar manufacturing, coconut and sugar processing operations.

Five, more libraries and gyms. One library each has been built for the Southern Philippines Aquamarine School of Technology (SPAMAST) and Carmelo delos Cientos National Trade School with five more libraries being planned.

Six, Cagas is building water facilities in each school.

Cagas knows his PDAF-assisted projects may be replicated in other districts, but as he vigorously defends the “pork,” he says, “I use the pork to benefit my constituents in the most honest, competent and effective way I can.” ©

The Attrition Act of 2005

By Raymond G. Pasilliao

KNOW the LAW

REPUBLIC Act 9335 or the Attrition Act of 2005 was signed into law on January 25,

2005. It provides for a system of rewards and penalties for personnel of the Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR) and the Bureau of Customs to encourage them to be more efficient in collecting taxes.

With the new law, it is hoped that public servants in these two revenue-collecting agencies will be working harder in to surpass collection targets in order to receive incentives. Corruption and a lackadaisical work ethic, meanwhile, will be minimized if not totally eliminated, with the imposition of stiff penalties for falling short of collection targets.

Priority Measure

RA 9335, or “An Act To Improve the Revenue Collection Performance of the Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR) and the Bureau of Customs (BOC) Through the Creation of A Rewards and Incentives Fund and of A Revenue Performance Evaluation Board and for Other Purposes,” is one of the revenue-generating measures certified urgent by President Arroyo.

Approved on 3rd reading by the House of Representatives by a vote of 133-28 and one abstention, the enactment of the measure is strong proof the government is serious in pursuing reforms to keep its financial house in order and trim the budget deficit. Speaker Jose de Venecia states that the Lateral Attrition Law could raise from P10 to P15 billion in new revenues for the government.

Declaration of policy

RA 9335 provides that it is the policy of the State to optimize the revenue-generation capability and collection of the Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR) and the Bureau of Customs (BOC) by providing for a system of rewards and sanctions through the creation of a Rewards and Incentives Fund and a Revenue Performance Evaluation Board in the above agencies for the purpose of encouraging their officials and employees to exceed their revenue targets.

Coverage

All officials and employees of the BIR and the BOC with at least six months of service, regardless of employment status, shall be covered by the system of rewards, incentives and sanctions provided in the Act.

Rewards and Incentives Fund

The most significant provision of the RA 9335 is the creation of a Rewards and Incentives Fund. The Fund will be sourced from the collection of the BIR and the BOC in excess of their respective revenue targets for the year (please see Table A).

District Incentive

The Law also provides for rewards and incentives at the district level. Revenue districts (BIR) and collection districts (BOC) that exceed their respective allocations of the revenue target shall be entitled to rewards and incentives amounting to ten percent (10%) of the excess over their allocated targets when the BIR or the BOC fails to meet its revenue target by less than ten (10%).

Revenue Performance Evaluation Board

RA 9335 creates a Revenue Performance Evaluation Board in the BIR and the BOC, each of which shall be composed of the Secretary of the Department of Finance (DOF) or an Undersecretary as the Chairman; the Secretary of the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) or the Undersecretary; the Director General of the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) or the Deputy Director General; and as nonvoting members, the Commissioners of the BIR and the BOC, or their Deputy Commissioners; two representatives from the rank-and-

file employees; and a representative from the officials, both of whom shall be duly nominated by their respective recognized organizations.

The Board shall have the power to prescribe the rules and guidelines for the allocation, distribution and release of the Rewards and Incentives Fund due to the agency, with rewards not limited to monetary benefits.

The Board shall also set the criteria and procedures for removing from service officials and employees whose revenue collection falls short of the target by at least seven and a half percent (7.5%). All relevant factors affecting the level of collection shall be taken into consideration.

Right to Appeal

Officials or employees whose employment is terminated by virtue of the decision of the Revenue Performance Evaluation Board may appeal to the Civil Service Commission (CSC) or the Office of the President (OP) in accordance with pertinent laws, rules and regulations.

Performance Report

The Law requires the Commissioners of the BIR and the BOC to file a report with the Revenue Performance Evaluation Board stating therein the status of collection in their respective agencies. In the event of a shortfall or surplus, the source of the shortfall or surplus, the personnel-in-charge of the unit, the explanation for the shortfall or surplus and the recommendation as to remedial course of

action in cases of shortfall, shall also be indicated in the report. The year-end report must also indicate the names of officers and employees who are recommended for termination or reward.

In the event of a shortfall in the national target, a separate report shall be submitted by the voting members of the Revenue Performance Evaluation Board to the Office of the President containing its evaluation of the performance of the Commissioner concerned.

Joint Congressional Oversight Committee

A Joint Congressional Oversight Committee is also created composed of seven Members from the Senate and seven Members from the House of Representatives. The Members from the Senate shall be appointed by the Senate President, with at least two senators representing the minority. The Members from the House of Representatives shall be appointed by the Speaker with at least two members representing the minority.

After the Oversight Committee will have approved the implementing rules and regulations (IRR) it shall thereafter become *functus officio* and therefore cease to exist.

Revenue collection reform

The enactment of RA 9335 paves the way to impart the message to public servants in the BIR and BOC that those who perform will receive rewards and incentives, but those who fail to meet standards shall be transferred or separated. In essence, the new law is a revenue reform measure indicating an earnest governmental effort to improve systematic collection and promote the efficient administration of tax laws. ©

TABLE A

The law provides for the following schedule:

Excess of Collection over the Revenue Targets	Percent (%) of the Excess Collection to Accrue to the Fund
30% or below	15%
More than 30%	15% of the first 30% plus 20% of the remaining excess.

To illustrate, if the Revenue Target for the Bureau of Customs is P100B and the target is exceeded with revenue collection amounting to P130B, the amount that will accrue to the Fund is P4.5B. This represents 15% of the P30B excess collection.

If, however, the revenue collection amounts to P150B, considering the Revenue Target of P100B, the amount that will accrue to the Fund would be P4.5B (15% of the first 30%) plus P4B (20% of the remaining excess of P20B), which would amount to P8.5B.

■ Interview with Rep. Constantino Jaraula

High time for a parliamentary, unicameral shift



THE debate on whether to have charter amendments this year and

how best to do it—through a Constituent Assembly or a Convention—is about to take center stage, likely after Congress tackles and approves the entire package of urgent revenue measures sought by Malacanang to reduce the huge budget deficit and avert a fiscal crisis.

Rep. Constantino Jaraula (Lone Dist., Cagayan de Oro City), veteran lawmaker and respected constitutionalist, who heads the House Committee on Constitutional Amendments, says his panel has done its homework and is ready to present a “menu of options” on charter amendments. **The Forum** interviewed him to get a preview of these options. Excerpts:

Question: What is the underlying philosophy for Charter amendments?

Answer: We need to amend the 1987 Constitution because there is an admitted defect in our structural system. Primarily, our present system promotes corruption; corruption is integral in the system. Since our number one problem is corruption, we must eliminate it at the source. We also need to address the fundamental concerns and interests of those in outlying islands who at present are considered second-class citizens in category and treatment. It is imperative that we now shift to a Federal System. The Sulu and Mindanao problem could be best solved by a shift to Federal System. The smoldering hatred



and hostility of people in these areas have translated themselves in rebellion, and they receive mass support from unity in sentiments.

Q: Is there a sense of urgency to amend the Charter now?

Answer: Absolutely. It may be too late to do it in 2007 or in 2010. Events are threatening to overtake us. There are more hungry people now than ever before.

Q: What specific provisions of the 1987 Charter have to be amended?

Answer: Specifically, Articles 6 and 7 relating to the structure of government and the executive and legislative departments. There will be changes in other areas as well, like constitutional commissions, as a result of the introduction of another system. The matter of the Judiciary may also yield to a revisit.

Q: The shift to a parliamentary system is likely to be a high priority. Why so?

Answer: We are moving toward a parliamentary unicameral system because this is the only way to eliminate the present duplicitous system that is a waste of people's money and time. We don't want this duplicitous system. What we do in the House of Representatives is re-done in the Senate; we are

spending the same amount of resources and time on the same bills. Therefore this system is expensive. For the country to recover economically, we must do some major cost-cutting as well.

“The parliamentary, unicameral system attacks corruption at the source. It eliminates waste of resources by cutting the cost of maintaining two chambers duplicating each other's work.”

Q: The House panel on Constitutional amendments which you chair wants a Constituent Assembly to amend the Charter. Why not a Constitutional Convention?

Answer: We want the Constituent Assembly (of the House and the Senate) primarily because of the expense needed

for this exercise. There is no sense in postponing or canceling the barangay elections, which is a regular exercise, due to lack of money and deciding to hold elections for delegates to a constitutional convention. That is being dishonest to the people. Besides, we in Congress already know what we have to do because our Committee, which has completed its administrative work, has specific proposals. Knowing what is to be done, why do we have to give this task to other people who may have to undertake a lot of study and research because they don't know these proposals yet? Finally, we are not revising the entire Constitution. We are merely targeting specific provisions.

Q: But the election of delegates to a convention will give people a voice in this process? What is your view?

Answer: The Con-Con is a romantic and popular notion. But we ask these questions. Who are going to vote—angels from heaven or the same electorate that elected our senators and congressmen? The answer is the same electorate. Who are likely to run? The popular view is the spouses of incumbent solons or their relatives. In which case we would have a convention conceivably controlled by the incumbents. The other view is that people who have lost in previous elections will run. So why give it to the second-raters and not to those who have just won a fresh mandate in the last elections?

Q: How far has your committee moved in regard to

Charter amendments?

Answer: My committee has done its job. We have prepared a Concurrent Resolution for the House and the Senate to constitute themselves into a Constituent Assembly to amend specific provisions of the Constitution. We have also drawn up the rules for the Constituent Assembly to avoid delays that we saw in the long debates on the rules of canvassing last May. After the moratorium on debates on Charter amendments is lifted, we are prepared to report our menu of options. After that, I will leave it to the Committee on Rules and the House leadership on how we will proceed. I just don't want to be sleeping on my job.©

CSC chairman David

Continued from page 1

there to keep accepting orders.

“If the House bureaucracy can raise its head up and show that even in the most political of institutions—that despite severe difficulties we find in the workplace and in the corners of our country—these [challenges] are surmounted and professionalism shines through, then there is hope for our country,” David said.

The CSC chair was invited by the Public Relations and Information Department, host of four Monday flag-raising rites last January. David said she normally declines Monday morning engagements due to conflict with the weekly CSC board meetings, but made an exception to attend a neighbor institution's request. “Its proximity would not absent me from the meeting,” she said.© Isagani C. Yambot Jr.



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