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BUDGET BRIEFINGS		
COMMITTEE	SUBJECT MATTER	DISCUSSIONS
Appropriations	<p>Briefing on the proposed FY 2018 budget, and plans and programs, and major accomplishments of the following government agencies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT) 	<p>The Committee, chaired by Rep. Karlo Alexei Nograles (1st District, Davao City), listened to the briefing on the proposed FY 2018 budget, plans and programs, and major accomplishments of the Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT) and the Commission on Higher Education (CHED).</p> <p>Committee Vice Chair Rep. Erlpe John "Ping" Amante (2nd District, Agusan del Norte) sat as the presiding officer during the DICT's budget briefing.</p> <p>DICT Secretary Rodolfo Salalima said that the DICT, created in May 2016 by virtue of RA 10844, got the approval of its organizational structure only in June this year. He also reported that RA 10929 which provides free Wi-Fi access in selected public places in the country was already signed by the President on August 2, 2017.</p> <p>Presenting the DICT's 2018 proposed budget, Undersecretary Monchito Ibrahim said that the DICT and its attached agencies are set to receive P6.87 billion, which is 96% higher than their 2017 budget of P3.5 billion. The 2018 budget is distributed as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> DICT Proper – P6.24 billion; National Telecommunications Commission – P453.47 million; National Privacy Commission – P150.83 million; and Cybercrime Investigation and Coordination Center – P19.72 million. <p>Ibrahim highlighted the Philippines' global rankings in various information technology (IT) services: 1st in the voice-based business process outsourcing (BPO) services and 2nd in non-voice IT services; third in the top 50 digital nations; 71st in the eGovernment development index; 73rd in the global innovation index; 37th in the global cybersecurity index; and top 10 in the Asia Pacific Region in the global cybersecurity index.</p> <p>Asked by Rep. Nograles to explain the reason for the huge increase in the budget of the DICT for 2018, Ibrahim said that a huge part of the budget will be used to finance the rehabilitation and maintenance of its old building on Roces Avenue and the training facility in Valenzuela City. Currently, the DICT is renting an office at the University of the Philippines (UP) Diliman. He also explained that P1.6 billion of the budget will fund the free Wi-Fi project of the government.</p> <p>KABAYAN Party-List Rep. Harry Roque Jr. inquired on what could compel telecommunications companies (telcos) to improve the quality of their service. Salalima suggested that RA 7925 or the Public Telecommunications Policy Act of the Philippines and other pertinent laws should be amended to increase the penalties against erring or non-compliant telcos.</p> <p>If the DICT's report on the country's global standing in the field of IT is made as basis, Rep. Mohamad Khalid Dimaporo (1st District, Lanao del Norte) asked how come the Philippines is one of the countries with the slowest internet connections.</p>

<p>Continuation... Appropriations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commission on Higher Education (CHED) 	<p>Salalima replied that while the Philippines has not yet met the global standard for internet speed of 10 to 11 megabytes per second (mbps), it has made progress by achieving the current average of 5 mbps compared to last year's 1 to 2 mbps. He said that the country needs more IT infrastructures and more telcos to engage in the business to attain efficient service while at the same time lowering the cost for the benefit of the consumers.</p> <p>On the inquiry of the Members of the Committee with regard to the status of implementation of the "Pipol Konek" or free Wi-Fi/internet access in public places, Ibrahim said that a total of 712 free Wi-Fi sites have already been established nationwide. The Committee requested the DICT to submit a list of these sites per municipality and per district.</p> <p>The DICT was likewise asked to submit reports and documents pertinent to the proposed 2018 budget as requested by the Members of the Committee before the plenary deliberation of its budget.</p> <p>Committee Vice Chair and Antique Rep. Paolo Javier sat as the presiding officer during the CHED's budget briefing.</p> <p>CHED Chair Patricia Licuanan said that under the FY 2018 National Expenditure Program (NEP), CHED is set to receive P13.52 billion, which is 31% lower compared to its current budget of P19.58 billion. By expense class, CHED's 2018 proposed budget will be distributed as follows: personnel services (PS), P408.68 million; maintenance and other operating expenses (MOOE), P12.77 billion; and capital outlay (CO), P344.77 million.</p> <p>Licuanan explained that the huge decrease in the budget of CHED is largely due to the non-allocation of MOOE funds for the Higher Education Support Program (HESP); decrease in MOOE allocations for the <i>Payapa at Masaganang Pamayanan (PAMANA)</i> Study Grant Program and the Information System Strategic Plan (ISSP); and decrease in CO allocation for the Research and Scholarship Project. These programs and projects will be part of the government's program providing free tuition in state universities and colleges (SUCs).</p> <p>CHED Commissioner Prospero De Vera mentioned that a budget of about P16.8 billion is required to implement RA 10931 or the Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act, specifically for academic year 2018-2019. He added that the P8 billion allocation for HESP under CHED's 2017 budget will be utilized for the implementation of the free tuition program for the current school year. He reported that the law's implementing rules and regulations (IRR) are already being drafted.</p> <p>Deputy Speaker Pia Cayetano (2nd District, Taguig City) and Rep. Edcel Lagman (1st District, Albay) requested CHED to study the possibility of excluding affluent students from the coverage of RA 10931 for the simple reason that they can well afford to pay for their tuition fees in SUCs which have generally low tuition rates compared to private schools. On the other hand, BAGONG HENERASYON Party-List Rep. Bernadette Herrera-Dy suggested that payment or non-payment of tuition fees be based on income brackets.</p> <p>In response to the query of some of the Members of the Committee regarding the unobligated amount of P1.55 billion from CHED's 2016 budget, Licuanan explained that it is mainly due to the delayed processing of scholarship grants. To address this problem, Licuanan said that CHED already revised its guidelines allowing the full obligation of scholarship funds for one year starting 2017. It likewise intends to hire additional staff in CHED's regional offices to speed up the process.</p> <p>Explaining further, Licuanan said that CHED's low 10.48% budget utilization rate for the 1st and 2nd quarter of 2017 is due to the fact that the academic year and the fiscal year of the government are not</p>
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Continuation... Appropriations		<p>synchronized. Thus, most of the programming of funds are done only on the 3rd and 4th quarter, she added.</p> <p>Party-List Reps. Antonio Tinio (ACT TEACHERS) and Sarah Jane Elago (KABATAAN) questioned CHED's issuance of Memorandum Order (MO) 64, s. 2017 which provides for a mandatory drug testing for students in secondary and tertiary schools. They claimed that this move by the CHED violates the students' right to education on the premise that the students who tested positive will not be admitted in school. They also emphasized that the Comprehensive Dangerous Drugs Act of 2002 (RA 9165) requires drug testing only on a random basis.</p> <p>Licuanan agreed to reexamine the MO and vowed that drug testing will not be made a prerequisite for admission in schools.</p>
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COMMITTEE MEETING				
COMMITTEE	MEASURES		SUBJECT MATTER	ACTION TAKEN/DISCUSSION
	NO.	PRINCIPAL AUTHOR		
Dangerous Drugs	HR 585	Rep. Sarmiento (C.)	Directing the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG), Maritime Industry Authority (MARINA), Office of Transport Security (OTS), Land Transportation Office (LTO), and other government agencies to intensify and coordinate their efforts to suppress the trafficking of illegal drugs in the country	<p>The Committee, chaired by Rep. Robert "Ace" Barbers (2nd District, Surigao del Norte), will deliberate further on the issues raised in HR 585.</p> <p>Catanduanes Rep. Cesar Sarmiento, author of HR 585, expressed great concern over the possibility that Catanduanes and other island provinces across the country are being used to serve as locations for <i>shabu</i> laboratories and jump-off points for the distribution of illegal drugs. This, after a "mega" <i>shabu</i> laboratory was discovered in Virac, Catanduanes on November 26, 2016 when police raided the place.</p> <p>Rep. Barbers, along with other members of the Committee, chided the Philippine National Police (PNP), particularly the Catanduanes Provincial Police, over alleged irregularities in the conduct of the police operation in Catanduanes and the inconsistencies in the testimonies of witnesses.</p> <p>Police Officer 2 Benjamin de la Rosa of the PNP Catanduanes, who is investigating the case, explained that the case filed against the personalities involved in the <i>shabu</i> laboratory case was amended twice based on the statements of witness Ernesto Tabor Jr.</p> <p>Tabor claimed that he was personally involved in the production of <i>shabu</i> in the laboratory in Catanduanes and in the shipment of these illegal drugs through the different ports in the country. He also claims to be an asset of the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) and the local police. He said he only came out of hiding to reveal what he knew about the syndicate after surviving an attempt on his life.</p> <p>AKO BICOL Party-List Rep. Rodel Batocabe questioned the PNP's decision to allow a relatively inexperienced member of the PNP to handle a case of such magnitude. He also questioned the reliability of Tabor's statements over the corroborated testimonies of another witness, Rudy Leonardo, who was reportedly the architect of the clandestine facility.</p>

Continuation... Dangerous Drugs				<p>According to Leonardo, the construction of the shabu laboratory did not begin until December of 2015 contrary to Tabor's claim that the laboratory has been operating as early as May 2015.</p> <p>Police Regional Office (PRO) 5 Chief Antonio Gardiola Jr. and PRO 5 Chief Legal Officer Edwin Engay, heeding the suggestions of the Committee, promised to replace the current investigators with more experienced ones and to withdraw the case filed, which has yet to reach the courts, and work closely with other government agencies to build up and file a better case against the persons involved in the operation of the illegal facility.</p> <p>Meanwhile, Virac Board Member Joseph Wong and his brother Jardin Wong, who were included in Tabor's list of people allegedly involved in the illegal drug trade, denied any knowledge of and involvement in the illegal drug trade.</p> <p>The PCG, LTO, Philippine Ports Authority (PPA), and other transport agencies were reminded to undertake concrete steps, particularly in relation to their mandate of supervising and monitoring the entry and transport of goods, to help combat the trafficking of illegal drugs in the country.</p>
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PUBLIC HEARING				
COMMITTEE	MEASURES		SUBJECT MATTER	ACTION TAKEN/ DISCUSSION
	NO.	PRINCIPAL AUTHOR		
Cooperatives Development	HR 120	Rep. Bravo (A.)	Investigation into the alleged violations in the contracts between oil palm plantation cooperatives in Southern Palawan and Agumil Phils., Inc. which put cooperatives in huge debts and displaced farmers from their own lands	<p>The Committee, chaired by AGAP Party-List Rep. Rico Geron, conducted a public hearing in Puerto Princesa, Palawan on August 10, 2017, in relation to HR 120.</p> <p>Discussed in the public hearing were the details of the agreements entered into by the oil palm plantation cooperatives with the Land Bank of the Philippines (LBP) and Agumil Phils., Inc.</p> <p>Aside from Reps. Geron and Anthony Bravo, Ph.D. (Party-List, COOP-NATCCO), author of HR 120, other House Members present during the meeting were: Deputy Speaker Frederick "Erick" Abueg (2nd District, Palawan), Reps. Gil "Kabarangay" Acosta (3rd District, Palawan) and Franz "Chicoy" Alvarez (1st District, Palawan), and Party-List Reps. Sabiniano Canama (COOP-NATCCO), Teodoro Montoro (AASENSO), Joseph Stephen Paduano (ABANG LINGKOD), and Orestes Salon (AGRI).</p>