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RESUMPTION OF SESSION

At 10:03 a.m., the session was resumed with Rep. Juan Pablo "Rimpy" P. Bondoc presiding.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER (Rep. Bondoc).
The session is resumed.
Majority Leader.

REP. LACSON-NOEL. Mr. Speaker, I move that we now proceed with the Additional Reference of Business and request that the Secretary General be directed to read the titles of bills and resolutions on First Reading, as well as committee reports.

I so move, Mr. Speaker.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER (Rep. Bondoc).
There is a motion. (*Silence*) Hearing no objection, the motion is approved.

The Secretary General is directed to read the titles of bills and resolutions on First Reading, as well as committee reports.

ADDITIONAL REFERENCE OF BUSINESS

The Secretary General read the following House Bills and Resolutions on First Reading, and Committee Reports, and the Deputy Speaker made the corresponding references:

BILLS ON FIRST READING

House Bill No. 7746, entitled:

"AN ACT CREATING AN ELECTRONIC VOTERS REGISTRATION SYSTEM, AMENDING FOR THIS PURPOSE REPUBLIC ACT NO. 8189, ALSO KNOWN AS 'THE VOTER'S REGISTRATION ACT OF 1996' "

By Representative Crisologo
TO THE COMMITTEE ON SUFFRAGE
AND ELECTORAL REFORMS

House Bill No. 7747, entitled:

"AN ACT MANDATING THE INSTALLATION OF ONLINE PAYMENT SYSTEMS IN ALL PUBLIC OFFICES AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR"

By Representative Castelo
TO THE COMMITTEE ON BANKS AND
FINANCIAL INTERMEDIARIES

House Bill No. 7748, entitled:

"AN ACT DECLARING AS AGRICULTURAL LAND PORTIONS OF FORESTLAND LOCATED IN BARANGAY MANOC-MANOC, MUNICIPALITY OF MALAY, PROVINCE OF AKLAN, AMENDING FOR THE PURPOSE PROCLAMATION NO. 1064, ENTITLED 'CLASSIFYING BORACAY ISLAND SITUATED IN THE MUNICIPALITY OF MALAY, PROVINCE OF AKLAN INTO FORESTLAND (PROTECTION PURPOSES) AND INTO AGRICULTURAL LAND (ALIENABLE AND DISPOSABLE) PURSUANT TO THE PRESIDENTIAL DECREE NO. 705 (REVISED FORESTRY REFORM CODE OF THE PHILIPPINES)"

By Representative Marquez
TO THE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL
RESOURCES

House Bill No. 7750, entitled:

"AN ACT TO PROHIBIT AND PENALIZE THE UNAUTHORIZED PRACTICE

OF LAW AND OTHER RELATED ACTS”

By Representatives Flores, Zarate and Bautista
TO THE COMMITTEE ON JUSTICE

OF RETIREES OF THE DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS”

By Representative Rodriguez
TO THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

House Bill No. 7751, entitled:

“AN ACT PROVIDING FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF GRAIN CENTRALS IN EVERY LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT NATIONWIDE AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR”

By Representative Zubiri
TO THE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE AND FOOD

House Bill No. 7756, entitled:

“AN ACT CREATING THE MUSIC DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL OF THE PHILIPPINES, DEFINING ITS POWERS AND FUNCTIONS, APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR, PROVIDING FOR PENALTIES FOR CERTAIN ACTS, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES”

By Representative Rodriguez
TO THE COMMITTEE ON BASIC EDUCATION AND CULTURE

House Bill No. 7752, entitled:

“AN ACT ESTABLISHING A FILIPINO SIGN LANGUAGE STUDIES PROGRAM”

By Representative Vargas
TO THE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION

House Bill No. 7757, entitled:

“AN ACT STRENGTHENING THE NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR CULTURE AND THE ARTS, ITS COMPOSITION, FUNCTIONS, POWERS, AND MANDATE, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES”

By Representatives de Venecia, Benitez, Singson-Meehan, Bagatsing, Legarda, Escudero, Santos-Recto, Fernandez, Arenas, Savellano, Sagarbarria, Yap (Victor), Aragones, Bolilia, Revilla, Hofer, Vergara, Torres-Gomez, Gatchalian, Roman, Rodriguez, Macapagal Arroyo, Garin (Sharon), Nograles (Jericho), Salceda, Alonte, Quimbo, Vargas, Atienza, Nieto, Tan (Sharee), Garcia (Jose Enrique), Robes, Maceda, Co (Angelica), Belmonte, Tambunting and Defensor (Lorenz)

TO THE COMMITTEE ON BASIC EDUCATION AND CULTURE

House Bill No. 7753, entitled:

“AN ACT DECLARING THE LAST FULL WEEK OF SEPTEMBER OF EVERY YEAR AS THE ‘NATIONAL WEEK OF THE DEAF’ AND SEPTEMBER 23 AS THE ‘FILIPINO SIGN LANGUAGE DAY’ ”

By Representative Vargas
TO THE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

House Bill No. 7754, entitled:

“AN ACT PROHIBITING DISCRIMINATION ON THE BASIS OF SEXUAL ORIENTATION, GENDER IDENTITY OR EXPRESSION, OR SEX CHARACTERISTICS (SOGIESC) AND PROVIDING PENALTIES THEREFOR”

By Representative Tan (Alyssa)
TO THE COMMITTEE ON WOMEN AND GENDER EQUALITY

House Bill No. 7758, entitled:

“AN ACT MANDATING INCLUSION OF PANDEMICS, PLAGUES AND OTHER PUBLIC HEALTH CRISES EXTENSIVELY AS PART OF THE TEXTS OF HEALTH SUBJECTS IN ALL PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES”

House Bill No. 7755, entitled:

“AN ACT ADJUSTING THE MONTHLY PENSION AND DISABILITY BENEFITS

By Representative Savellano
TO THE COMMITTEE ON BASIC
EDUCATION AND CULTURE

House Bill No. 7760, entitled:

“AN ACT TO DEVELOP THE FINANCIAL
TECHNOLOGY INDUSTRY IN THE
PHILIPPINES, AND FOR OTHER
PURPOSES”

By Representative Salceda
TO THE COMMITTEE ON BANKS AND
FINANCIAL INTERMEDIARIES AND
THE COMMITTEE ON INFORMATION
AND COMMUNICATIONS
TECHNOLOGY

House Bill No. 7761, entitled:

“AN ACT ESTABLISHING THE CEBU
GERIATRIC MEDICAL CENTER
AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS
THEREFOR”

By Representative Abellanos
TO THE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH

House Bill No. 7764, entitled:

“AN ACT AMENDING SECTION 2
OF REPUBLIC ACT NO. 10868,
OTHERWISE KNOWN AS THE
CENTENARIANS ACT OF 2016 AND
FOR OTHER PURPOSES”

By Representative Tambunting
TO THE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON
SENIOR CITIZENS

House Bill No. 7765, entitled:

“AN ACT PROVIDING FOR THE
REGISTRATION, REGULATION AND
OPERATION OF COOPERATIVE
BANKS AND OTHER PURPOSES”

By Representative Tambunting
TO THE COMMITTEE ON BANKS AND
FINANCIAL INTERMEDIARIES

House Bill No. 7766, entitled:

“AN ACT PROMOTING
ENVIRONMENTAL
CONSCIOUSNESS THROUGH
EDUCATION AND CIVIC
ENGAGEMENT IN ORDER
TO INCREASE SOCIAL
RESPONSIBILITY AMONG THE

YOUTH, APPROPRIATING FUNDS
THEREFOR AND FOR OTHER
PURPOSES”

By Representative Tambunting
TO THE COMMITTEE ON BASIC
EDUCATION AND CULTURE

House Bill No. 7767, entitled:

“AN ACT UPGRADING THE POSITION
OF THE PROVINCIAL SCIENCE
AND TECHNOLOGY OFFICER
INTO THE PROVINCIAL SCIENCE
DIRECTOR IN THE DEPARTMENT
OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
AMENDING REPUBLIC ACT NO.
6959, APPROPRIATING FUNDS
THEREFORE AND FOR OTHER
PURPOSES”

By Representative Tambunting
TO THE COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE
AND TECHNOLOGY

House Bill No. 7768, entitled:

“AN ACT PROMOTING INTEGRATED
URBAN AGRICULTURAL
DEVELOPMENT IN ALL
METROPOLITAN AREAS
NATIONWIDE TO ADDRESS
FOOD SECURITY CONCERNS
AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS
THEREFOR”

By Representative Tambunting
TO THE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE
AND FOOD AND THE SPECIAL
COMMITTEE ON FOOD SECURITY

RESOLUTIONS

House Resolution No. 1246, entitled:

“RESOLUTION URGING THE HOUSE
OF REPRESENTATIVES THROUGH
THE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH
TO INVESTIGATE, IN AID OF
LEGISLATION, THE ALLEGED
DEMOTION OF NURSE POSITIONS
IN THE IMPLEMENTATION
OF SALARY UPGRADING FOR
NURSES”

By Representatives Gaité, Zarate and
Cullamat
TO THE COMMITTEE ON RULES

House Resolution No. 1247, entitled:

“A RESOLUTION URGING THE COMMITTEE ON GOOD GOVERNMENT AND PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY TO CONDUCT AN INVESTIGATION, IN AID OF LEGISLATION, ON THE DUBIOUS OPERATIONS OF SABONGINTERNATIONAL.COM AND THE PROLIFERATION OF SIMILAR ONLINE COCKFIGHTING SCHEMES OUTSIDE LICENSED COCKPITS WITH A FACILITY FOR BOTH LOCAL AND INTERNATIONAL BETTING”

By Representatives Fernandez, Marcoleta, Remulla and Barzaga
TO THE COMMITTEE ON RULES

House Resolution No. 1248, entitled:

“A RESOLUTION URGING THE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION (DOTr) TO DO A COMPREHENSIVE STUDY OF THE POTENTIAL IMPACTS OF THE PROPOSAL TO MANDATE THE REGISTRATION OF ELECTRIC BIKES (E-BIKES) AND ELECTRIC SCOOTERS (E-SCOOTERS) BEFORE ITS IMPLEMENTATION”

By Representative Castelo
TO THE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

House Resolution No. 1249, entitled:

“A RESOLUTION URGING THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE TO DIRECT THE NATIONAL FOOD AUTHORITY TO INCREASE ITS PURCHASE OF ALL GRAIN PRODUCE OF OUR FARMERS”

By Representative Zubiri
TO THE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE AND FOOD

House Resolution No. 1250, entitled:

“A RESOLUTION URGING THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES TO INCREASE THE FUNDS TO BE APPROPRIATED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE”

By Representative Rodriguez
TO THE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

House Resolution No. 1251, entitled:

“RESOLUTION URGING THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS, THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH (DOH) AND THE DEPARTMENT OF BUDGET AND MANAGEMENT (DBM) TO INCLUDE A STATEMENT IN THE SPECIAL PROVISIONS UNDER THE 2021 DOH BUDGET ALLOWING THE EXTENSION OF THE AVAILABILITY OF THE DOH’S 2020 PROGRAM ON MEDICAL ASSISTANCE TO INDIGENT PATIENTS (MAIP) UNTIL DECEMBER 30, 2021”

By Representative Violago
TO THE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

House Resolution No. 1252, entitled:

“RESOLUTION URGING THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES TO INVESTIGATE, IN AID OF LEGISLATION, THE KILLING OF 78-YEAR-OLD ROLANDO PATIÑO LEYSON SR. BY SUSPECTED STATE SECURITY FORCES IN SISON, SURIGAO DEL NORTE”

By Representatives Cullamat, Zarate, Gaité, Brosas, Castro (France) and Elago
TO THE COMMITTEE ON RULES

House Resolution No. 1253, entitled:

“A RESOLUTION EXPRESSING SUPPORT OF THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY FOR THE FULL IMPLEMENTATION OF THE FUNDING REQUIREMENTS OF THE NATIONAL BROADBAND PLAN (NBP) OF THE DEPARTMENT OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY (DICT) TO SPEED UP THE GOVERNMENT WITH ITS IMPERATIVE DUTY TO ACCELERATE INTERNET CONNECTIVITY THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY”

By Representatives Yap (Victor), Benitez, Marquez, Tambunting, Siao, Cabredo, Abaya, Violago, Garin (Sharon), Biazon, Natividad-Naga'o, Garcia (Jose Enrique), Tiangco and Nolasco
TO THE COMMITTEE ON INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY

House Resolution No. 1254, entitled:

"RESOLUTION CALLING FOR THE IMMEDIATE AND FULL LIFTING OF THE BAN ON THE OPERATION OF PUBLIC UTILITY JEEPNEYS"

By Representatives Gaité, Abante, Belmonte, Zarate, Cullamat, Brosas, Castro (France) and Elago
TO THE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Report of the Committee on Local Government (Committee Report No. 532), re H.B. No. 7771, entitled:

"AN ACT REAPPORTIONING THE PROVINCE OF AGUSAN DEL NORTE INTO THE LONE LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT OF THE CITY OF BUTUAN AND THE LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT OF THE PROVINCE OF AGUSAN DEL NORTE"

recommending its approval in substitution of House Bill No. 4123

Sponsors: Representatives Villanueva (Noel), Fortun and Amante-Matba
TO THE COMMITTEE ON RULES

Report of the Committee on Local Government (Committee Report No. 533), re H.B. No. 7772, entitled:

"AN ACT DECLARING JULY 5 OF EVERY YEAR A SPECIAL NON-WORKING HOLIDAY IN THE MUNICIPALITY OF BAMBANG, PROVINCE OF NUEVA VIZCAYA, TO BE KNOWN AS 'BAMBANG DAY' IN COMMEMORATION OF ITS FOUNDATION ANNIVERSARY"

recommending its approval in substitution of House Bill No. 6794

Sponsors: Representatives Villanueva (Noel) and Cuaresma
TO THE COMMITTEE ON RULES

Report of the Committee on Local Government (Committee Report No. 534), re H.B. No. 7773, entitled:

"AN ACT DECLARING SEPTEMBER 5 OF EVERY YEAR A SPECIAL NON-WORKING HOLIDAY IN THE MUNICIPALITY OF BASISTA, PROVINCE OF PANGASINAN TO BE KNOWN AS 'BASISTA FOUNDATION DAY', IN COMMEMORATION OF ITS FOUNDATION ANNIVERSARY"

recommending its approval in substitution of House Bill No. 3077

Sponsors: Representatives Villanueva (Noel) and Espino
TO THE COMMITTEE ON RULES

Report of the Committee on Local Government (Committee Report No. 535), re H.B. No. 7774, entitled:

"AN ACT DECLARING JANUARY 2 OF EVERY YEAR A SPECIAL NON-WORKING HOLIDAY IN THE MUNICIPALITY OF BONIFACIO, PROVINCE OF MISAMIS OCCIDENTAL TO BE KNOWN AS 'BONIFACIO DAY', IN COMMEMORATION OF ITS FOUNDATION ANNIVERSARY"

recommending its approval in substitution of House Bill No. 7253

Sponsors: Representatives Villanueva (Noel) and Oaminal
TO THE COMMITTEE ON RULES

Report of the Committee on Local Government (Committee Report No. 536), re H.B. No. 7775, entitled:

"AN ACT CREATING BARANGAYS ACMAC, DITUCALAN, SAN ROQUE, LUINAB, UPPER HINAPLANON, AND UBALDO LAYA, ALL IN THE CITY OF ILIGAN"

recommending its approval in substitution of House Bills Numbered 3964, 3965, 3966, 3967, 3968 and 3969

Sponsors: Representatives Villanueva (Noel) and Siao
TO THE COMMITTEE ON RULES

Report of the Committee on Local Government (Committee Report No. 537), re H.B. No. 7776, entitled:

“AN ACT DECLARING NOVEMBER 15 OF EVERY YEAR A SPECIAL NON-WORKING HOLIDAY IN THE PROVINCE OF ORIENTAL MINDORO, TO BE KNOWN AS ‘ARAW NG ORIENTAL MINDORO’, IN COMMEMORATION OF ITS FOUNDATION ANNIVERSARY”

recommending its approval in substitution of House Bill No. 6150

Sponsors: Representatives Villanueva (Noel) and Umali (Alfonso)
TO THE COMMITTEE ON RULES

Report of the Committee on Local Government (Committee Report No. 538), re H.B. No. 7777, entitled:

“AN ACT DECLARING JANUARY 8 OF EVERY YEAR A SPECIAL NON-WORKING HOLIDAY IN THE MUNICIPALITY OF PAVIA, PROVINCE OF ILOILO, TO BE KNOWN AS ‘PAVIA DAY’, IN COMMEMORATION OF ITS FOUNDATION ANNIVERSARY”

recommending its approval in substitution of House Bill No. 6084

Sponsors: Representatives Villanueva (Noel) and Gorriceta
TO THE COMMITTEE ON RULES

Report of the Committee on Metro Manila Development (Committee Report No. 539), re H.B. No. 7783, entitled:

“AN ACT MANDATING THE ESTABLISHMENT, MANAGEMENT, MAINTENANCE, AND REGULATION OF A RAINWATER HARVESTING FACILITY IN ALL NEW INSTITUTIONAL, COMMERCIAL, INDUSTRIAL, AND RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS IN METRO MANILA”

recommending its approval in substitution of House Bills Numbered 2418, 4111, 4124 and 4698

Sponsors: Representatives Lopez, Belmonte and Castelo

TO THE COMMITTEE ON RULES

THE PRESIDING OFFICER (Rep. Bondoc).
Majority Leader.

SUSPENSION OF SESSION

REP. LACSON-NOEL. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the session for a few minutes.

I so move, Mr. Speaker.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER (Rep. Bondoc).
The session is suspended.

It was 10:11 a.m.

RESUMPTION OF SESSION

At 10:20 a.m., the session was resumed.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER (Rep. Bondoc).
The session is resumed.

Majority Leader.

CONSIDERATION OF H.B. NO. 7727
Continuation

PERIOD OF SPONSORSHIP AND DEBATE

REP. LACSON-NOEL. Mr. Speaker, under the Calendar of Unfinished Business, I move that we resume the consideration of House Bill No. 7727, as contained in Committee Report No. 528. And for this purpose, may we direct the Secretary General to read the title of the said measure.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER (Rep. Bondoc).
Hearing no objection, the motion is carried. The Secretary General is directed to read the title of House Bill No. 7727, as found in Committee Report No. 528.

THE SECRETARY GENERAL. House Bill No. 7727, 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-ONE, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER (Rep. Bondoc).
Majority Leader.

DEPARTMENT OF TRADE
AND INDUSTRY

REP. LACSON-NOEL. Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary status of House Bill No. 7727 is that we are in the period of sponsorship and debate.

I move that we proceed with the consideration of the proposed budget of the Department of Trade and Industry.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER (Rep. Bondoc). Hearing no objection, the period of sponsorship and debate on the budget of the Department of Trade and Industry is opened.

Majority Leader.

REP. LACSON-NOEL. Mr. Speaker, I move that we acknowledge the presence of the heads and officials from the DTI, namely: Secretary Ramon Lopez, Undersecretary Ireneo Vizmonte, Undersecretary Ceferino Rodolfo, Undersecretary Ruth Castelo, Undersecretary Blesilda Lantayona, President and CEO Luna Cacanando, Director Ma. Asuncion Cruzada, and Atty. Cheryl Carbonell.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER (Rep. Bondoc). The Department of Trade and Industry family, led by its Secretary Ramon Lopez, and with Undersecretary Ireneo Vizmonte, Undersecretary Ceferino Rodolfo, Undersecretary Ruth Castelo, Undersecretary Blesilda Lantayona, President and CEO Luna Cacanando, Director Ma. Asuncion Cruzada, and Atty. Cheryl Carbonell, are most welcome to the House of Representatives.

Majority Floor Leader.

REP. LACSON-NOEL. Mr. Speaker, I move that we recognize the Honorable

Zubiri, Vice Chairperson of the Committee on Appropriations, to answer questions on the proposed budget of the DTI.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER (Rep. Bondoc). Hearing no objection, our esteemed Vice Chairman and Sponsor for the budget of the Department of Trade and Industry, the Hon. Manuel Zubiri, is recognized.

REP. ZUBIRI. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, our dear colleagues, and, of course, our DTI family, good morning to all of you. Let me make this quick, Mr. Speaker, my opening statement for the sponsorship of the DTI's budget is very simple.

Mr. Speaker, 0.2 percent of the national budget of P4.1 trillion is for the DTI. It is not even 1 percent or 2 percent, Mr. Speaker. In spite of its achievements, supposedly the savior of the MSMEs, the Department's attached agency, the SB Corp, for example, its lending arm, was only given P1.5 billion for 1.4 million small companies for 2021. Please be mindful that the MSMEs are the backbone of our economy, comprising 90 percent of all businesses and of which 40 percent, during April and May folded up, were folding, or were about to fold up, while 80 percent up to this day, Mr. Speaker, are still in dire need of help. As per today's statistics, as I have read in the newspapers today, Mr. Speaker, only 6 percent of the 1.4 million MSMEs remain closed. They say it has improved. Assuming it has, but we do not know that the rest of the 94 percent needs immediate assistance. We know that, whether we like it or not, they are open but we do not know whether they are making money or not, but definitely to my knowledge, they are having a very difficult time.

It does not mean they are financially stable or making money. We need to address this very challenging concern immediately, Mr. Speaker. If not, more jobs would be lost in the months to come and would result in more hunger and less revenues for our country. Compared to other countries in Southeast Asia, the Philippines' Trade Department has one of the lowest budgets in the entire region. Case in point, Mr. Speaker, Malaysia – their

budget for their DTI is P33 billion in peso value; Thailand is P20 billion in peso value; Singapore has P136 billion for a six-million population; Indonesia has P27 billion in pesos. Hence, we expect them to do so much with so little.

My dear colleagues, right at this moment, Mr. Speaker, this is where we should stand together, whether we are with the Majority or the Minority, left, left of center, center, right, right of center or from the far right. We need to stand hand in hand in support of the DTI and its attached agencies, most especially the SB Corporation, this unit that is the main lender of our MSMEs. If we want those 7.3 million families taken out of hunger, then support a much larger budget for the Department of Trade and Industry. We have resolutions in place, Mr. Speaker, Majority and Minority, to support a bigger budget for the DTI.

I now stand in front of you, my dear Speaker, to defend their meager budget.

I am ready for questions, Mr. Speaker.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER (Rep. Bondoc). Majority Leader.

Before our Sponsor begins, may I just ask the honorable Sponsor if this is for the budget of the Department of Trade and Industry alone or including the attached agencies already?

REP. ZUBIRI. Yes. Mr. Speaker, this is inclusive of all the attached agencies, except TESDA.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER (Rep. Bondoc). So, it includes the Cooperative Development Authority, Mr. Sponsor?

REP. ZUBIRI. Attached agencies are all mine, except for TESDA. I believe TESDA is under Luis Campos, Cong. Luis Campos. It was assigned to him by the Chairman. It used to be Congressman Matugas, Mr. Speaker.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER (Rep. Bondoc). So, to clarify, we are taking up the budget of the Department of Trade and Industry, including the attached agencies and corporations, except the CDA and TESDA.

Majority Leader.

REP. ZUBIRI. Yes, Mr. Speaker.

REP. LACSON-NOEL. Mr. Speaker, I move that we recognize the honorable Rep. Janette Garin of the First District of Iloilo to interpellate the Sponsor on the proposed budget of the DTI.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER (Rep. Bondoc). Our esteemed Deputy Minority Leader from the First District of Iloilo, the Hon. Janette Garin, is recognized for her interpellation of our Sponsor.

REP. LACSON-NOEL. Mr. Speaker, let me correct that. Instead of the Hon. Janette Garin, may I recognize the Hon. Gabriel Bordado Jr. of the Third District of Camarines Sur.

I so move, Mr. Speaker.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER (Rep. Bondoc). The Gentleman from the Third District of Camarines Sur, the Hon. Gabriel Bordado Jr., is recognized.

REP. BORDADO. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Majority Floor Leader. Thank you to the Sponsor of the Department of Trade and Industry.

Mr. Sponsor, several economists claimed, and I quote, "It is not a toss of priorities between health or economy. Only when the threat of COVID-19 subsides will economic activities resume." How do you react to this proposition, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker?

REP. ZUBIRI. Mr. Speaker, I could not hear the question clearly. My apologies, Congressman Bordado.

REP. BORDADO. Okay, let me repeat the question.

Can you hear me, Mr. Sponsor?

REP. ZUBIRI. Not too clearly, Congressman.

REP. BORDADO. Okay. At this stage, can you hear me?

REP. ZUBIRI. Go ahead, go ahead, please, with the question.

REP. BORDADO. Some economists claimed, and I quote, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker, "It is not a toss of priorities between health or economy. Only when the threat of COVID-19 subsides will economic activities resume." What is your reaction to this proposition, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker?

REP. ZUBIRI. Mr. Speaker, my dear Congressman Bordado, there is a proposal by the DTI to reopen the economy to almost a 100-percent capacity. They proposed this and I believe it came out in the newspapers. I read the newspapers today and they want more companies to open, Mr. Speaker, Congressman Bordado. They are working on it.

REP. BORDADO. Okay, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the deteriorating economic outlook, a decrease in the budget of the Department of Trade and Industry is sending the signal that the government is not serious in putting the economy on the road back to recovery and alleviating the plight of businesses in this crisis. Do you agree, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker?

REP. ZUBIRI. This is why, Mr. Speaker, we are part of the government. In the Legislative branch of government, we are working hand in hand with the Minority and the Majority to give the DTI a bigger budget, Mr. Speaker. Definitely, yes, we are working on it and I believe the problem right now with the pandemic is the economy and health. We are addressing health; now, we need to address the economy, of which DTI plays a big part in the economy. So, yes, we are going to address it and the government will address it, Mr. Speaker.

REP. BORDADO. Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor, I fully agree with you that there is an urgent need to increase the budget of the Department of Trade and Industry. So, given a low budget, is the Department confident enough that it can aid the businesses, particularly the micro-, small-, and medium-scale businesses cope with the effects of the pandemic and the downturn in our economy, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor?

REP. ZUBIRI. Yes, Mr. Speaker, very simple, input equals output. If you give them a small input, you will receive a small output. So, Mr. Speaker, we need a bigger budget for the DTI. We need to fight for a bigger budget for the DTI. They want to do so much, but they only have so little. Yes, they will do their best, and they have promised that for as long as they are given the right budget, they will work hard with us to make sure that all the small businesses thrive again in the future, Mr. Speaker.

REP. BORDADO. Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker, is the Department of Trade and Industry looking into new or all alternative long-term avenues like online platforms where trade and business can be conducted?

REP. ZUBIRI. Yes, Mr. Speaker, I believe they are. Now, with the new normal, they are trying to find ways and means to be able to adjust to this new system of working and operating businesses, Mr. Speaker. I am sure they are still doing their research on how to go about it, but definitely, they have a lot of ideas. But to be able to implement or to instigate all these programs, they need a bigger budget, so yes. As you could see, what they have done so far to protect all the MSMEs – for example, they helped in making these businesses operate online. Right now, a lot of retail businesses are going online and I am sure they are working hand in hand with them to enable these people or these companies to achieve that type of business, Mr. Speaker, that business model, Mr. Speaker.

REP. BORDADO. Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor, what specific programs or projects of the Department were introduced? Mr. Speaker, I am referring to the online projects and programs. Can you give us, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker, specific programs and projects now being conducted by the Department of Trade and Industry?

REP. ZUBIRI. It is basically helping MSMEs, for example, going through the e-commerce platform. To date, 314 MSMEs are live on Shopee. They are helping in making

the businesses go digital, meaning to say, through online purchasing, through online retail shopping, Mr. Speaker. But definitely, they are giving seminars and the DTI has set up a market showroom, for example, and an online trade platform called “Pasinaya” during the pandemic, mid-July, all the way and as projected, assisted a total of 260 MSMEs, which generated a total of about close to P32 million in sales. So, they are still trying and they are working hard to find ways and means for these MSMEs to survive in this new digital platform, Mr. Speaker.

REP. BORDADO. Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor, what, again, specific programs and projects did the DTI introduce just to help the MSMEs transform into digital platforms or transition into digital platforms, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor?

REP. ZUBIRI. One moment, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker.

To date, they are still ongoing with their Negosyo Centers, their OTOP, their Shared Service Facilities (SSF), Livelihood Seeding Programs. These are still ongoing, Mr. Speaker, aside from webinars and seminars for the digital platform, Mr. Speaker. Then also, we have got the Reboot Package for online enterprises, one of the flagship programs of the DTI for promotion of e-commerce. So basically, they are all e-commerce-based, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, if Congressman Bordado would want the hundred-page presentation of the DTI, we will send it to him. You could see everything that they are working on and what so far they have achieved. So, if I may, may I just present this to Congressman Bordado; I can send it to his office. This is their presentation and a lot of specific information that he needs are in here, Mr. Speaker.

REP. BORDADO. Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor. So, in other words, the DTI is doing well in helping the MSMEs adjust to the so-called online platform, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor. Now, what are the Department’s plans to help boost the manufacturing sector in the country in order to provide more jobs to Filipino workers, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor?

REP. ZUBIRI. Mr. Speaker, the DTI is working hard to be able to — they are trying their best to open more sectors of our economy, Mr. Speaker, and they are now working on better financing for these companies that have worked hard. But on the manufacturing side, Mr. Speaker, as you could see this morning, Secretary Mon Lopez came out in the newspaper saying that more industries and sectors should be opened for us to be able to create more jobs, bring back the jobs that have once been lost and, definitely, they are on track. If we are only allowed to make them operate, I believe we will get back the jobs that have been lost through the months during this pandemic, Mr. Speaker. And also, they are working on financing these corporations or small companies — sorry, not corporations but MSMEs that have been hit hard. So they are looking for other ways to be able to finance small business companies, Mr. Speaker.

REP. BORDADO. Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor, are you aware of the number or the percentage of manufacturing companies now operating in the country despite the pandemic?

REP. ZUBIRI. My apologies, Congressman Bordado. Mr. Speaker, my apologies, aware of what specifically, sir?

REP. BORDADO. The number of manufacturing companies operating in the country at this stage.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor, I just wish to know the number or the percentage of the manufacturing firms operating in the country today vis-à-vis the number of manufacturing companies operating prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

REP. ZUBIRI. One minute, Mr. Speaker, Congressman Bordado, one minute.

Mr. Speaker, to date, as per survey, as per statistics, 6 percent have closed. As I have said during my opening speech, 6 percent of MSMEs have closed. From April to May, they were at almost 40 percent. Now, some have recovered, some are trying to recover, but most of them are about to start or have

been given a second chance to reopen. Out of 1.5 million, 6 percent are closed, the rest are operating. Out of the 6 percent, about 90,000 MSMEs are closed. That is ...

REP. BORDADO. Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor, are you telling us that 94 percent of the MSMEs are now operating?

REP. ZUBIRI. As per survey, as per statistics, yes, that is the number. As compared to April and May, when they were close to 38 to 40 percent.

Now, Mr. Speaker, my dear Congressman Bordado, the question is, if they are open? Okay, yes, they are open. Are they making money? That is another question. Kumikita ba sila o hindi? That is another question. Kailangan ba nila ng seed fund o kailangan ba nila ng tulong? Definitely, kailangan po nila ng tulong. This is why dito po sa ating resolution na ibinigay po ng committee, ng Trade Committee, kung puwede, dagdagan po natin iyong pondo ng SB Corporation at saka hihingi po tayo sa SB Corporation na huwag pong mag-charge ng interest o kung may interest man, mas maliit pa sa kanilang interest na i-tsina-charge nila noong 2019. We are requesting them to lessen the interest or if not, charge no interest for a period of one to two years for the MSMEs to recover, Mr. Speaker, my dear Congressman Bordado.

REP. BORDADO. Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor, are you saying that although 94 percent of the MSMEs are now open, they are not earning anything? Is that correct, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker?

REP. ZUBIRI. As you could see, Mr. Speaker, 50 percent of them have partially reopened. The question is, have they released ...

REP. BORDADO. Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker, you were saying a while ago that 94 percent ...

REP. ZUBIRI. Yes.

REP. BORDADO. ... of the MSMEs are now open and only 6 percent are closed.

REP. ZUBIRI. Yes, Mr. Speaker, as per statistics.

REP. BORDADO. There seem to be some contradictions in your pronouncements now.

REP. ZUBIRI. Mr. Speaker.

REP. BORDADO. Kindly clarify, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor.

REP. ZUBIRI. Mr. Speaker, dear Congressman Bordado, 6 percent, as per statistics, are closed and 94 percent are open. Out of the 94 percent, 50 percent of them, of which we do not—they are not operating at full capacity; they are operating at partial capacity. This is why there was still a drop in unemployment. The unemployment rate has decreased but it is still big. We still need to address the unemployment rate, Mr. Speaker. So, yes, they have been opened recently but at what capacity? Whether it is at 50 percent, 60 percent, 40 percent capacity, it is still to be determined, Mr. Speaker.

REP. BORDADO. So, in other words, you are saying that 94 percent of the MSMEs are now open but half of this 94 percent are not earning well or are operating in a temporary fashion or temporary manner, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor?

REP. ZUBIRI. As per data, Mr. Speaker, Congressman Bordado, they have been operating but a lot of them have been operating at a loss. A lot of them are trying their best to make money. A lot of them are not in full capacity, at the same time, have not hired more people or they let go of their people. They are now operating only at 50 percent of their workforce or even less. So, Mr. Speaker, yes, it is still a problem, a big problem because they need the funds, they need help in terms of financing, they need help in terms of subsidies, Mr. Speaker. Yes, so even if we say that 6 percent are closed and 94 percent are open, I believe, I strongly believe that the 94 percent need help. In my opening statement, Mr. Speaker, as of today, 80 percent of them have requested from the

SB Corp that they not to be charged interests and that they get more financing or funding, Mr. Speaker. Meaning to say, 80 percent are still in dire need of help, Mr. Speaker. Yes, they are operating but they are either operating at a loss or just trying to survive, Mr. Speaker, Congressman Bordado.

REP. BORDADO. So, in other words, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor, we do need to help these MSMEs. Now, aside from what you said, Mr. Sponsor, what other specific steps can we do to help these MSMEs, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor?

REP. ZUBIRI. Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor, it is very simple, they need help, they need financing, they need subsidies from the government. They need the SB Corporation to release the funds and not to charge them, at least for one or two years, interest. We need to bring up the fund of the SB Corporation, P1.5 billion for 2021 is not enough, Mr. Speaker, my dear Congressman Bordado. Who will pay taxes next year if we do not help them? If they start folding up and we do not help them, then they will now – how do you call this – file for losses and will not be able to pay in 2021. This is why right now, as soon as we are finished with the budget, we should see – how do you call this – we need to help the attached agencies, especially the SB Corporation, with the seed fund. We need to supply them with the money to be able to lend to our MSMEs, Mr. Speaker, Congressman Bordado.

Yes, I am with you, I am definitely with you. This is why we requested both the Majority and the Minority to support the increased funding for the SB Corporation and the other attached agencies, especially the Livelihood Seeding Program of the DTI so they can really be serious in helping and working for the upliftment of all these MSMEs, Mr. Speaker, Congressman Bordado.

REP. BORDADO. Okay, thank you. Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor, I have here my last question. Is the Department going to continue letting manufacturing firms and employers shoulder the costs of disinfecting facilities and places of business, and providing other health

measures like testing and PPEs, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker?

REP. ZUBIRI. Are you asking about the PPEs, about the health manufacturing supplies that are being done in the Philippines as against our purchase in other countries, outside, Mr. Speaker, Congressman Bordado? Is that the question?

REP. BORDADO. No, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor, I am asking about the disinfection of facilities and places of business which are now shouldered by the business firms themselves. Will the DTI continue with this scheme of things or has it allotted a budget in order to extend financial assistance for these businesses?

REP. ZUBIRI. In terms of financial assistance, Mr. Speaker, Congressman Bordado, yes, it will be under the SB Corporation. They will extend and assist as much as possible, depending on what is given to them, and definitely, with the other programs, they will still continue to assist the Livelihood Seeding Program, the OTOP and the other programs. These will still be continued. They are just requesting for a bigger budget, Mr. Speaker, to be able to implement a true-to-form recovery plan for this country, for this economy, Mr. Speaker.

At this juncture, Rep. Bondoc relinquished the Chair to Deputy Speaker Johnny Ty Pimentel.

REP. BORDADO. Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor, I fully agree that we really need to augment, ...

REP. ZUBIRI. Yes, Mr. Speaker.

REP. BORDADO. ... to increase the budget of the Department of Trade and Industry.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor.

Thank you.

REP. ZUBIRI. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, Congressman Bordado. Thank you very much and I am with you, with

everything that you have said. Definitely, we will work hard to achieve what you want them to achieve, Mr. Speaker, Congressman Bordado.

Marami pong salamat.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Pimentel).
Majority Leader.

REP. LACSON-NOEL. Mr. Speaker, I now move to recognize the Hon. Arlene Brosas of the Party-List GABRIELA for her interpellation.

I so move, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Pimentel).
Hon. Arlene Brosas is recognized and please be reminded of our 30-minute rule.

REP. BROSAS. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, will the Sponsor yield to a few questions?

REP. ZUBIRI. Yes, Ma'am. Yes, Mr. Speaker. Yes, Ma'am, I am ready, I will yield to your questions.

REP. BROSAS. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, just this September 16, President Duterte extended the declaration of state of calamity nationwide until Sept. 12, 2021, until next year po.

The proclamation states:

This extension will, among others, effectively afford the national government, as well as local government units (LGUs) ample latitude to continue utilizing appropriate funds, including the Quick Response Fund, in their disaster preparedness and response efforts to contain the spread of COVID-19, monitor and control prices of basic necessities and prime commodities, and provide basic services to the affected populations.

Noong nag-declare po ng state of calamity noong May at nagkaroon ng lockdown, nag-issue po ng price freeze. Ngayon, nag-declare ulit. Ano naman po ang aksyon na gagawin

ng DTI kaugnay sa pagkontrol ng mga presyo ng bilihan, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor?

REP. ZUBIRI. Mr. Speaker, dear Congresswoman Arlene Brosas, I believe iyong SRP po magiging iyon ang presyo, 'no, na ngayon ay ginagamit ng lahat ng mga tindahan. No, there is no price freeze pero SRP, iyon talaga ang pinapasunod nila sa lahat ng mga nagbebenta po diyan sa buong bansa, Mr. Speaker, Ma'am Arlene. I hope that answers your question, but they do not have any price freeze as of the moment.

REP. BROSAS. Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor, tila ba wala na tayong public health emergency kung ganoon pa rin iyong ating gagamitin na pamamaraan. Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor, tinanong ko po ito eh: Sasapat ba iyong SRP lamang samantalang noong nag-declare na ng health emergency – ngayon ay nag-declare muli ang Pangulo, bakit hindi o walang aksyon o walang ginagawa ang DTI para magkaroon ng relief kaugnay sa presyo ng mga bilihan, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor?

REP. ZUBIRI. Sa monitoring, from my stats, Ma'am Arlene, iyong SRP system, 100-percent compliance po. As of last September, ngayon, from September to September of last year and now this year, September, wala pong nag-increase as per the DTI. So sinusunod po iyong SRP. Pero I understand your question and I understand the need to make sure that people do not take advantage of our populace, that people do not take advantage of the situation, and I know because coming from the province, I know that we also got hit before and, definitely, I will make sure and I will let them know. Babantayan po natin iyong presyo po ng mga basic goods at magtulungan po tayo, tutulungan din tayo ng DTI para mamonitor po para hindi naman mang-abuso iyong mga oportunista na nandiyan po sa ating bansa.

REP. BROSAS. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor.

Mr. Speaker, sinabi po noong nakaraang Committee budget hearing ng DTI na walang buffer fund po na puwedeng gamitin for

stockpiling basic and prime commodities. Pero sinasabi nga po naming mayroong Section 9 ng Price Act kung saan mayroon dapat buffer fund, 'no. Ngayon, bakit walang inilaan para sa buffer fund for stockpiling? Did you consider this in your original proposed budget? How much is the needed buffer fund?

REP. ZUBIRI. Since the very start, Mr. Speaker, Ma'am Arlene, they have not practiced the buffer fund. Wala pong buffer fund from the very start. Nasa P5.3 billion yata iyong kanilang budget. There is no buffer fund to speak of. But just going back to your question, the first question, iyong profiteers po, based on their statistics po, over 500 were arrested during these COVID months, Ma'am Arlene, Congresswoman Arlene. But definitely, wala po silang buffer fund. They have never practiced that buffer fund. Baka sa ibang ahensiya po iyong buffer fund na 'yon. Kasi based on their – looking at iyong kanilang pinapanggastos po sa kanilang Departamento, wala pong buffer fund.

REP. BROSAS. Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor, tama po ba, walang prinopose na budget for buffer fund ang DTI?

REP. ZUBIRI. Hindi po, hindi po sila nag-propose. Pero kung gusto n'yo pong tulungan ang DTI maglagay po tayo ng buffer fund, kung gusto po ninyo, baka puwede tayong humingi from the people, the stakeholders involved, puwede rin tayong humingi ng buffer fund para puwede, pero right now, from the very start, from the beginning of the DTI, wala po silang buffer fund, Mr. Speaker, Congresswoman Arlene.

REP. BROSAS. Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor, mahalaga po dahil ito iyong tutugon kapag nagkaroon ng shortages sa panahon ng sakuna. Iyon po talaga iyong dapat magkaroon ng allocation para sa mga implementing agencies natin. "The implementing agency may procure purchased imports, stockpile any basic commodity or prime commodity, devise ways and means of distributing them for sale at reasonable prices in areas where there is a shortage of supply or a need to

effect changes in its prevailing price." Kaya iyong buffer fund po magandang ina-allocate sa appropriations, sa annual appropriations, lalong-lalo na ngayon, ang DTI – kasi kahit po sa usapin ng face masks, mga PPEs, et cetera, lahat, mahalaga po na may pondo tayo para diyan. Alam n'yo naman noong nakaraan na nagkaroon ng shortages sa ilan sa mga pangangailangan, lalo na sa health sector, eh maganda pong merong nagagamit iyong DTI na buffer fund, Mr. Speaker, distinguished Sponsor.

Now, on to my next question po, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor. May inilaan lamang na P2.2 billion para sa MSME Development Program. Nabawasan po ito ng P415 million mula sa dati nitong budget na P2.6 billion. Nananatili naman, kanina po narinig ko sinabi ninyo, iyong budget ng Small Business Corporation, iyong SBC – tama po ba – P1.5 billion pa rin, parang hindi nagkaroon ng pandemya. Kasi noong nakaraan po, ang budget nito ay P1.5 billion; ngayon, nakapeg pa rin siya, P1.5 billion. So, ano po iyon? Bakit parang walang naging pandemya kaya ganoon. Ano po iyong paliwanag dito, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor?

REP. ZUBIRI. Mr. Speaker, Madam Congresswoman Arlene, it is the same question that baffles me. Even from the very start, I was trying to get a bigger budget for SB Corporation. I am not going to mention any names, but it came to the point that one of the leaders of the DTI during one of the Zoom meetings cried in front of all of us, Congressmen and Congresswomen, because kulang po iyong budget nila. That is why nandito po ako, tama po kayo na kailangan natin ng mas malaking budget para sa SB Corporation – P1.5 billion is not enough and definitely the DTI, Mr. Speaker, Congresswoman Arlene, talagang kailangan na kailangan. If we can do it dito sa Congress, ipa-increase po natin kasi meron po tayong resolution na galing po sa Trade Committee natin, headed by Weslie Gatchalian, na mag-increase po ng pondo para sa SB Corporation. Kung puwede po idoble o itriple kung kaya po natin. Kaya maghahanap po tayo ng pondo para sa SB Corporation kasi dapat naman

talagang matulungan ang mga MSMEs. Sila po iyong backbone; 90 percent of businesses here in the Philippines are MSMEs. Iyong big corporations, 10 porsiyento lang po ito. Kaya tama po kayo na maghahanap po tayo ng mas malaking pondo para sa kanila. Yes, I am with you, Congresswoman Arlene.

REP. BROSAS. Yes, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor, katulad nga po ng sinasabi natin, meron nga tayong budget for infra spending – napakalaki no'ng in-increase – may debt servicing, may increase din tayo sa debt servicing, tapos may increase din tayo sa military budget, at sa NTF-ELCAC na P19 billion iyong nakalagak diyan. Maaari po bang iyon na lang iyong gamitin natin at idagdag natin dito sa mga nangangailangan na MSMEs natin o iyong maliliit nating mga business establishments na pinakaapektado noong lockdown, ano? Halos 99.56 percent ng business establishments sa buong bansa ay binubuo ng MSMEs at halos 7 out of 10 na manggagawa ay nasa sektor ng mga MSME. Kaya, Mr. Speaker, sa ganitong pigura ng budget, magmumukhang wala tayong kinakaharap na pandemya ngayon, ano. Para sa mga MSMEs, lumalabas kulang ang pagpapahalaga ng gobyerno sa ating maliliit na negosyo. Itong halaga sa MSME development at SB Corporation na nasa proposed budget ng DTI ay hindi nagagarantiya na mabibigyan ng sapat na tulong ang ating MSMEs para makabangon muli. Ang subsidy ang kailangan at hindi pautang na may interes, iyan po ang tingin namin. Now, can we ask the DTI if they have included an increase in their original proposal to the DBM, at magkano po iyon? Maaari bang makahingi ng kopya ng original proposal ninyo, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor? I am asking, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor, kasi katulad po ng sabi kanina, at the proper time, at the period of amendments, we will propose for a higher budget for our MSMEs.

REP. ZUBIRI. Dito po sa request ano, sa wish list po ng DTI, mayroon dito po na P3.459-billion additional to be able to jumpstart the economy and to help the programs that help bring jobs and work to the country. Wala pa iyong sa P3.5 billion dito,

Mr. Speaker, Congresswoman Arlene, wala pa iyong additional cost sa SB Corporation. So, tinitingnan po natin a total of about P5.280 billion iyong kailangan po ng DTI for them to be able to work efficiently and effectively during this time of the pandemic. You compare it sa budget po ano, kung i-compare po natin sa budget ng ibang bansa – sa P10 billion, kasi magkano iyong kanilang kuwan, Office of the Secretary and the DTI Proper, nasa P5.3 o P5.5 billion, if you add this P5 billion, P5,000,000,280, ay wala pang P11 billion, Mr. Speaker, Congresswoman Arlene. So, still, nandoon pa tayo sa lower echelon ng Southeast Asian countries kasi iyong mga iba nasa P27 billion, like Malaysia, P33 billion; Indonesia, nasa P27 billion; Thailand, nasa P20 billion; and Singapore, nasa P136 billion, Mr. Speaker, Ma'am Arlene.

REP. BROSAS. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor. Susuportahan po natin na ma-increase itong budget para sa MSMEs particular, para po makatulong sa ating mga maliliit na nagnenegosyo sa ating bansa. We support local, ano, lalong-lalo na iyong mga local producers natin, iyong mga manufacturers natin dito sa ating bansa, kasi iyon po dapat iyong ating tunguhin at suportahan sa ngayon. Ngayon, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor, mayroon pong kaakibat na problema din kasi kaugnay sa response ng gobyerno sa kasalukuyan sa pandemic. For example, ang Lancet COVID-19 Commission Statement on the occasion of the 75th Session of the UN General Assembly, sinasabi (*inaudible–Zoom technical issue*) response in the East, Southeast Asia. Actually, worst among the world iyong Pilipinas. Sinabi ko lang po iyong report ng COVID-19 Response Commission Statement ng Lancet. Sinabi nila na worst pandemic response ang mayroon tayo, kaya kailangan po matugunan, first and primarily, iyong health problem o necessity na kinakaharap natin sa ngayon. At mahalaga po, mahalaga na may kumpiyansa sa gobyerno dapat kung ganoon. Eh pero po kapag hindi ganyan iyong response ng gobyerno, magkakaproblema talaga tayo kahit ano pong budget and ilagay natin kung hindi natutugunan. Nag-breach na tayo ng 300,000

cases ng COVID-19 ngayon. Kailangan pong matugunan iyon properly ng gobyerno. Kung hindi, anuman pong budget ang ilagak natin, ilagay natin sa kahit anong ahensiya, kung hindi natin iyon magagawan ng solusyon, magkakaproblema at magkakaproblema ang ekonomiya. Hindi lang po ang ekonomiya ng bansa, but health and economy ng ating bansa.

Now, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor, sa last ko po na tanong, may budget po ba tayo sa subsidy para sa local manufacturers, particularly ng mga health supplies and PPEs?

REP. ZUBIRI. Wala po. Mr. Speaker, Congresswoman Arlene, wala po, wala po silang budget for subsidies. How I wish, Mr. Speaker, Congresswoman Arlene, na mabigyan po ng subsidy kasi sa maraming bansa po sa Southeast Asia, sa Europe o sa North America, nagbibigay po sila ng subsidies for their workers and for the manufacturing sector at least sa pambayad lang po sa sweldo ng mga workers o empleyado po nila. Pero dito po sa atin, wala. Kung mabigyan po natin ng budget, Mr. Speaker, Congresswoman Arlene, then definitely, they will accept it and they will make sure that they make use of it properly. And being part of the Trade Committee as Vice Chair, Mr. Speaker, Congresswoman Arlene, I will make sure na lahat po ng mga requests ng ating mga colleagues ay talagang maaksyunan po nila at babantayan po ng komite ang kanilang trabaho day to day, especially during this time of the pandemic, Mr. Speaker, Madam Arlene.

Mr. Speaker, nawala po si Cong. Arlene Brosas.

SUSPENSION OF SESSION

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Pimentel). Hon. Arlene Brosas, are you still online? Honorable Brosas, we do not have any connection with you, so the Chair declares a suspension.

The session is suspended.

It was 11:12 a.m.

RESUMPTION OF SESSION

At 11:14 a.m., the session was resumed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Pimentel). The session is resumed.

REP. BONDOC. Mr. Speaker, I move that we suspend the consideration of the budget of the Department of Trade and Industry, including its attached agencies and corporations, except TESDA and CDA, due to the fact that our Internet connection has been cut.

I so move, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Pimentel). Is there any objection? (*Silence*) The Chair hears none; the motion is approved.

Majority Leader.

TECHNICAL EDUCATION AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

REP. BONDOC. Mr. Speaker, I move that we begin the consideration of the budget of the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority.

I so move, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Pimentel). Is there any objection? (*Silence*) The Chair hears none; the motion is approved.

Majority Leader.

REP. BONDOC. Mr. Speaker, we would like to welcome the members of the TESDA family: Secretary Isidro Lapeña, Deputy Director General Rosanna A. Urdaneta, Deputy Director General Lina C. Sarmiento, Director Ma. Angelina Carreon, Director Juliet O. Orozco, Director Cariza A. Dacuma, and our colleague, former Cong. John Bertiz – the TESDA family, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Pimentel). To the TESDA family, headed by Secretary General Isidro Lapeña, welcome to the House of Representatives.

Majority Leader.

REP. BOLILIA. Mr. Speaker, I move that we recognize Rep. Luis Campos, Vice Chair of the Committee on Appropriations, to answer questions on the proposed budget of TESDA.

I so move, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Pimentel). Hon. Luis Campos, you are recognized.

REP. CAMPOS. Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, this Representation is ready to be interpellated on the budgets of TESDA and the CDA.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Pimentel). Majority Leader.

REP. BOLILIA. Mr. Speaker, I move that we recognize Rep. Sarah Jane Elago of the Party-List KABATAAN to interpellate the Sponsor.

I so move, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Pimentel). Hon. Sarah Elago is recognized. Please be reminded of our 30-minute rule.

REP. ELAGO. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Will the honorable Sponsor be open to answer a few clarificatory questions from this Youth Representation?

REP. CAMPOS. Please proceed, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor.

REP. ELAGO. Maraming salamat, Ginoong Speaker.

First, I would like to ask about what TESDA has done so far in compliance with its obligation to formulate and implement affirmative action programs to enhance the access of disadvantaged students and learners, as mandated by Republic Act No. 10931 or the Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education?

REP. CAMPOS. Mr. Speaker, may I request the Honorable Elago to repeat because it is reverberating.

REP. ELAGO. Yes, Mr. Speaker.

May we know from the distinguished Sponsor what has been done in so far as compliance with the obligation of TESDA to formulate and implement affirmative action programs to enhance access to disadvantaged students and learners, such as Lumads, Muslims and other indigenous peoples,

as required by Republic Act No. 10931 or the Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act? Sang-ayon po sa batas na ito, Ginoong Speaker, kinakailangan na gumawa ng mga kongkretong hakbang ang TESDA upang maabot ang mga kabataan, lalong-lalo na ang mga nagmula sa pinakabulnerableng mga sektor.

SUSPENSION OF SESSION

REP. CAMPOS. Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, may I request for a one-minute suspension. I need to ...

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Pimentel). The session is suspended.

It was 11:19 a.m.

RESUMPTION OF SESSION

At 11:19 a.m., the session was resumed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Pimentel). The session is resumed.

REP. CAMPOS. My apologies, Congresswoman Elago, because the question was muffled.

Anyway, with reference to your question, the graduates of UAQTEA for 2018, out of an enrolment of 102,000, 72,600 graduated. In 2019, out of an enrolment of 66,000, approximately 42,500 graduated. But in 2020, out of an enrolment of 4,000, we have graduated 4,300, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor – 403, I mean.

REP. ELAGO. Mr. Speaker, 403 students? Four hundred three enrollees graduated?

REP. CAMPOS. No, 4,000 enrollees, approximately 10 percent graduated for 2020.

REP. ELAGO. May we know, Mr. Speaker, the particular programs that are being undertaken by TESDA to reach the vulnerable groups from marginalized communities especially the Lumads, indigenous peoples and other cultural communities.

REP. CAMPOS. Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, first, we have the TWSP, and then the PESFA, the STEP, and yes, the UAQTEA for the scholarship programs to address the needs for training and upscaling of individuals.

REP. ELAGO. Mr. Speaker, what was the proposed budget, original proposed budget for TESDA for next year, for the upcoming fiscal year?

REP. CAMPOS. Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, could you kindly repeat that.

REP. ELAGO. Magkano po ang proposed budget ng TESDA para sa PESFA at saka sa STEP at sa iba pang mga programa na kaugnay ng UAQTEA?

REP. CAMPOS. Okay.

Para po sa mga programang ito, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, ang total po for Fiscal Year 2021 is one point—just a minute, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, the total TESDA scholarship proposal for funding for the programs would be P11,114,250,000.00. As per the DBM-approved NEP, they were given P5,000,003,000, so we have an unfunded amount for the programs of P6,111,000,250.

REP. ELAGO. Mr. Speaker, based on TESDA's computation, how many scholars or applicants will be affected by this huge cut from the original proposal?

REP. CAMPOS. Approximately, if I remember my briefing correctly, we are looking at target recipients based on approximately 300,000.

REP. ELAGO. Ibig sabihin, Ginoong Speaker, 300,000 ang maaapektuhan dahil sa hindi po lahat mapupunan ng pondo para sa 2021 ang proposal ng TESDA?

REP. CAMPOS. Okay. Approximately, ang maaapektuhan ho, nasa over 200,000 individuals na hindi makakatanggap ng tamang scholarship for training programs, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor.

REP. ELAGO. Ginoong Speaker, tayo po ay manghihingi ng datos nito sa ating Kinatawan na Sponsor upang makita rin natin kung saang mga lugar ang maaapektuhan at ano pong mga programa ang pinakaapektado ng mga hindi napunan ng pondo na ito.

Ngayon, Ginoong Speaker, maaari rin po ba tayong manghingi ng dokumento ng action program ng TESDA pagdating nga sa compliance nila sa Section 7 ng Republic Act No. 10931? Sa ngayon po, wala pa po tayong natatanggap na kopya ng action program ng TESDA pagdating sa free public at TVET.

Now, Mr. Speaker, let me go to our next concern. Ilan po ba ang registered ngayon na mga tech-voc institutions? Ilan po ang pampubliko at ilan ang pribado?

REP. CAMPOS. Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, can the Honorable Elago please repeat the question?

REP. ELAGO. Ginoong Speaker, ilan po sa mga TVET institutions natin ang pampubliko at pribado, iyong bilang po ng mga TVET institutions na public at private?

REP. CAMPOS. Okay.

REP. ELAGO. Ginoong Speaker, nais ko na rin itanong kung ano po iyong mekanismo ng checking ng regulation ng TESDA pagdating sa mga fees na sinisingil sa mga private tech-voc institutions?

REP. CAMPOS. Ah okay, sistema ng fees. Okay. Mayroon po tayong—ako po'y sasangguni ngayon para makuha ko ho iyong eksaktong pigura. Pero sa akin pong briefing with the agency, mayroon pong private technical training schools and then there are also TESDA-operated institutions. So, we have to qualify, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, the concern of the Honorable Elago. But as to the number of private training institutions, we have approximately 4,004 private training institutions and then we have 409 publicly owned training institutions, so approximately 10 percent of the number of private training schools.

And as to the question of the Honorable

Elago, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, the breakdown of the fees charged by the private institutions had the clearance of the National Tax Research Center and it is composed of the approval and training costs, the trainer's allowance, as well as supply and materials, and training equipment, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor.

REP. ELAGO. Maraming salamat, Ginoong Speaker. Nais din natin kunin ang lahat po ng mga kopya ng rules and regulations pagdating sa determination ng cost of fees in our private TVET institutions.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask about—can we get an update on the guidelines for the spending of the TESDA allocation from Bayanihan 2 Law? Kumusta po ang pagpapatupad nito? Ilan ang mga beneficiaries? Kailan matatanggap ng mga pinakanangangailangan nating kababayan, lalong-lalo na iyong mga displaced workers, mga OFWs rin po na nangangailangan ng dagdag na kabuhayan o pagkakakitaan at kinakailangan ng makakatulong sa kanila na mga dagdag na training? Paano po ito ipapatupad, Ginoong Speaker?

REP. CAMPOS. Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, out of the P1 billion allocated from the Bayanihan 2 funding for TESDA, lahat po ito ay gagamitin sa scholarship programs. Ang apportionment po nito ay 30 percent po ay pupunta sa agri-fisheries, agro-industrial sector; sa construction sector po, 30 percent; manufacturing training po for that sector, 20 percent; for health, wellness and other services, 10 percent; and then another 10 percent po for anything that may come up as immediate and necessary. And if the Honorable Elago will indulge me, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, it will be distributed to these following target beneficiaries: OFW po, mga OFW, magba-Balik Probinsya po, Bagong Pag-asa (BP2) Program, former rebels po na nagbalik-loob under the purview of E.O. No. 70. Iyon lang po, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor.

REP. ELAGO. Mr. Speaker, paano po ang identification ng mga beneficiaries? Sa OFWs, sino po ang mamamahala dito? Pagdating naman sa pagpapatupad ng E.O. No. 70, sino

pong mamamahala rin sa pagpili ng mga beneficiaries?

SUSPENSION OF SESSION

REP. CAMPOS. One-minute suspension, Mr. Speaker.

REP. BOLILIA. Mr. Speaker, we move for one-minute suspension, please.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Pimentel). The session is suspended.

It was 11:32 a.m.

RESUMPTION OF SESSION

At 11:32 a.m., the session was resumed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Pimentel). The session is resumed.

REP. CAMPOS. With reference to the question of the Honorable Elago, for E.O. No. 70 the criteria for the identification of beneficiaries are under a national task force for poverty alleviation. It is a convergence—the way I understand it, it is a convergence of several agencies of government chaired by the President himself, Mr. Speaker.

REP. ELAGO., Mr. Speaker, what then would be the particular role of TESDA in this whole program since the budget will be lodged into the agency?

REP. CAMPOS. The participation of TESDA, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, is purely skills training and downloading of said skills training to the target beneficiaries, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor.

REP. ELAGO. Sa ngayon po ba may listahan na kayo kung saan po mapupunta ang mga pondo na ito?

REP. CAMPOS. Pakiulit lang po, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor.

REP. ELAGO. Yes, Mr. Speaker. Sa ngayon

po ba, mayroon nang mga pupuntahan na mga partikular na institusyon ang P1 billion na ito? May breakdown na po tayo kung saan siya mapupunta, saang mga TVET institutions? Kasi, Mr. Speaker, dapat deretso ito sa TVET institutions. Hindi naman po ito deretso doon sa mga mismong magte-training kasi nga sila ay papasok sa mga TVET institutions para kumuha ng mga partikular na kurso. Kaya nais natin malaman, nandiyan na ba iyong listahan ng kapupuntahan na mga TVET institutions?

REP. CAMPOS. Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, the TESDA has a target—has a list which it may provide the Honorable Elago with.

REP. ELAGO. Yes, Mr. Speaker, tayo po ay manghihingi ng kopya nitong listahan na ito ng ating mga TVET institutions na makakakuha ng share mula doon sa P1 billion at hangad natin na matulungan talaga iyong mga pinakanangangailangan natin na mga displaced workers, mga OFWs, lalonglalo na ang pondo po na itong nakalagay sa Bayanihan 2, para tumulong doon sa mga apektado ng pandemic response. Ngayon, tayo po ay nababahala na mayroon ding portion na mapupunta para sa pagpapatupad ng E.O. No. 70. Ngayon, Ginoong Speaker, puwede bang maipaliwanag ng ating Sponsor kung ano ang mga programa ng TESDA na may kaugnayan sa pagpapatupad ng E.O. 70?

REP. CAMPOS. Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, as previously mentioned, tayo po ay nagbababa ng—ang TESDA po ay magbababa ng mga programa na targeted po for particular segments of the demographic like OFWs, rebel returnees, iyong mga displaced manufacturing workers, health workers natin, upskilling indigenous peoples po o indigenous peoples, pero ito po ay kailangang-kailangang gawin at magamit nang tama ang P1 billion na Bayanihan 2 funds. Kaya po in close coordination po ang TESDA with other agencies and, as previously mentioned, again, Mr. Speaker, TESDA is willing to provide the Honorable Elago iyong detalye po ng lahat ng hinihingi niya, Mr. Speaker.

REP. ELAGO. Mr. Speaker, I asked about the particular role of TESDA and the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict in E.O. No. 70 and according to one of their press statements dated August 20 of this year, they are part of the Poverty Reduction Livelihood and Employment Cluster, okay, the PRLEC. Ito po ba iyong binabanggit ninyo na poverty alleviation task force or iba pa po ito? May binanggit po na national task force on poverty alleviation. Mayroon din pong tinatawag na “PRLEC” o “Poverty Reduction Livelihood and Employment Cluster” na nasa loob ng NTF-ELCAC.

REP. CAMPOS. Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, the overall umbrella of the national task force, PRLEC, which is part of the poverty alleviation cluster, is shared by TESDA because its primary goal is really to alleviate the poverty incidence and to mitigate its effects on the citizenry and to uplift their standard of living through upskilling and training, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor.

REP. ELAGO. Then, Mr. Speaker, how much has TESDA spent for all the programs under the PRLEC for 2019 and 2020?

REP. CAMPOS. Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, wala pa po. Bilang sagot po sa tanong ni Honorable Elago, wala pa pong nagagastos ang TESDA. Mayroon po tayong allocation na approximately P1.875 billion for the year 2021, for the TESDA programs under PRLEC.

REP. ELAGO. So, P1.8 billion for PRLEC—may we know the breakdown of this P1.85-billion budget?

REP. CAMPOS. It is all for training programs po. Ang allocation po niyan, breakdown is as follows, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor: for agriculture, forestry and fisheries po, mayroon po tayong 40.7 percent, iyan po ang bulk; for construction po, mayroong 21.48 percent; for manufacturing po, we have 25.19 percent; tourism, we have 6.72 percent; and another 5.9 percent for logistics and other sectors, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor.

REP. ELAGO. Salamat po, Ginoong Speaker. Hingin din po natin ang regional allocation ng pondo na ito na kapupuntahan ng mga budget para sa PRLEC. Kukunin na lamang po ng Representasyon na ito na pag-aralan.

REP. CAMPOS. Yes, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, TESDA is willing to provide all these materials to the Honorable Elago.

REP. ELAGO. Ginoong Speaker, mayroon din pong mga partnership and TESDA sa iba't ibang mga private TVET institutions. May we know po how much of the government subsidy goes to our private TVET institutions? Magkano po ang subsidized natin through these partnerships or wala po bang pondo na ginugugol para sa mga partnerships na ito?

SUSPENSION OF SESSION

REP. CAMPOS. One-minute suspension, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Pimentel.). The session is suspended.

It was 11:42 a.m.

RESUMPTION OF SESSION

At 11:43 a.m., the session was resumed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Pimentel.). The session is resumed.

REP. CAMPOS. Pertaining to the question of the Honorable Elago, the partnerships that the Honorable Elago was mentioning earlier are market-driven, such as downloading of agricultural produce to marketing cooperatives or companies. The TESDA does not put out any subsidy for this; it is purely market-driven.

REP. ELAGO. Alright. Ginoong Speaker, tayo po ay hihingi ng detalye mula sa Sponsor tungkol dito sa mga partnerships sa private TVET institutions at gayundin, nais din nating malaman kung may listahan na sila noong mga fees na sinisingil sa iba't ibang

mga TVET institutions, mga top-up fees. Ang Representasyon po na ito ay nais din itong malaman dahil nga sa panahon ngayon, ang isa po sa mga pinakapanawagan ng ating mga kababayan ay kung may mga programa na katulad ng free public tertiary education na kasama na iyong walang binabayaran sa ating mga public at TVET institutions ay mas marami pa na maging beneficiaries na wala talagang babayaran. Hindi iyong sa panahon ng pandemya, sila rin ay nakakaranas ng iba't ibang mga pagsasamantala pagdating sa mga dagdag pa na mga fees at mga pinapabili na mga materyales. Kaya ang Representasyon po na ito ay para sa pagpapalawig pa ng kapasidad para doon sa suporta sa mga displaced workers, sa mga OFWs, gayundin sa kanilang mga pamilya.

At bilang huli ko pong katanungan, Ginoong Speaker, ang TESDA po, nabanggit kanina na may pondo na 41 percent sa ilalim ng PRLEC para sa construction. At sa kanila din pong statement nito lamang nakaraang buwan, sila rin po ay nagte-train ng mga soldiers-trainers para sa GIDAs, ang ating Geographically Isolated and Disadvantaged Areas. Lahat po ba ng 41 percent na ito ng PRLEC ay para dito sa programa na ito?

REP. CAMPOS. Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, can the Honorable Elago elucidate on her last question?

REP. ELAGO. Yes, Mr. Speaker. Will the 41 percent of the budget allotted for PRLEC, that is P1.8 billion, be for the construction-related training and assessment in GIDAs? Lahat po ba iyon ng 41 percent ng P1.8 billion ay para lamang sa construction-related training ng soldiers-trainers sa GIDAs o mayroon pa pong iba na kapupuntahan itong mga programa? Ang reference po ay ang kanilang statement na nagsasabi na mayroon silang construction-related training sa GIDAs.

REP. CAMPOS. Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, iyong soldiers-trainers po sa kasalukuyan ay wala pa pong ganoon ngayon. Ang ginagamit po natin ay mga TESDA trainers pa rin. Pero plano pa po iyon para maging force multiplier po sila para maka-cover po ng mas malawak

na coverage ang ating training programs dahil ang kagustuhan po natin, ang mga programa po ay maibaba po natin sa mga lugar kung saan ito pinakakailangan. Katulad po, tanggap naman po natin dito na may mga lugar na hindi po naaabot ng kuryente, na kahit po lagyan ng o wala pong daan pero kahit po lagyan ng daan iyan, kung hindi naman fully economically viable for the electric cooperative or for the power provider to provide the posts and the lines, hindi rin po malalagyan iyan. Ang ginagawa po ngayon, ang TESDA po, nakakarating po sila sa pinakadulo-dulong mga baryo at nagte-training po sila ng mga magkakabit ng mga photovoltaic devices para po mayroong ilaw ang mga kabarangayan. Kasabay po nito, iyong mga recipients po ay nagkakaroon ng additional training at nagkakaroon po sila ng power or kuryente sa kanilang mga barangay.

So, iyon lang po, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor.

REP. ELAGO. Ginoong Speaker, based on TESDA's statement po, they graduated Philippine Air Force soldiers already to help with construction-related training and assessment in GIDAs. Kaya po manghihingi na lamang ang Representasyon na ito ng kabuuang report kung papaano ba gugugulin ang P1.8 billion para sa PRLEC, gayon din ang breakdown at regional allocation ng lahat ng pondo para sa pagpapatupad ng libreng pampublikong tertiary education.

Maraming salamat, Ginoong Speaker. Maraming salamat po sa Ginoong Sponsor.

REP. CAMPOS. Maraming salamat, Mr. Speaker, Honorable Elago.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Pimentel). Majority Leader.

REP. BOLILIA. Mr. Speaker, I move that we recognize Hon. Bernadette Herrera-Dy of the BAGONG HENERASYON Party-List for her manifestation.

I so move, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Pimentel). Hon. Bernadette Herrera-Dy is recognized.

Again, reminder, you only have 30 minutes for your interpellation.

REP. HERRERA-DY. Yes, Mr. Speaker, hindi na po ako mag-i-interpellate. Na-bring up ko na po kay Secretary Lapeña and to our Vice-Chairman the concern. As long as we have a concrete plan lang po para sa mga TVIs natin, iyon lamang po. And they gave us an assurance that maaalagaan po ang mga TVIs natin especially in the new normal. Iyon lamang po and I fully support the budget of TESDA.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Pimentel). Majority Leader.

REP. BOLILIA. Mr. Speaker, I move that we recognize Rep. France Castro of the Party-List ACT TEACHERS for her interpellation, France Castro.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Pimentel). Hon. France Castro is recognized.

REP. CASTRO (F.L.). Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

So, I asked for some documents and reports from the TESDA during the briefing, Mr. Speaker, at hindi pa po ito naisa-submit sa akin. Related po ito doon sa mga naitanong po ni Cong. Sarah Elago na sinasabing isa-submit. Pero sa akin po, natanong ko na po iyong ibang mga detalye doon sa participation ng TESDA sa NTF-ELCAC dahil malinaw po, kabilang ang TESDA doon sa 12 agencies na nag-i-implement ng E.O. No. 70 at iyon nga iyong PRLEC, ang papel ng TESDA dito, poverty alleviation. At mula po noong 2019, 2020, 2021, ayan, mayroon na naman pong P1.8 billion, so wala pong malinaw at hindi rin naman ito na-audit ng COA, itong participation o iyong mga ginagastos ng TESDA doon sa NTF-ELCAC mula noong 2018. So, puwede po bang mag-comment dito ang ating butihing Sponsor, Mr. Speaker, doon sa sinasabi po natin o iyong mga binanggit po natin. Babanggitin ko po mamaya iyong mga hiningi kong data mula sa TESDA.

REP. CAMPOS. Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, all the documents pending from TESDA for the Honorable Castro will be emailed to her by the close of office hours today and the hard copies will be delivered after.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor.

REP. CASTRO (F.L.). Well, nakakalungkot, Mr. Speaker, dahil more than a week naman na iyong hinihingi nating mga documents na related to the implementation of E.O. No. 70, particular po dito sa mga sinasabi natin. Kasi, otherwise, Mr. Speaker, iyong hinihingi nilang P1.8 billion for another implementation na naman ng E.O. No. 70 ay I move na matanggal ito, ma-defund kung wala silang ire-report sa atin, Mr. Speaker. At ngayon po iyong time na dini-discuss natin ito sa plenary, ano po ang gusto, ide-defer po ba natin iyong discussion ng TESDA budget, Mr. Speaker?

REP. CAMPOS. Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, medyo malabo po iyong dating ng katanungan ni Honorable Castro, kung puwede lang pong ulitin.

REP. CASTRO (F.L.). Mr. Speaker, diretsuhin ko na lang po, I move to defund iyong budget ng TESDA on E.O. No. 70 dahil hanggang ngayon, Mr. Speaker, ang 2018, 2019, 2020 report about this ay hindi pa nasa-submit sa atin po. Ipinangako po iyan noong last briefing, Mr. Speaker.

REP. CAMPOS. Ito pong budget for E.O. No. 70 ay, kung tayo po ay gagabayan ng Panginoon, ito po'y siguro simula na ng lunas para sa ating dinadaan na armed conflict dahil ang kailangan po naman talaga ng taumbayan natin ay ang pag-angat ng estado ng kanilang pamumuhay. Ito po, katulad ng sinabi ko kanina noong nagtanong po si Honorable Elago, ang TESDA po, purely skills training and downloading of said skills training ang tungkulin. Ito po ay tungkulin nila na gagampanan kung kaya naman po tayo ay humihingi ng suporta ng Kamara upang matugunan natin ang kanilang pangangailangan sa budget, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Pimentel). Honorable Castro.

REP. CASTRO (F.L.). Pasensya na po, Mr. Speaker, hindi ako ina-unmute ng host. Anyway, Mr. Speaker, malinaw naman dito, doon sa implementation ng E.O. 70 mula noong 2018, so kung ito po, kung naniniwala po, Mr. Speaker, ang Sponsor natin kung nakakatulong ito, so ano po ba iyong proof nito? Iyong mga reports ay hindi maibigay. Kasi kung pinaninindigan po ng ating Sponsor na malaki ang naitutulong nito, nasaan po iyong report, Mr. Speaker? Sinasabi kasi dito na tinutulungan iyong mga former rebels, mga surrenderees, indigenous people at iba pa. Isa pang inilalagay dito, Mr. Speaker, doon sa kanilang mga report, na iyong mga former rebels daw po sa TESDA programs nila has resorted to livelihood and income generation. So, nire-recruit as Philippine Army at saka CAFGU – Philippine Army CAFGU saka iyong mini side street food business, cum laundry services and construction. So, ano po iyong – nasaan po iyong report nito, ilan po, saang region? Mula po noong 2018 hanggang ngayong 2020, wala pong inilalabas ang TESDA na report, Mr. Speaker. So, paano natin nasabi na nakakatulong ito doon sa ating mga marginalized sector? Iyan na po iyong itinanong ko na rin noon.

REP. CAMPOS. Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, wala pong output during 2018 kasi wala pa po siya sa budget and for 2019, wala po sa budget iyong programang iyan. Pero ayon sa TESDA, ginamit po ng TESDA ang kanilang current training programs for 2019 to be able to facilitate this. Pero for 2020 po, mayroon tayong – since it was budgeted already, may enrollees po tayong 1,734 and then ang graduates po niyan ay 408; ang na-assess po ay 44; certified 44; at ang employed po doon sa lahat ng nag-graduate, currently ay 54, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor.

REP. CASTRO (F.L.). Mr. Speaker, iyon po bang binabanggit ng ating butihing Sponsor, iyon po ba iyong sinasabi nating livelihood mula doon sa E.O. No. 70? Kasi ang dinig ko po, doon sa 1,000-plus na binabanggit po ng

TESDA at ng ating Sponsor, Mr. Speaker, ay iyon iyong total na sinasabi nating natulungan mula doon sa mga programs ng iba't ibang mga regions. So, kung totoo po iyan, 1,000 na mga rebel returnees, mga rebels, mga surrenderees, puwede po bang magbigay ng report ang TESDA sa atin po, tapos ano-ano iyong mga skills na inilagay at paano ba nila namo-monitor at nasubaybayan ito? Kasi nakalagay din kasi dito, walang nabanggit sa mga sinabing mga skills iyong sinasabing pagre-recruit nila sa Philippine military, sa CAFGU at saka iyong pagbibigay nila ng small business na P3,000 iyong halaga noong mga businesses, Mr. Speaker.

REP. CAMPOS. Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, as an addendum to what I mentioned earlier, there are documented success stories such as in Masbate, 24 former rebels trained in various qualifications are now employed by the Philippine Army. Out of these 24, three became enlisted personnel who are now receiving a monthly compensation of P29,000, and the remaining 21 are receiving an allowance of P4,500 as CAFGU. Some of these former rebels are also engaged in operating a side street food business-cum-laundry services and construction. All of them are earning an average of at least P3,000 a month. But the more interesting story to this would be the training-cum-production in toddy tapping, with an ensured regular income first for IPs. For 100 coconut trees, these IPs are now assured of an income of at least P80,000 per month for 600 liters of coco syrup which would be bought by partners of TESDA. If the Honorable Castro, Mr. Speaker, would allow us, TESDA is willing to provide her with the actual list of these beneficiaries who have been successful, so that she may have verification.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor.

REP. CASTRO (F.L.). Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor.

Having checked the emails, so yesterday po, nagpadala po ang TESDA, 'no. So, nakalagay dito iyong 106 na beneficiaries noong kanilang program based on E.O. No. 70. Tama po ba ito, Mr. Sponsor?

REP. CAMPOS. Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, can the Honorable Castro please repeat?

REP. CASTRO (F.L.). Yes. Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor, so nag-check po ako ng email, ano, so nakita ko kahapon mayroon palang ipinadala, iyong sinasabing 106 na mga beneficiaries nitong E.O. batay sa mga sinasabing livelihood and income-generating programs, 'no. So, hindi pa nakadetalye dito kung ano-ano iyon. Pwede po bang mai-submit? Ah, tama po ba, 106 lang po iyong mga beneficiary? Pero ito iyong 2020 pa lang. How about the report for 2019 at—yes, 2019 po?

REP. CAMPOS. Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, actually po, 106 barangays po ang beneficiaries with a total beneficiary base of 7,878 individuals, ...

REP. CASTRO (F.L.). Seven thousand po?

REP. CAMPOS. ... Mr. Speaker, Your Honor.

REP. CASTRO (F.L.). So, sige po. So kung titingnan ko po itong data na ito, so ibig sabihin, ganito po karami iyong mga rebels and surrenderees, 7,000? Tama ba iyan? Kasi parang naghalu-halo. Kasi nag-focus lang po ako doon sa E.O. No. 70 eh dahil sinasabi po ng TESDA, iyong papel nila dito, sa E.O. 70 na PRLEC. So kung totoo po iyong sinasabi, 7,000 po iyong for 2020, 7,000 iyong mga rebels and surrenderees na tinulungan ng ating TESDA po or ano ba iyong breakdown niyan based doon sa prioritization of the marginalized and vulnerable sectors?

REP. CAMPOS. Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, iyon pong 7,700 na iyon ay hindi po lahat rebel returnees. Bulk of that is composed of IPs. Iyon pong kinukuha ko lang po, ang proportion ng returnees at IPs pero bulk of that, majority of that would be indigenous peoples po, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor.

REP. CASTRO (F.L.). So, pwede po bang mag-submit sa akin—ah, mag-submit po, Mr. Speaker, ang ating Sponsor for TESDA noong

itinatanong ko pong report noong sa briefing, iyon lang pong sinasabi nating beneficiary po noong sa budget natin for E.O. No. 70?

REP. CAMPOS. Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, if the Honorable Castro would allow, TESDA is committing to send the breakdown of the composition of the 7,700 recipients to her as well by end of office – ah, by the close of office hours today, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor.

REP. CASTRO (F.L.). Okay. Thank you po, Mr. Speaker. So, nakita ko rin po, Mr. Speaker, dito iyong sa per – ah, tulong din po mula from persons deprived of liberty. Ilan po ba ito, iyong mga natulungan nating sa mga training na PDLs? At saka, Mr. Speaker, iyong mga agrarian reform beneficiaries, mayroon din po ba tayong breakdown noon, iyong mga ARBs?

REP. CAMPOS. We will – Your Honor – ah, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, we will provide the Honorable Castro with the list.

REP. CASTRO (F.L.). Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor, kabilang po ba doon sa binabanggit na 7,000 iyong sinasabi nating persons deprived of liberty at saka iyong mga agrarian reform beneficiaries po?

REP. CAMPOS. Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, pakiulit lang po ang katanungan ni Honorable Castro.

REP. CASTRO (F.L.). Mr. Speaker, kasama po ba doon sa binabanggit or ini-report na 7,000 iyong mga PDLs at saka agrarian reform beneficiaries na tinulungan po sa mga livelihood and other income-generating projects?

REP. CAMPOS. Yes, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, we will provide you with the complete list.

Thank you.

REP. CASTRO (F.L.). Okay. Going back to implementation of E.O. No 70, Mr. Speaker, meron ditong mga proposal na 63 mobile training laboratory trucks, creation of 996

plantilla positions, 63 units of vehicles, for operations, operating expenses for 63 priority areas, 46 provinces plus 17 regions. Ito po, Mr. Speaker, ito iyong hinihingi ko rin na report or proposal mula doon sa TESDA. Hindi pa po naibibigay sa akin iyong report, Mr. Speaker.

REP. CAMPOS. Yes, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, TESDA will provide the Honorable Castro with the list.

REP. CASTRO (F.L.). Thank you po. Okay lang po, Mr. Speaker.

REP. CAMPOS. So, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, can the Honorable Castro repeat her last question, if any?

REP. CASTRO (F.L.). Okay. So, iyong last po, Mr. Speaker, ito iyong mga data na hinahanap natin based doon sa proposal ng TESDA in the implementation of E.O. No. 70.

So, doon po sa mga priority areas nila, may nakalagay na 63 priority areas nila, ano-ano po ito? Saang province and regions? Kasi meron silang proposal na P2.7 million per area, so para makita natin kung anong gagawin po. Sixty-three units motor vehicles – saansa po ito ibibigay, anong region, anong probinsya? Creation of 996 plantilla positions para po sa implementation ng E.O. No. 70 – bakit kailangan po ng 996 plantilla positions? Meron pong ganoong at saka 63 mobile training laboratory trucks to complete po iyong training equipment, P8.5 million each. So, puwede po bang makakuha ng detalye nitong proposal na ito, Mr. Speaker?

REP. CAMPOS. Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, TESDA is willing to provide all these, although we still have to get the approval of Congress for the funding for these because as – for example, the 63 mobile training laboratories, complete with training equipment, at P8.5 million each, only P50 million was approved. It would only be good for six units, approximately. So, in order to completely itemize the distribution of these equipment, we would need funding for this. TESDA would be needing funding for

this, But at the same time, TESDA will provide the Honorable Castro with the deployment, proposed deployment schedule, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor.

REP. CASTRO (F.L.). Okay, thank you po.

Paano po nagkaroon ng proposal na 996 na plantilla positions? Nagtataka lang po ako, ano, implementation ng E.O. No. 70 pero less than a thousand ang kailangan ninyong plantilla positions to implement yoong E.O. No. 70. So, ano po ba iyong rationale dito? Tapos iyong 63 na mga mobile training laboratories, para po ba ito sa mga rebel returnees at saka doon sa mga surrenderees? So, ang dami po nito ano. Ilang priority areas – 47 provinces. So, paano po na-determine, Mr. Speaker, at ano ang rationale nitong may mga ganitong klaseng mga proposal?

REP. CAMPOS. Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, pertaining to the 996 plantilla positions, ito po, majority nito mga trainers at ito po iyong mga ide-deploy natin to be able to fully utilize these logistics for the far-flung provinces, far-flung areas where trainings would be conducted. Sa kasalukuyan po, kulang po ang manpower complement ng TESDA kung kaya kailangan pong punuan ito ng 996 plantilla positions, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor.

REP. CASTRO (F.L.). Okay. So, sige po, para matapos na lang po natin iyong ano, 'no, tungkol dito sa E.O. No. 70, so, nakikita natin – ah, sige, magsa-submit naman po yata ang TESDA dito sa mga detalyeng ito, Mr. Speaker. Kailangan lang po nating mabantayan iyong mga budget na dinadala o ilalagay doon sa E.O. No. 70 dahil napakalaking pondo ito na nilalagay ng ating gobyerno, na sinasabi nila na para masugpo daw iyong communist armed conflict. Pero kung ira-rationalize po natin ito, ito na po talaga iyong – halimbawa, iyong 996 na positions na mapapakinabangan sana ng mas nakararami ng ating mga mamamayan at saka itong mga itong sinasabi nating mga operating expenses, saka mga mobile training laboratory. So, iyon lang po, Mr. Speaker, at titingnan po natin iyong implementation ng TESDA nitong

E.O. No. 70 na ito, kung ano po iyong nagiging benepisyong nito sa ating mga mamamayan.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Pimentel). Majority Leader.

REP. DELOS SANTOS. Mr. Speaker, I move to recognize the Hon. Mark Go of the Lone District of Baguio for his interpellation.

REP. GO (M.). Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Pimentel). Honorable Mark Go is recognized.

REP. GO (M.). Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Pimentel). Please be reminded of our 30-minute rule.

REP. GO (M.). Yes, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor.

I would like to ask Secretary Lapeña. Last hearing of the Department of Education, I asked the question of whether they are willing that the Tech-Voc Track under the K to 12 Program be transferred to TESDA, the technical education authority, and Secretary Lapeña was there present and he said that they can handle this, ano. Just a little background, we implemented the K to 12 Program starting 2016 where we offered the Senior High and we provided in this particular bill or in this particular law that we will have two basic tracks: one is the University Track, and the other one is the Tech-Voc Track. And after two years, I delivered a privilege speech on the situation of the K to 12 Program and the different problems encountered by this particular program. One of the things I have highlighted is the fact that most of those who finished their K to 12 or their Senior High under the Tech-Voc Track have not been considered for hiring by most of the companies in the country. And the reason for that is the companies that were surveyed said that the qualifications, as well as the skills that they are supposed to develop when they take the Tech-Voc Track under the K to 12 Program did not materialize and, therefore, they do not have the necessary skills yet to assume jobs

after they have completed the Tech-Voc Track under the K to 12 Program. And because of the presentation of Secretary Lapeña then during that meeting, it was found that most of the trainees that they trained under TESDA, more than 84 percent, were hired after finishing their Tech-Voc or their training at TESDA. And that is the reason why I asked if it will be okay with TESDA to transfer the program of the K to 12, particularly the Tech-Voc Track, to TESDA, the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority. I would like to ask again Secretary Lapeña if this is still possible for them to consider that program once, of course, we pass a law to this effect, if it can be managed and administered, the Tech-Voc Track by TESDA, Mr. Speaker and Mr. Sponsor?

REP. CAMPOS. Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, this Representation and TESDA fully support his position on the integration of the Tech-Voc portion of K to 12 under TESDA because TESDA is really the government arm for skills training. We understand that there may be redundancies currently but we seek to minimize these and, as such, again, I reiterate our agreement to what the Hon. Mark Go said. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor.

REP. GO (M.). Okay. Having said that, Mr. Speaker, I would like to find out what resources do they need to be able to manage or administer the Tech-Voc Track under the K to 12 Program, Mr. Speaker?

REP. CAMPOS. Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, the TESDA administration commits to submit a list of these requirements to help facilitate the concern of the Hon. Mark Go and as such extends its appreciation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor.

REP. GO (M.). Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, our Sponsor.

The other question I have here is we have—I am the sponsor of this particular bill, this Cordillera State Institute of Technical Education. This bill was approved during the Seventeenth Congress and we are expecting that the budget for this bill, because it was

already approved into law, be incorporated in the current budget proposal of TESDA for 2021. I would like to find out if this was originally proposed and whether it was approved by the DBM, and if not, what might be the reason why it was not accepted by the DBM as part of the 2021 budget of TESDA?

REP. CAMPOS. Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, it is included in the legislation-related proposal of TESDA, which as of current time is fully unfunded under the NEP, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor.

REP. GO (M.). Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, I would like to find out how much was the recommended budget supposedly for the Cordillera State Institute of Technical Education, as submitted to the Department of Budget and Management before the NEP was released by the DBM, Mr. Speaker?

REP. CAMPOS. Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, the proposed budget was P456,000,433, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor.

REP. GO (M.). May we know, Your Honor, Mr. Speaker, may we know if Your Honor would like to recommend the reinstatement of this particular budget because this was approved in 2018 and if we look at the timetable, this is the right time to have the budget approved for this particular Cordillera State Institute of Technical Education, Mr. Speaker and Your Honor.

REP. CAMPOS. Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, this is part of our request to have our initial budget proposal reinstated, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor.

REP. GO (M.). Having said that, Mr. Speaker, I would like to manifest at this point in time that we include this as part of the budget of TESDA for 2021 and, at the appropriate time, this Representation will manifest the inclusion of this budget that was removed by the DBM before we approve on Second Reading this GA Bill this week or probably next week, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor.

REP. CAMPOS. Mr. Speaker, Your Honor,

this Representation and TESDA extends its appreciation to the Hon. Mark Go for his support.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor.

REP. GO (M.). Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor.

I will end my interpellation at this point and I am very happy that our Honorable Campos and the members of TESDA have indicated their support to the two items that I mentioned: one is the consideration for TESDA to administer and manage the Tech-Voc Track under the K to 12 Program, and they will submit to us the necessary requirements for us to be able to implement this particular program, and the second one is the reinstatement of the budget of the CSITE in the 2021 budget of TESDA.

So, Mr. Speaker, at this point, thank you very much and magandang hapon sa lahat ng aking mga kasama.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Pimentel). Majority Leader.

REP. DELOS SANTOS. Mr. Speaker, I move to recognize Deputy Speaker Loren Legarda of the Lone District of Antique for her interpellation.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Pimentel). Can you repeat?

REP. DELOS SANTOS. Mr. Speaker, I move to recognize the honorable Deputy Speaker Loren Legarda, Loren Legarda.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Pimentel). Hon. Loren Legarda is recognized.

Honorable Legarda, you have the floor.

Can we proceed to the next interpellator?

Hon. Loren Legarda, are you already online?

SUSPENSION OF SESSION

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Pimentel). The session is suspended.

It was 12:23 p.m.

RESUMPTION OF SESSION

At 12:33 p.m., the session was resumed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Pimentel). The session is resumed.
Majority Leader.

REP. BONDOC. Mr. Speaker, we move that our Deputy Minority Leader, the Hon. Kaloi Zarate, be recognized.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Pimentel). Hon. Carlos Zarate is recognized.

REP. ZARATE. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Considering, Mr. Speaker, that there are no more Members from the Minority who will interpellate on the budget of TESDA, we move to terminate the deliberations on the budget of TESDA, Mr. Speaker.

REP. DELOS SANTOS. Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Majority, we join the Minority in moving to close the period of interpellation on the budget of TESDA.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Pimentel). Is there any objection? (*Silence*) The Chair hears none; the motion is approved.

SUSPENSION OF SESSION

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Pimentel). The session is suspended.

It was 12:34 p.m.

RESUMPTION OF SESSION

At 12:34, the session was resumed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Pimentel). The session is resumed.
Yes, Representative Campos.

COOPERATIVE DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

REP. CAMPOS. Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, I am also sponsoring the budget of the CDA,

as I mentioned earlier, as an attached agency of the DTI. May I request that it be included in the termination.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Pimentel).
Majority Leader.

REP. BONDOC. Mr. Speaker, I move that we begin the period of sponsorship and debate on the budget of the CDA.

I so move, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Pimentel).
Is there any objection? (*Silence*) The Chair hears none; the motion is approved.

Majority Leader.

REP. BONDOC. Mr. Speaker, I move that we recognize our esteemed Deputy Minority Leader, the Hon. Kaloi Zarate.

I so move, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Pimentel).
Hon. Carlos Zarate is recognized.

REP. ZARATE. Mr. Speaker, considering that no member of the Minority wishes to interpellate on the budget of the CDA, we move to terminate the deliberations on the budget of the CDA.

I so move, Mr. Speaker.

REP. CAMPOS. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Pimentel).
Majority Leader.

REP. DELOSSANTOS. Mr. Speaker, we join the Minority in moving to terminate the period of sponsorship on the budget of the CDA.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Pimentel).
Is there any objection? (*Silence*) The Chair hears none; the motion is approved.

REP. CAMPOS. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, the Honorable Zarate, the Minority. Thank you very much. (*Applause*)

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Pimentel).
Majority Leader.

DEPARTMENT OF TRADE
AND INDUSTRY
Continuation

REP. BOLILIA. Mr. Speaker, I move that we resume the consideration on the deliberation of budget of the DTI.

I so move, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Pimentel).
Is there any objection? (*Silence*) The Chair hears none; the motion is approved.

Majority Leader.

REP. BOLILIA. Mr. Speaker, I move that we recognize Representative Zubiri to answer questions on the budget of the DTI.

I so move, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Pimentel).
Rep. Manuel Zubiri is recognized.

REP. ZUBIRI. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I think we need to continue with the deliberations on the Department of Trade and Industry's budget, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Pimentel).
Majority Leader.

REP. BOLILIA. Mr. Speaker, I move that we recognize Rep. Arlene Brosas of the GABRIELA Party-List to continue her interpellation.

I so move, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Pimentel).
Rep. Arlene Brosas is recognized.

REP. BROSAS. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Pimentel).
Yes, please proceed.

REP. BROSAS. Maraming salamat, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Pimentel).
Please proceed, Honorable Brosas.

REP. BROSAS. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, as to my last question, ay iyong budget po para sa local manufacturers, particularly ng health supplies. Kasi po, alam n'yo, imbes na mag-rely tayo sa mga imports, mas kikita pa iyong mga local businesses natin at mabibigyan natin ng trabaho ang mga manggagawa kapagka ito po ay binadyetan natin, inayos natin, at sinuportahan natin ang mga local manufacturers natin, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor.

May I know from the DTI kung mayroon po bang budget dito, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor?

REP. ZUBIRI. Mr. Speaker, puro support po ito, 'no, tinutulungan sa facilitation, sa pag-ayos ng mga dokumento, mga papeles, pero wala pong budget na talagang binibigyan itong mga manufacturers, especially para sa mga frontliners natin, so wala po. Kung gusto n'yo po, puwede tayong gumawa ng isang resolution o puwede po tayong humingi ng tulong dito po sa mga colleagues natin para mabigyan po ng budget ito. Pero right now, it is either just support in terms of facilitation and helping them meet the right people for them to be able to manufacture all these items, Mr. Speaker. So, no financial support whatsoever, Mr. Speaker, Ma'am Arlene.

REP. BROSAS. Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor, gusto ko lang sabihin na sa Bayanihan 2, mayroong fiscal and non-fiscal incentives para sa importation ng PPEs. Ngayon, in contrast, iyong mga gumagawa ng PPEs dito sa atin na local manufacturers, noong nakaraang mga buwan, nagpahayag na nadismaya sila dahil mas nag-rely pa ang gobyerno natin sa imported PPEs. Ngayon, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor, this is the time na puwede talaga ang DTI magbigay ng pagpapahalaga at palakasin ang local PPE manufacturing natin, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor. So, bakit hindi ito inilagay sa budget ng DTI, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor?

REP. ZUBIRI. Mr. Speaker, Madam Arlene, I think iyong sabi po dito sa DTI na iyong three million—for example, three million PPEs and about 56 million face masks will be manufactured locally but they do not have

the financial support to purchase the items. They are just linking the buyer, the seller and the manufacturer together to be able to make it happen. So, wala pong subsidy, wala pong hinahawakan na budget o pera na tulongan po iyong mga manufacturer. But I am a believer of buying local. Whatever it is, it is about time that we buy locally, we stop importing, and we should support our local manufacturers a hundred percent. Especially in this time of pandemic, importante po na we should unite in terms of helping small businesses reopen and revive them in terms of buying their products. Whatever they manufacture, dapat bibilhin po natin kasi kung hindi, mahihirapan po iyong taong-bayan kung mag-i-import pa rin tayo. Kasi alam po natin, dito po sa Trade Committee, alam po natin na hanggang ngayon po, we are still a net importer of so many goods as against being a net exporter. So, I am with you, Mr. Speaker, and Congresswoman Brosas that we need to buy local. Whatever product that can be manufactured locally, we should buy. This should be the practice of all Filipinos nationwide.

REP. BROSAS. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor, sa pagsabi ng suporta kaugnay dito. Kitang-kita po natin na kailangang-kailangan talaga nating tulongan iyong mga local manufacturers natin, lokal na manggagawa natin, tulongan, particularly iyong DTI, dahil napakalaki ng ini-slash na pondo sa kanila. Maliit na nga iyong pondo nila, napakalaki pa ng pondo na ini-slash sa kanila, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor. Pero sa kalagayan po na ganito, uulitin ko lang po, sabi nga ng Lancet COVID-19 Commission Statement on the occasion of the 75th Session of the UN General Assembly, worsening or worse pandemic response ang mayroon sa Pilipinas. Mas malala pa po tayo sa Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia and even sa mga maliliit ang GDP. Iyong Laos PDR, Cambodia, at Myanmar—iyon po iyong mga bansa na smaller ang GDP kaysa sa Pilipinas. Doon din sa mga bansa na financially weak, sabi weaker than us iyong Vietnam, Indonesia, and Malaysia, pero mas nakaungos pa sila sa pag-respond dito sa pandemya. Ang Pilipinas po nahuhuli. Kaya may priority po dapat

talaga na asikasuhin ang Pilipinas kaugnay sa pagresponde sa pandemya at sumusunod nga po itong usapin ng pagbubukas ng ekonomiya.

Maraming salamat po, Mr. Speaker. Maraming salamat, Mr. Sponsor.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Pimentel). Majority Leader.

REP. BOLILIA. Mr. Speaker, I move that we recognize Hon. Loren Legarda of the Lone District of Antique for her interpellation.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Pimentel). Hon. Loren Legarda is recognized.

REP. BOLILIA. Mr. Speaker, considering that the Honorable Legarda is not yet connected, may we recognize Hon. France Castro of the Party-List ACT TEACHERS for her interpellation.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Pimentel). Hon. France Castro is recognized.

REP. CASTRO (F.L.). Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So, doon po ako doon sa MSME. I join the Sponsor, Mr. Speaker, doon sa kaniyang panawagan na madagdagan iyong budget para doon sa ating mga MSMEs. Nakakalungkot at nakakabahala na doon sa report niya, more than 9,000—tama po ba na 900 o 9,000 na mga MSMEs talaga iyong mga nag-close down or nagsara at 94 percent dito iyong talagang hindi pa talaga nakakaagapay, at 50 percent are not at full capacity—tama po ba iyan—tapos 2 percent continued operations. Tama po ba iyong data na narinig ko, Mr. Speaker?

REP. ZUBIRI. Mr. Speaker, Madam France, actually, 6 percent po, ano, 6 percent is 90,000.

REP. CASTRO (F.L.). Okay.

REP. ZUBIRI. Mr. Speaker, 90,000 small companies have closed. Malaki po iyon. Marami pong trabahante ang nawalan ng trabaho.

REP. CASTRO (F.L.). Okay, ang laki po.

REP. ZUBIRI. Importante po na matulungan po sila. If we can make them reopen and give back the jobs, mas maganda po. Pero iyong problema po natin sa 94 percent na nasa operation pa rin, hindi ibig sabihin na kumikita po sila. They are just trying to survive and trying to keep afloat.

REP. CASTRO (F.L.). Okay.

REP. ZUBIRI. Kaya importante na talagang matulungan po natin silang lahat and the 6 percent, 90,000 of them, if we can, we will try to keep them open. Pero iyan po iyong statistics o iyong figures po na nandito sa atin ngayon. Mr. Speaker, 80 porsiyento po ay humihingi po talaga ng tulong kasi nahihirapan po sila, so that is why we need, ano. Nakita po natin iyong Minority at saka kayong Majority, we are all in one with regard to the budget of the DTI. Wala po akong nakita na negative debate po dito o deliberation po dito sa DTI. Nakita ko po, what I have noticed in my observation na talagang we are unified, we are in unity in terms of making sure that the budget of the Department of Trade and Industry is brought to levels wherein it can really help in the situation right now, especially in this COVID-19 pandemic, Mr. Speaker, Ma'am France.

REP. CASTRO (F.L.). Okay. Naniniwala po ako diyan, Mr. Speaker. Sinasabi nga doon sa Budget Message ng ating Pangulo na to support a strong economic recovery plus to provide recovery and rehabilitation, and stronger support for private sector at magiging behikulo daw ang 2021 Budget to reset, rebound and recover our country. Kaya kung paano tayo makaka-recover kasi bago ang pandemya, nakita naman natin iyong maliit na support ng ating gobyerno dito sa ating mga MSMEs kaya talagang bago pa po magpandemya ay talagang sisinghap-singhap na iyong ating mga MSME at nagkaroon pa ng pandemya. So nakita doon sa support ng budget, instead na tumaas, Mr. Speaker, from P5.5 billion, in 2021, naging P5.28 billion. So parang hindi ano, 'no, parang hindi matched, mismatched iyong budgeting natin doon sa

Budget Message ni Pangulo. So kung ganito, ang tingin dapat natin sa Budget Bill ay dahil nakita natin na susi talaga iyong MSMEs para doon sa pagbangon noong ating ekonomiya at alam naman natin at aware tayo kung gaano kalaki ang demographics at ambag nila, at kung ilan sa ating mga kababayan ang umaasa doon sa MSME. So, ang binabanggit nga na number of MSMEs na talagang mga nagsara ang kabuhayan, iyong mga Pinoy micro, small, and medium enterprises, kabilang na po dito, Mr. Speaker, iyong barangay micro business enterprises, sila po iyong nagbibigay ng trabahong direkta sa mga komunidad at mga mahihirap na mga pamilya. Sila iyong nagbibigay ng sigla sa ating ekonomiya.

So, kung ganoon, dapat lang po natin na, you know, bigyan ng malaking budget or dagdagan iyong budget para sa ating mga MSMEs. Kapansin-pansin, Mr. Speaker, iyong One Town, One Product Program, ang budget ay slashed by 68 percent; Negosyo Center, slashed by 20.61 percent; iyon pong MSME Development Program, slashed by 107.2 percent; at saka iyong Go Local Program, P9.8 million. Sa tingin po ba ng ating Sponsor, Mr. Speaker, tama ba na dapat proteksyonan natin iyong ating mga negosyo na lokal sa ating bansa para makaahon tayong muli doon sa economic crisis?

REP. ZUBIRI. Mr. Speaker, Madam France, my colleague, my dear colleague, lahat po ng sinabi mo sang-ayon po kami, sang-ayon po ako. We need to buy Philippine-made goods. We need to buy Philippine-made items. We need to support our local manufacturers. Maski na po iyong mga malalaking manufacturers, iyong mga malalaking negosyante which comprise 10 percent of the whole 100 percent of all businesses in the Philippines, sabi po nila, we need to support the 90 percent, the MSMEs. Kasi po, kung wala po iyong mga MSMEs, wala din po sila. Kasi ito po ang nagbibigay, itong nobenta porsiyento na mga MSMEs, ito po ang nagbibigay ng tulong sa mga 10 percent po because it is part of the whole chain in terms of our economy. So, pati sila po ang nagsasabi kung puwede tulungan po natin ang mga MSMEs.

And iyong sinabi ninyo po, iyong mga programa na binawasan po sa DTI, kaya po mayroon silang isang listahan dito, isang wish list na ipaparating ko po sa leadership, sa liderato, na at least mabigyan ng pansin, baka sakaling mabigyan po ng additional budget iyong Department of Trade and Industry. So, yes, Ma'am, I support you and all the items that you have said, that we need to support our economy, we need to increase the budget of the DTI. Ang problema po ngayon is health at saka ang ekonomiya.

REP. CASTRO (F.L.). Okay.

REP. ZUBIRI. The DOH is getting to get its proper budget and we hope that the Department of Trade and Industry will get its proper budget as well.

Marami pong salamat, Mr. Speaker, Madam France.

REP. CASTRO (F.L.). Okay. Tama po iyon, hindi lang po, kagaya ng—sususugan ko rin iyong sinabi ni Cong. Arlene Brosas kanina, hindi lang naman natin kailangan din iyong budget, support sa budget. Pero kung nananatili pong nandidiyan iyong mga policies, mga patakaran na talagang nagbibigay ng discontentment sa ating maliliit na negosyo, or hindi sila confident, o naguguluhan sila sa mga policies na inilalabas kaugnay nito—example na lang po iyong sa IATF. Sa panahon ng pandemya, although focused po tayo doon sa health crisis, problema natin sa COVID-19, pero sa panahon ng March, April and May hanggang noong June, hanggang ngayon po, nakita natin iyong ekonomiya, iyong ating ekonomiya ay talagang na-sidestep. Naniniwala ba kayo dito?

So, sa panahon ng pandemya, habang nire-resolve sana natin iyong health crisis, dapat ay pinoproteksyonan din natin ang ekonomiya. Naniniwala ba ang ating Sponsor dito?

REP. ZUBIRI. Yes, Mr. Speaker, Madam France, my dear colleague. Yes, I believe that mabibigyan po ito ng pansin at saka iyong budget po nila na P5.3 billion, wala pang P5.5 billion—P5.3, parang nakakapagtaka, Mr.

Speaker, na ganito lang iyong budget nila. Hindi ko po maintindihan. Pero puwede po natin – we can correct the mistake, we can try our best to bring up the budget because I truly feel and we truly feel, especially in the Trade Committee, headed by Weslie Gatchalian, sabi po ni Chairman Wes Gatchalian, na kailangan na kailangang itaas po iyong budget ng Department of Trade and Industry. That is why I am here, appealing to the Minority and the Majority, let us be one in bringing the budget of the DTI to its proper form or to its – how do you call this – to what the DTI really needs for them to operate efficiently and effectively.

REP. CASTRO (F.L.). Tama po iyan, ano. Ang tanong ko po, naniniwala po ba kayo na hindi lang po budget ang kailangan? Ang kailangan po natin ay talagang efficient at tamang mga polisiya na ipinatutupad natin sa panahon ng pandemya para sa ating mga maliliit na negosyante. Magbibigay po ako ng example na ito ay nagiging problema natin noong mga lockdowns. May mga lockdowns tayo na – halimbawa po iyong mga industry ng pagkain, ng mga vegetables, chicken at iba pa, hirap na hirap iyong ating mga businessmen doon sa pag-transport noong kanilang mga produkto pa-Maynila at sa iba't ibang mga lugar dahil dito sa mga patakaran na hindi naman nakaka-solve doon sa pandemya. In fact, lumalaki pa at talagang kahit na matagal iyong lockdown natin, nagwo-worsen or worse pa nga iyong ating sitwasyon. So, naniniwala ba kayo na kailangan din nating palitan iyong polisiya natin para sa ating ekonomiya during the pandemic?

REP. ZUBIRI. Mr. Speaker, Madam France, sa totoo lang, according to our dear Secretary, ngayon ay gumaganda po iyong supply. Two to three months iyong supply po ng ating mga basic goods, wala pong problema sa supply at saka ngayon, medyo free flowing iyong delivery ng mga goods po natin. Walang masyadong problema ngayon pero ang gusto po ni Secretary, kung puwede, mas mabuksan pa po iyong mga ibang mga industriya para lumakas po iyong ekonomiya natin. Pero ngayon, it is much better than

what it was a few months ago, Mr. Speaker, Madam France.

REP. CASTRO (F.L.). Okay, tama po iyan, iyan po iyong ine-expect nating direksyon, na dahil nga para makatulong po tayo doon sa ating mga maliliit na negosyante, iyong MSMEs. I-rationalize natin iyong pagbubukas ng ekonomiya, iyong kanilang suggestion na mas ibukas pa nga, at considering din iyong mga health protocols, ay mas maganda iyon na dapat na gawin. So, dahil nagkaroon po ng Proclamation No. 1021, Extension of the State of Calamity, mayroon po bang ginagawang pag-aaral ang DTI as to the effect naman nito ulit sa mga MSMEs? Kasi kung ganitong may state of calamity, magkakaroon na naman ng mga iba't ibang klase ng lockdown, mga restrictions at iba't iba pa. Iyong transportation, napakahalaga niyan. So, anong tingin ninyo ang mangyayaring muli doon sa ating mga MSMEs kasi hanggang September pa ito next year. Tingin n'yo ba magkakaroon ng malaking impact ito sa mga MSMEs?

REP. ZUBIRI. Mr. Speaker, Madam France, actually, gumaganda na po iyong flow ng items o goods dito sa ating bansa. Hindi na masyadoong istrikto ngayon. Maski na ngayong nag-declare ng state of calamity, nag-ease na po, medyo gumaan na po iyong proseso sa pagde-deliver o pagbenta ng mga basic goods po natin. Ngayon, nandito po sa atin iyong consumer protection, iyong binabantayan po nila iyong talagang presyo na hindi po tumaas ang presyo ng mga basic items. At saka according to the Usec. beside me, sabi po ni Usec. Cruz na over 500 na po ang naaresto since day one or I think a few months ago in terms of people who are profiteering during this pandemic, people that are taking advantage of the situation. So, mayroon na rin pong mga over 500 people who have been arrested because of illegal profiteering from our countrymen, Ma'am, Mr. Speaker.

REP. CASTRO (F.L.). So, sinasabi po ng ating Sponsor, Mr. Speaker, hindi nakakaapekto sa confidence ng ating mga negosyante itong extended na state of calamity? Hindi siya makakaapekto, tama po ba iyon?

REP. ZUBIRI. I think, Mr. Speaker, and of course, Madam France, we have to have a kuwan, ano, hahanap po tayo ng happy medium kasi hindi rin natin puwedeng buksan iyong ating lahat ng mga restrictions kasi kung bubuksan po natin at saka magkaka-second wave, baka magkaproblema po tayo. Kaya iyong DTI po ay naghahanap ng paraan na kung puwedeng win-win. We should still follow the safety protocols and the policies na kailangan para hindi po magka-second wave iyong Pilipinas. At saka nandito naman po sila, nagbabantay na hindi po tumaas masyado iyong mga basic goods natin. There should still be a free flow of goods from point A to point B. So, dapat bantayan po nila iyan and they have assured us, they will do their best. This is why lumabas po sila sa newspaper, ano, sa news kaninang umaga na humihingi sila ng tulong po sa IATF na kung puwede, buksan na po iyong mga ibang industriya at saka mga ibang negosyo, businesses na nandoon na, nakasara pa para at least gumanda po iyong ating ekonomiya slowly but surely, Ma'am, Mr. Speaker.

REP. CASTRO (F.L.). Okay. Maganda, maganda po iyong inilabas noong ating mga MSMEs na panawagan kaya nga ito nga iyong sinasabi ko, Mr. Speaker, iyong mga policies and guidelines ng IATF, sana nagdya-jibe ito doon sa problema ng ekonomiya natin. So, kung magkakaroon pa rin ng mga iba't ibang klase ng restrictions, kaya nga sinasabi natin, sana magkaroon ng pag-aaral, ng surveys ang ating DTI para malaman natin iyong sentimyento noong ating mga MSMEs. Iyan, kung naglabas na, patunay ito na mayroong something wrong with the policy na mga inilalabas ng IATF doon sa pagbubukas ng ekonomiya natin. Hindi lang naman iyong ano, iba't ibang mga factors din like iyong transportation at iba pa po. So, dapat mag-survey, makita natin sa ating mga MSMEs iyong mga ikinakatakot nila, iyong mga pinoproblema nila. Kung talagang ang gusto po ng DTI ay talagang magbukas na ng ekonomiya, go, iano po natin iyon, i-push po natin iyon with the MSMEs at ang ating DTI. So, tama po ba iyon, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker?

REP. ZUBIRI. Mr. Speaker, Madam

France, actually, makikita po natin, from 17 percent unemployment, nasa 10 percent unemployment na lang tayo, at ito po ay based on statistics. Saka makikita rin natin, maski na may state of calamity, basta allowed mag-operate iyong mga negosyo ay talagang iyong DTI at saka iyong IATF, nag-uusap po sila almost daily po para, at least, it is a push and pull, kung anong gusto ng DTI, nakikinig naman po iyong IATF and vice versa. So, hopefully, God willing po, uusbong ulit ang ekonomiya, Ma'am. As you can see sa figure, nabasa po natin sa statistics, from 17 percent unemployment, nasa 10 percent unemployment tayo. Pero malaki pa rin po, 10 percent unemployment, double-digit, that is still big, kaya humihingi talaga ang DTI ng tulong in terms of budget para iyong 10 percent na unemployment na iyan ay bababa pa. So, hopefully, given the right budget, iyong sabi ko nga kanina, kaninang umaga, input equals output, so bigyan natin ng malaking input ang DTI para, at least, we can expect them na mabigyan din tayo ng malaking output, Mr. Speaker, Madam France.

REP. CASTRO (F.L.). Okay, so thank you, po, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker.

As a last manifestation po, Mr. Speaker, so nasa gitna po tayo ng pandemya at humaharap po tayo doon sa matinding krisis pang-ekonomiya. So sa mga iba't ibang aspeto, makakatulong nang malaki ang MSMEs kung bibigyan sila ng wastong pagpapahalaga, not just iyong in terms of policies but also in terms of funding. Sa totoo lang, dapat gawin din natin iyong mga ginagawa ng ating mga kapitbahay na mga bansa na nagbukas na ng ekonomiya ng may pandemya pero with the right policy. Sa tamang mga patakaran sa pagsugpo ng pandemya, nagawa nila. So, kaya po simpleng idinidiin ko dito na kung mali ang policy ng ating gobyerno sa economics, sa pagsugpo ng ekonomiya – pagsugpo ng health crisis ay talagang kawawa po iyong ating mga maliliit na negosyo.

So, iyon lang po, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor. Salamat po.

REP. ZUBIRI. Marami pong salamat, Ma'am.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Pimentel). Majority Leader.

REP. BOLILIA. Mr. Speaker, I move that we recognize Deputy Speaker Loren Legarda of the Lone District of Antique for her interpellation.

I so move, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Pimentel). Deputy Speaker Loren Legarda is recognized.

REP. LEGARDA. Magandang hapon po sa ating DTI family and good afternoon to all my colleagues. I am speaking to you via Zoom. I hope that my connectivity is strong enough to be heard in plenary.

REP. ZUBIRI. Yes, DS Loren, I can hear you loud and clear.

REP. LEGARDA. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, Mr. Speaker.

I appreciate all the discussion, especially of my predecessor or esteemed colleague who spoke heavily on micro, small, and medium enterprises.

As you know, as a principal author of this measure many, many years ago, and we know that there are 998,000 – if this is accurate (*inaudible*) 998,342 MSMEs or 99.52 percent of our national and local economy, and there are 4,769 of these or only 0.48 percent are large enterprises. And kung hihimayin pa rin po natin itong mga MSMEs na ito, ang microenterprises constitute 88.45 percent or 887,272 of the total MSME establishments, and the small are only 10.58 percent or 106,175, and the medium are only 0.49 percent or 4,895. The DTI itself had presented those figures with the PSA.

May I confirm, Mr. Chair, Mr. Speaker, the focus and bias, assistance and support of the Department of Trade and Industry in reviving and resuscitating this fledgling MSME industry which is more than 99 percent and the backbone of our national economy that has been adversely affected, not of our doing but affected globally because of the global pandemic, which brings me to my first question:

Does the DTI have a clear monitoring facility of these 99 percent of the MSME facilities, businesses, enterprises which have been affected by the pandemic – and, obviously, all of them have in one way or the other – so that we know, from the time that I authored the law, R.A. No. 9501, the MSME Law which amended R.A. No. 6977, the Magna Carta for Small Enterprises? The essential amendment here was the inclusion of the microenterprises which, as I said, cover the most of MSMEs. And so as I peruse your budget, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Chairman, having premised that it is the backbone of the economy, I take note that the MSME Development Program, separate from the Shared Services Facilities, is so small. The OTOP is a component of the MSME Development Program and we saw that the funds for 2020 may have been P290 million for OTOP under MSME Development and in 2021, it was brought down to P91.498 million. Considering the pandemic, considering the support needed for microenterprises, instead of increasing our MSME Development Fund, it has been reduced to one-fourth of the budget of 2020, pre-pandemic, Mr. Speaker. I do not understand the lack of appreciation for microenterprises as reflected in this budget.

My second question is, and Secretary of DTI Mon Lopez would know this, in 2019, we increased the budget of Shared Services Facilities from a measly P50 million to P1 billion. Then the next year, 2020, it was halved to only P578 million, and this is nationwide, and the next year, P574 million. Mr. Chairman, Mr. Speaker, are we responding to the pandemic? Are we supporting our microenterprises which are the backbone of our national economy? Are we insensitive to their needs that we have even reduced the budget for Shared Services Facilities and the MSME Development Fund which is lodged in the regions? For the life of me, I cannot comprehend why a pre-COVID budget in 2019 and 2020 could even be higher than a post-COVID budget considering that our P4-trillion budget has even increased. I apologize to my esteemed colleague for this lengthy question but I have to set the premise because – I do not have to explain myself. I just need, in sum, I need to know the monitoring facility for all microenterprises; second, why

the budget for MSME development lodged in regions has been drastically cut; and third, why the SSF budgets in 2020 and 2021 were drastically cut from the time that I, if I may say, chaired your budget in 2019 and increased it from P50 million to P1 billion? I submit, Mr. Chairman, Mr. Speaker.

May the honorable Chair please respond based on the information from our Secretary.

Thank you.

REP. ZUBIRI. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, Madam DS Loren.

To be honest, I am with you a hundred percent. I have no argument whatsoever with you and I am with you definitely. The budget was cut last year from P6 billion, close to P6 billion, down to P4 billion. I think P2 billion was taken out of it. Right now, with whatever they have, whatever they did, nandito po sa presentation po nila, ipinakita po sa atin that they have taken care of 35,000 MSMEs. They have assisted 35,000 and they are still continuing to do so. But yes, in terms of figures, we do not have the exact number or figures. But definitely, they will work on it and they will pass it on to you. But in the meantime, as you can see, during the budget briefing, they gave us a presentation and the presentation that they gave us, all the Negosyo Centers – they have put up about 1,148 Negosyo Centers and then for programs for the youth, about 4,337 batches of youth were assisted, and all these other programs.

DS Loren, yes, definitely, they are clamoring for a bigger fund for them to be able to assist. And yes, 90 percent are MSMEs and most of those 90 percent are microenterprises, not even small or medium. We need to assist them and this is why the SB Corporation, which is under the DTI, is requesting for a bigger budget. And, of course, we want them to lessen the interest rates as well, moving forward. This is the only way, during – this is the only way, not only way but this is one of the biggest ways to help them in terms of reviving their businesses, Mr. Speaker, DS Loren. I believe that during – we have been meeting with them, through Zoom, and the DTI. You know, even in front of me, we have leaders of the DTI

already begging and requesting for help, for us to put more money into SB Corporation for them to be able to lend more money to those businesses that are in dire need and that are about to close. This is why we need to pour in the resources right now.

A lot of the budget was taken out and put in for COVID response, but now, moving forward, we are now in either phase two or – yes, phase two of the pandemic. We now have to revive the economy, we now need to pour in more money for its attached agencies and for its other programs. This is why the DTI requested for an additional P3.459 billion for their attached agencies and for the Office of the Secretary, for their programs, and an additional P1.5 billion for SB Corporation. I feel that it is not enough, but they are requesting for an additional P5.280 billion out of the P4.1-trillion budget of the country, Mr. Speaker, Madam DS.

REP. LEGARDA. Thank you for that information, I appreciate it, my esteemed colleague, but I have not been answered the question, that despite the increase in the total NEP budget compared to the GAA of this present year, the budget of the Department of Trade and Industry which is supposedly the frontliners, so to speak, in the economic recovery of our country, its budget has been trimmed. And if we actually believe that MSMEs are the backbone of our economy, why do we give such minute support to the backbone? The GAA 2020, it was P4.1 trillion, the entire budget; the NEP 2021 is P4.506 trillion, but for the Department of Trade and Industry, focusing on the MSME Development Fund, the OTOP is part of that – and I have a pending bill on the institutionalization of the One Town, One Product program – and the Shared Services Facilities which is an implementation of a Republic Act I authored in 2008 – they have been drastically reduced. So, I would hasten to say, Mr. Speaker, with all due respect, we are rendering lip service and not putting our heart into budgetary action. We say we support them, we say we want to respond well to those who have been adversely affected by the COVID pandemic, but why are we cutting the budget for the microenterprises

support fund? Why are we not allocating at least to the level of 2019, P1 billion, when the budget was much less than for the Shared Services Facilities, which are equipment and training in the grassroots? It is possible, Mr. Speaker. I have analyzed the budget for seven years. Ang budget po na ating ihinahain noon ay kaliit-liit lang kumpara sa P4.5 trillion at kaya pong bigyan ng mga gamit ang ating mga maliliit na negosyante at mga maliliit na negosyong tine-train ng TESDA na attached agency ng DTI. Bakit niya kakaltasan mula sa P1 bilyon sa 2019, sa 2020 – 500, sa 2021 – 500? Hindi ba ho, common sense, kailangan nating dagdagan? Hindi ba ho kailangan nating lalong akayin at tulungan ang maliliit na negosyo na nagsara o naghihingalo dahil sa pandemya na hindi natin kagagawan pero kaya po nating buhayin kapag tinulungan ng pamahalaan na napakalaki ng pondo para mabuhay ang negosyo ng tao, para maibsan ang gutom na unprecedented ngayon na napakataas? Hindi dulot ng anumang pulitika o administrasyon kung hindi dulot ng pandemya, pero ang aakay sa pag-ahon, sa gutom ng Pilipino ay pagbibigay ng suporta sa maliit na negosyong kanilang ginugol, inisip, pinaghirapan na namatay sa panahon ng pandemya, at kailangan lang ay mumunting tulong mula sa atin. So, I do not accept the budget, Mr. Speaker. I have done the budget before. It is possible with a smaller budget. It is even a bigger budget now, by P500 million from the previous year's budget, but the budget for MSMEs, OTOP is part of that, the SSF and other programs, had been reduced. I do not understand the logic, Mr. Speaker.

Cong. Zubiri, even your brother, Majority Leader Migz, you yourself, Cong. Manoy, you would know what I mean. Your indigenous people, the weavers and the artisans of Region X, the weavers and artisans of the Island of Panay, they have the skills, we have the resources. Mangolekta lang po kami ng bariw sa aming bundok sa Antique, gagawa na po kami ng bag at carpet. Kailangan lang namin, karagdagang tools at tutulungan ng design center at i-link sa merkado. Pero sa panahon ngayon, halos namatay na lahat ng mga maliliit na industriya o enterprises, eh papaano po ito? Eh pinapatay natin sa napakaliit na budget

eh. Hindi ko po maintindihan ang logic bakit binababaan sa panahon ng pandemya.

I would like to receive, not a generic political diplomatic answer but the truth, Mr. Chair, Mr. Speaker.

REP. ZUBIRI. Yes, I believe, Mr. Speaker, Madam DS, that 2019, natanggalan po ito, may pondo po ito. Is this for the Shared Services, itong MSMEs assisted and developed programs, Ma'am? I think bumaba ito 'no ng...

REP. LEGARDA. Five hundred.

REP. ZUBIRI. Yes. Iyong isinauli because of the COVID response, from P2,650,000,000 ay binawasan po ng P1.2 billion during the pandemic as COVID response and 500 of that, of which is for the SSF, DS, and then...

REP. LEGARDA. Let me just restate my question po: 2019, P1 billion SSF; 2020, 500; 2021, 500. This is part of the COVID response. It is for resuscitating the economy. The other item is MSME development, P90 million? What are we talking about, P90 million nationwide? Is this accurate or am I not seeing the numbers correctly? I do not think it is fair to do this, Mr. Speaker, to this agency which is expected to revive microenterprises – P91 million nationwide compared to, in 2020, P290 million. I will say the same thing with health for COVID response, I will say the same thing for agriculture as we provide for sustainable agriculture productivity. So, may I just know the reason why a measly P91 million is allocated for national efforts, for MSME development and only P500 million compared to the P1 billion for 2019 Shared Services? Iyon lang po. Huwag po nating gagawing dahilan na ginamit sa Bayanihan because we are looking prospectively for next years' economy where we hope to help the people in the hinterlands, those who have no access to the cities, so that they can have the tools and the necessary equipment to restart their micro businesses.

REP. ZUBIRI. Mr. Speaker, Madam DS, natanggalan po sila ng P500 million. There

was P1 billion and then because of the COVID response, they took away P500 million. And yes, you are right, kulang po, they should have given this back. That is the reality of it all, Ma'am. That is the answer given to me by the DTI team. That is why they are trying to restore the P500 million to bring it back to one billion to be able to help during this COVID times, for 2021.

REP. LEGARDA. Let me just help, Mr. Speaker. I know, Cong. Zubiri. I am with you. I know you are with me. I know you understand my frustration. If I were face to face with Secretary Mon, he would see my face. I wish we were in the gallery together as we used to in the Senate. However, I will not be happy and content with that answer. Together with you as Chair, may I request you, I am just one of the 300 Congs now, to spearhead the effort, to restore it at least to the 2019 pre-COVID level at the very, very least because our total budget, as I said, has been increased anyway to P4.5 from P4.1 trillion. That is the least we could do to fund a law from 2008 which has helped the grassroots and rural economy.

REP. ZUBIRI. Yes, Mr. Speaker, Madam DS. Yes, we are in agreement. Definitely, we want that restored back to its P1B-level to be able to help the micro-entrepreneurs, and this is what they are also fighting for, Madam DS. This is why the Secretary has requested for a bigger budget and this will be included in their budget.

REP. LEGARDA. A new law, Mr. Chair, Mr. Speaker, is another law I principally authored just recently in the Senate and hoping that as a Cong now, I would see its effective implementation, but I am disappointed that it has not been given the value that it deserves, and that is the Innovation Act.

May I know how the DTI is implementing this most important law. It is the age of innovation and this is a law that somehow looked forward. It was done pre-COVID, but in a sense, it is prescient and it addresses the needs of adjusting to a better normal and innovating with the use of technology and

other sources for better times post-pandemic. I do not see in the budget how the Innovation Act is being implemented. I am not talking about the Innovation Fund which is lodged in NEDA, which the Secretary mentioned was not funded at all. So, he has another unfunded law which both Houses of Congress deliberated on, discussed and passed in due time. It is lauded even by the international community, but I do not see our Executive Department implementing it, Mr. Speaker. Will this go down in the list of statistics of unfunded laws, Mr. Speaker? This is Republic Act No. 11293, signed by the President a year and a half ago.

This Representation proudly authored it as principal author, and along with many Congressmen and Senators, former colleagues, it mandates the National Innovation Council, it will steer the whole of government collaboration into innovation governance. NEDA, the DOST, and the DTI are supposedly the lead agencies that will lead the country into innovation governance. And so, we have the IRR. Pre-COVID, pre-lockdown, it was approved. Thanks to our Secretaries of the DOST, the DTI and NEDA, and their staff. We appreciate that. On February 7, the IRR was approved. In crafting the NEP for 2021, I would have wanted to see innovation governance staring me in the face. I do not want to see the DTI budget as usual, or the DOST budget as usual, but it is not here. I do not see innovation mainstreamed in a whole-of-government approach, Mr. Chair, Mr. Speaker.

REP. ZUBIRI. Mr. Speaker, DS Loren, right now, there is no budget for innovation for RIICs, industry and startups. They are requesting for a P200-million budget; if given, then they will actively do their jobs in terms of the innovation process. But right now, what is happening is they are networking and advising all these people who are trying to get new businesses and new programs started. But there is no actual budget for this, Mr. Speaker, Madam DS.

REP. LEGARDA. Mr. Speaker, may I know the breakdown of the P200 million of

which you claim or the Chair has said does not appear in the budget as implementation of innovation governance with DTI as one of the three lead agencies of government.

REP. ZUBIRI. They will submit it to you. Mr. Speaker, they will submit it to you. But as of now, this is what we have: RIICs' Expansion, P24.9 million; Industry Transformation, P105 million; Startup Development, P130 million; Startup Venture Fund, P500 million, if given the possibility.

REP. LEGARDA. The Startup Venture Fund, will this be a lending institution or is it a grant and will it go through the SB Corp. as it does with MSMEs, or will it go to a government financial institution?

REP. ZUBIRI. Mr. Speaker, Madam DS, the Startup Venture Fund will go to the NDC, National Development Corporation, and this will form a part of the equity for the new startups.

REP. LEGARDA. Will this new equity for startups, Mr. Speaker, under the startup fund, be grants to startups or is this a loan with no collateral and very low interest for startups, Mr. Speaker?

REP. ZUBIRI. This will be part of the equity or I guess for the startup, but iyon pong sa GAA, iyong Industry Transformation of P105 and the startup development for P113, these are what we have right now, Mr. Speaker, Madam DS.

REP. LEGARDA. Mr. Speaker, may I know the sentiment of the Department, headed by my good friend, the Secretary, on the non-implementation of the Innovation Act or maaaring hindi naniniwala ang Departamento sa ating ginawang batas at ibabasura na lang ito dahil hindi pinopondohan. I just want to know, Mr. Speaker, because this well-thought of law, if unfunded, will be for naught and ito po ay magbibigay lang ng empty hope sa ating mga tao at hindi naman mapopondohan. What is the use of legislating if we do not operationalize and fund it?

May I know the sentiment of the DTI whether they are in favor of this but during our hearings in the Senate then, they seemed to be supportive and that is the reason why they are one of the three implementing agencies. But why is there no funding for implementation of this new law whose time has come, for innovation governance in our country?

REP. ZUBIRI. Mr. Speaker, Madam DS, this will be used to modernize their equipment and to be used to, I guess, modernize everything that they have right now, kung may pondo po. Pero ngayon, wala pong pondo, hindi po sila makakagalaw.

REP. LEGARDA. Research and development, Mr. Speaker, are they not the heart of innovation? And this would include, of course, robotics and everything. This is the way forward. This is the post-pandemic recovery aside from health issues, agriculture productivity issues, support for microenterprises and innovation, and research and development are at the core of post-pandemic recovery for our economy. That is what I believe in. That is the reason why this law was enacted and I am glad that the IRR was signed just before the lockdown. I was simply hoping that I would see the implementation and the financing of this law when I see the NEP of the three agencies of government tasked to implement it.

I must say that I am downhearted to see that and to hear that it has not been funded. I will probably have to wait for the 2022 Budget or perhaps as Chair, Mr. Speaker, my esteemed colleague from Mindanao, if you will, as Chair of this important Committee, go with me in trying to lead the way to restore and to allocate a fund to implement this new law in the new norm, if you agree, Mr. Speaker. By the way, your brother...

REP. ZUBIRI. Yes.

REP. LEGARDA. ... your brother was my coauthor and Senator Joel Villanueva as well, and they feel very strongly about this.

REP. ZUBIRI. Yes, Mr. Speaker. DS Loren, yes, I am with you. Definitely, innovation is key to industrialization. We know for a fact that it is very important, but we need the fund. Definitely, they are with us and they will help us help our countrymen. But now, we do institutional networking but that is about it. Without any budget, as I have said, they cannot move. But they want to innovate, but I think it takes money and time if we do want to innovate. This becomes even more crucial as we enter the new normal use of new technologies and innovation. Innovation would be crucial to build a more resilient, inclusive industry development. So, these are coming from the Department heads of the DTI and they are with you, they are one with you. The only thing is wala na po silang pondo and they are just trying to make do with what they have, Mr. Speaker.

REP. LEGARDA. Magsasabi lang po ako ng maikli lang na ehemplo ng innovation, strong innovations. For example, they developed a system for collecting and using rice straw to make biogas and fertilizer. Pangalawa po, circular solutions, a biodigester system that does not require a lot of space and can be installed within a day. Their goal is to promote the concept of the circular economy, another bill I filed, and to provide technical support to institutions to develop effective and efficient programs on resource management. Nandiyan iyong Light of Hope, which is trying to address the energy poverty situation in far-flung areas in Cebu by distributing do-it-yourself night lamps. So marami pong mga maliliit kasi po crosscutting ito eh. Ang microenterprises ay startup din at sila na rin po ang makikinabang sa innovation at ang makikinabang po dito ang mga lugar 'gaya ng Bukidnon, 'gaya po ninyo, 'gaya po ng sa amin sa Panay, sa kabundukan at sa mga hinterlands na may kakulangan po sa oportunidad kaya po minarapat natin na suportahan at i-author ito.

And let me just say before I end that this was not a refiled measure. This innovation law was the output that I gathered from all those who participated in APEC. It was an original bill we filed right after APEC. Sayang naman po, naipasa natin itong batas na ito, kung

hindi po mamarapatin at bibigyan ng halaga ng ating Ehekutibo at popondohan at, more than the funding, understand its importance in promoting research and development, and information in the grassroots and to spur our rural local economy. It would be such a waste because there are many young people, millennials, with startups who are just dying to use their brains for innovation.

I have said too much and I do not want to stress the point too much. It just tires me, Mr. Speaker, to see a budget that is not reflective of a post-pandemic response and recovery that is attuned to innovation, that is attuned to a circular economy, that is attuned to support for microenterprises, the backbone of our economy. That is the reason why we have debates like this so that you, as Chair, can help steer us towards a post-pandemic recovery and response that is more responsive to the needs of our people. It should not be budget as usual.

I have said my piece. I am not certain if the Chair agrees with me. I tried to pour my heart out as the author of the Innovation Act and the MSME Law, and many more, but I am certain that the DTI family, as we used to in the past five years, would agree. I wish we were face-to-face. I wish I had the power to put back your P500 million. That was time immemorial. But with the Chair believing in what we said, perhaps the leadership of Speaker Cayetano and Chair Eric and DS LRay, I am certain, would agree with putting funds to a new law in the better norm. I am grateful to the Chair. He tried his best. But I must confess that I am not completely content with the answers, not because of the lack of answer of the Chair but because I wanted positive action and a commitment to restore the funding support. And I am not speaking for my district. I speak as a national leader who believes that laws must be implemented for the betterment of the people who have been most affected by the pandemic. With that, I submit, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Chair. I would collaborate with the Chair in amending the budget in the House level. Let us not wait for the Senate to bring it back. Perhaps in the GAB, we can go beyond the district amendments and do national amendments for this most important piece of legislation.

I thank you for your patience and I wish the best for the DTI family whom I have worked with for many, many years, and I will support you, as always.

Keep safe. God bless.

Maraming salamat po sa inyo.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Pimentel).
Majority Leader.

REP. BOLILIA. Mr. Speaker, I move that we recognize Hon. Ferdie Gaité of the BAYAN MUNA Party-List for his interpellation.

I so move, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Pimentel).
Hon. Ferdinand Gaité is recognized.

REP. GAITE. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Salamat po sa ating mga kapita-pitagang mga kasamahan sa Kongreso, sa ating mga panauhin at sa pamilya ng DTI, at sa ating kagalang-galang na Sponsor ng budget ng DTI. May mga ilan po akong katanungan kung pahihintulutan po ng ating Sponsor, Mr. Speaker.

REP. ZUBIRI. Yes, Mr. Speaker, Congressman Gaité. Yes, I can hear you loud and clear.

REP. GAITE. Yes. Okay. Salamat po.

Nabasa ko iyong CPBRD's Agency Budget Notes, and they placed a very telling analysis. Sinabi po na dahil nga sa COVID, talagang on a downturn ang ating ekonomiya. At sinasabi ngayon ng gobyerno na ang mga ilang paraan para maisalba iyong ating ekonomiya ay palakasin iyong mga batayang sektor, lalo na iyong micro-, small-, and medium-scale enterprises. Pero as you have already presented, and I heard the frustration of our colleagues in Congress, I heard the very emotional and very pointed, specific concerns raised by DS Loren Legarda, marami siyang concerns regarding the budget. Bumaba ang budget ng DTI. Ang tanong, seryoso ba talaga iyong gobyerno na i-address iyong problema ng ekonomiya dahil ang sabi nga ng CPBRD, "Is it really serious in addressing the economic problems of our country and of

our countrymen?" Seryoso ba sila by lowering the budget of the DTI, which is responsible for the trade and industry of our country? So, Mr. Speaker, ano ba ang tingin ninyo diyan? Sumasang-ayon ba kayo na ibaba pa ang budget ng DTI lalo na sa panahon ng pandemya, Mr. Speaker?

REP. ZUBIRI. Iyong sagot po diyan, Mr. Speaker, I think seryoso naman po iyong gobyerno, kasi tayo po, gobyerno din tayo, magtulungan po tayo. Kung ano po iyong problema natin, kung budget po ng DTI—kasi iyong sinabi ko po, ekonomiya at saka health po iyong problema natin ngayong 2020, so magtulungan po tayo dito po, with the power of the purse. Kung maliit po iyong budget na ibinigay po sa DTI, kulang, dagdagan po natin dito sa plenaryong ito o dito sa Kongresong ito, Mr. Speaker, Congressman Gaité. But definitely, palakasin po natin iyong MSMEs especially during this time of pandemic. We really need to show support for the MSMEs by reflecting in the budget in terms of lahat ng mga support services para sa kanila. At saka iyong pang-utang, importante po, 'no, pang-utang, kasi alam po nila iyong kanilang negosyo better than all of us, eh. Iyong problema talaga iyong pondo na makaabot sa kanila. So, basically, this is it, Mr. Speaker and Congressman Gaité.

REP. GAITE. Salamat po. At tama po, talagang sa panahon ngayon, totoo naman na ang priorities natin ay health, iyong problema ng ating kalusugan sa harap ng pandemya, pero talagang hindi, not far behind, it should be addressing the impact of COVID-19, lalo na sa ekonomiya, lalo na sa ating mga manggagawa. Sabi mismo ng study ng ADB, sa survey nila, ang talagang negatively impacted ay iyong mga MSMEs, na obviously walang economies of scale, mas maikli ang pisi, umaasa lamang sa mabilis na pagbalik ng kanilang capital. Pero dahil nga sa pagtumul ng negosyo, iyong demand for their products and services have actually not only slowed down, and some, as you have observed, nagsarado na nga. Kaya doon nga, ang point ko lang po, tama na dapat dagdagan ng pondo ang DTI, lalo na sa usapin

ng pagtulong sa ating mga maliliit na mga negosyante para makatulong sa pag-revive ng ekonomiya and that should be a priority and should have been reflected in the budget. Hindi dapat i-reduce, dapat nga lakihan. Pero ang tanong ko lang, Mr. Speaker, ako'y laging interested doon sa issue ng ating mga manggagawa, for the past several years, we have had a very—iyong unfilled positions since, well, the data of the CPBRD is only for 2019, but I remember, nasa bandang 17.7 percent ang unfilled positions sa buong DTI and I think necessarily, importante ito kasi, how will services be delivered? Example, for the past several years, the Design Center of the Philippines' unfilled positions have been at 80.8 percent, eh di practically 20 percent lang ng kanilang workforce ang nandiyan. And I think Cong. Loren Legarda pointed out na importante iyong tulong ng iba't ibang attached agencies under the DTI. And I saw the products, in the last hearing I was very proud to see iyong locally produced natin and iyong tulong nga ng DTI, lalo na sa pag-improve ng design to make them more competitive. Bakit po ba hanggang ngayon, na parang consistent, na sa ganoong 17.7 percent ang — 17.3 in 2019; 17.7 in 2020; then again in 2021? We provided a budget for this which translates to about 1,500 positions. Hindi ba dapat manguna ang gobyerno? Kung matumal ang ekonomiya, gobyerno nga ang dapat isang tagapanguna sa pag-aayos, lalo na sa panahon ng pandemya tulad ng nangyari noong mga nakaraang mga krisis sa daigdig, iyong Great Depression. Government dapat ang mag-i-initiate ng employment at hindi simpleng employment. The employees will provide genuine service which will multiply in terms of other services to the people, lalo na sa ating ekonomiya.

Ano pong tingin ng ating kagalang-galang na Sponsor sa usapin nitong mababang rate ng empleyo? Bakit ba double-digit pa rin hanggang ngayon, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor?

REP. ZUBIRI. Mr. Speaker, Congressman Gaité, this is with regard to Design Center of the Philippines. Right now, 17 percent po iyong unfilled positions. By year-end,

mayroon tayong mga 50 pax. Kulang pa po sa kailangang tulongan at saka mabigyan ng trabaho, pero sigurado po, sisikapin po nila na makuwan po ito ano, matapos, mabigyan po itong trabaho, itong position na almost 18 percent po na wala pang trabahante doon sa Design Center of the Philippines, Mr. Speaker, Congressman Gaité.

REP. GAITE. Yes, Mr. Speaker. Sana po talagang pabilisin natin ito, hindi lang sa usapin ng empleyo ng mga manggagawa dito, either DCP iyan, TESDA or other attached offices. Dahil nabanggit na iyong pangangailangan ng pagbibigay ng serbisyo, hindi gagana kahit anong opisina pa iyan, kahit na lagyan mo ng napakaraming budget kung walang aktuwal na manggagawa o kawani na magpo-provide ng service na iyan, mananatiling nakatengga ang pondo ng ating opisina. At nanawagan ako ulit, I made this manifestation even during the 2020 budget deliberations, na hindi dapat manatili na ganito ang unfilled positions sa any government agency. I think a single-digit—kahit pa may single-digit unfilled position presented, hindi acceptable. With the double-digit, I do not think that is reflective of the good management of an agency, more so iyong DCP nga na 80 percent. Although binanggit ninyo bumaba na, but still, this is still a concern considering na, I believe, many of the offices under the DTI provide a great service to our various enterprises.

Finally po, mayroon lang po din akong tanong na naitanong ko rin po sa ating unyon, sa DTI-EU, at mayroon lang po silang mga ilang gustong ma-raise, dahil in providing services, lalo na sa panahon ng pandemya, ano po ba ang ginagawa nating proteksyon para sa ating empleyado? Kasi balita ko, frontliners din iyong ating DTI boys, especially iyong doon sa ating enforcement, iyong mga nag-e-enforce ng price monitoring, iyong Bureau of Philippine Standards, and others. They must make sure that even in the time of a pandemic, iyong functions ng DTI should not be impeded and yet, ang problem nila is they have to go doon sa sites, sa mga empresa, sa price monitoring. Hindi puwedeng i-Zoom iyan, kailangan nilang aktuwal na pumunta sa mga tindahan at iba pa. Ano ho ba ang

ginagawa natin sa DTI in terms of protection for our employees, lalo na doon sa nasa frontline services? Mayroon bang ina-allocate na resources ang DTI para sa ating mga empleyado, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor?

REP. ZUBIRI. Okay. Mr. Speaker, Congressman Gaité, I believe iyong SRP po, iyong sinusunod nila, what they are doing, Congressman Gaité, is mataas naman po iyong compliance rate. They have a high compliance rate in terms of following the SRPs nationwide. Wala naman po. I think iyong mga profiteers, as I have said, as mentioned earlier, over 500 po iyong naaresto and they are trying their best to make sure that all the SRPs are being followed and the prices are not being abused.

Ito po iyong – nandito po, kaharap ko po si Usec. Ruth sa Consumer Protection at saka po nandito po si Secretary Mon Lopez, eh talagang sinusunod po nila and continuous po iyong price monitoring kasi alam po nila na importante po ito na hindi po maabuso iyong mga presyo ng mga basic goods natin, Mr. Speaker, Congressman Gaité.

REP. GAITE. Yes, salamat po sa input, doon sa information. Ang concern ko po, Mr. Speaker, liban doon ay iyong nabanggit ko iyong mga kawani ng DTI na actually nagmo-monitor at nagtse-check, nagpa-price monitoring. Sila rin ay nalalagay sa panganib, sa risk dahil required na sila mismo, I believe, will have to go out in the field to monitor these, itong violations, possible violations ng SRP at iba pa. Nabanggit iyan eh, 500 na nahuli o nakita na nag-violate.

Does the DTI provide PPEs to our personnel who are in the field? Ano ba ang – are they given, are they tested for (*inaudible*) COVID-19? By the way, ang tanong ko rin, gaano ka – what is the extent of COVID infections in our employees in the DTI? So, these are the concerns of the workers because they too want to serve but they have to contend with the (*inaudible*) problem, the real, real problem of the pandemic. Kasi nai-text din sa akin, may mga problema pa rin, pati mga benefits hindi nila natatanggap, example po, iyong kanilang hazard pay na ni-request

nila; iyong kanilang PBB, Performance-Based Bonus, na since 2018 ay hindi pa natatanggap; at may request sila for increase in uniform allowance. So, these items will help especially in the time of COVID. Lahat tayo apektado but the employees who have to be in the frontline of providing services, under the DTI, in their official capacity, sila rin sana ay tulungan at sana makita rin natin na nagre-reflect doon sa how the DTI, in their mandate to support and help trade and industry in our country, paano rin natin tinutulungan iyong ating staff, iyong ating mga employees nationwide. Sana po makita rin ito, lalo na ngayon na, nabanggit na kanina, talagang dapat itulak at suportahan natin iyong ating sariling ekonomiya, iyong ating industriya. And ako, I believe, many of our employees play a role in ensuring that these services are delivered.

So, ano ho ba ang puwede nating makita ngayon in terms of the budget, considering na lumiit pa nga? Pero ako ay nananawagan na dapat palakihin talaga. Ano ho ba ang ginagawa nating paraan para iyong nabanggit na proteksyon sa ating mga manggagawa sa loob ng DTI, lahat ng attached agencies, lahat ng mga offices ay mag-reflect sa budget for 2021, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor?

REP. ZUBIRI. Mr. Speaker, Congressman Gaité, I believe that iyong practice po ng DTI kung nandoon po sila, nagche-check po, nagmo-monitor ng mga SRPs po ng mga consumer goods natin, naglalagay po sila ng face shield, face mask, nagdadala po sila ng alcohol at saka iba po iyong service nila, it is a private vehicle that they use to service the employees. Tapos ngayon, ang ating mga ROs and HO provide PPEs, alcohols and shuttle service. The DTI field personnel, they are the most shielded group in the DTI. Ito iyong mga may PPEs, may hazard pay, may mga bitamina pa po, mayroong mga vitamins na ibinibigay po iyong Departamento para sa kanila and some are even given extra allowances po. Ito po iyong practice nila.

REP. GAITE. Okay.

REP. ZUBIRI. So, tama po iyan, that is very important. They are at risk, they

are also our frontliners, so let us do our mandate. Mag-oversight po tayo, not only for the DTI but for all the other agencies kung talagang tinutulungan po nila to protect themselves all the agencies out there that risk themselves to provide service to our country, to our countrymen nationwide, Mr. Speaker, Congressman Gaité.

REP. GAITE. Yes. Salamat, Mr. Speaker. Salamat, Mr. Sponsor. We are pleased to know that the DTI is addressing the concerns of our employees and hopefully, iyong ating, generally, iyong ating mamamayan, you know, in providing the basis of the mandate of the DTI, and sana rin huwag natin laging makalimutan iyong ating mga frontliners na government workers who are also victims of this pandemic. And hopefully, doon, at the proper time, we can introduce some amendments for the increase in the budget of the DTI. So, iyon lang po, Mr. Speaker. Maraming salamat po sa ating DTI family, sa ating colleagues sa Kongreso at iba pa nating kasamahan sa hapong ito. Salamat po.

REP. ZUBIRI. Marami pong salamat, Mr. Speaker, and Congressman Gaité.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Pimentel). Majority Leader.

REP. BOLILIA. Mr. Speaker, I move that we recognize Rep. Mark Go of Baguio City for his interpellation.

I so move, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Pimentel). Rep. Mark Go is recognized.

REP. GO (M.). Thank you, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, Majority Leader, our Sponsor.

I have some questions to our Sponsor with the help, of course, of our Secretary of the Department of Trade and Industry. This is about one of the attached agencies of the DTI, and this is the SB Corporation or the Small Business Corporation. In the budget of 2021, you have included another P1.5 billion,

which is basically the same as the budget in 2020. I would like to find out whether this budget is for loans to our MSMEs or it is for the operation of the corporation, Mr. Chair, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor?

REP. ZUBIRI. This is all for loans, Mr. Speaker, Cong. Mark Go.

REP. GO (M.). And this is on top of the budget? If this is for loans, this is on top of the budget of the Office of the Secretary in terms of organizational outcome. Under Operation 003, the MSMEs Assisted and Developed has a budget of P2.2 billion in 2021 and, supposedly, it should have a budget of P2.6 billion in 2020, but because of NBC 580, this was reduced to P1.4 billion. I would like to find out if this amount of P2.2 will also be used to give loans to our MSMEs, Mr. Chair, I mean Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor?

REP. ZUBIRI. Mr. Speaker, Congressman Go, part of this will go to the OTOP, our programs, all the other SSFs, and all the other facilities and programs of the DTI. This will not be part of the loans, Mr. Speaker, Cong. Mark Go.

REP. GO (M.). Okay. So, how much more do we ask for the SBC loans that we will give to our people, the budget, this P1.5 billion? How much more or what was the original proposal of the DTI that was probably denied by the Department of Budget and Management? I would like to find out how much was the original budget?

REP. ZUBIRI. What was approved, Mr. Speaker, Cong. Mark Go— what was approved was P1.5 billion. They are requesting for another P1.5 billion for SB Corp. These are all for loans for the MSMEs.

REP. GO (M.). Of course, I would like to understand, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker, that these are not going to be grants given to our SB Corporation. These will be loans to SB Corporation that will be used to be given to our borrowers from the MSMEs. Am I correct in that assumption, Mr. Sponsor?

REP. ZUBIRI. Yes, that is correct, Mr. Speaker, Congressman Go. That is a hundred percent correct.

REP. GO (M.). Yes. Well, under Republic Act No. 11494, this is the Bayanihan 2, it is provided in this approved law that we will be giving P10 billion to the SBC under the CARES Program. Is this not sufficient if this will be given to the SBC for loans to our MSMEs?

REP. ZUBIRI. As of the moment, Mr. Speaker, Congressman Go, P6 billion went to the tourism companies and then P4 billion went to, more or less, the micro – MSMEs in general. These are the ones that the DTI is helping, but P4 billion went to, more or less the micro, small, and medium enterprises, but P6 billion of which is in the tourism industry.

REP. GO (M.). So, in other words, this amount is not sufficient to address the concerns of our economy in terms of stimulating the economy by helping our MSMEs. Am I correct with that statement, Mr. Sponsor?

REP. ZUBIRI. Yes, yes, Mr. Speaker, Cong. Mark Go. According to our DTI family, the P10 billion is not enough, that is why they are requesting for an additional P1.5 billion from the original P1.5 billion that is to be granted to them.

REP. GO (M.). Mr. Sponsor, I will support the additional P1.5 billion to be given to the SBC. However, I would like to ask at this point, because when I reviewed the performance of the SBC and, at the same time, the interest rate that they charge – right now, they have this 3Ps Program, which is the Pondo Para sa Pagbabago, and they are charging a 1.5-percent interest per month. And I would like to find out, nakalagay pa rito, this is nominal interest and they have identified 353 conduit institutions that will directly give loans to other MSMEs. Is it possible, Mr. Sponsor, to request the Chair of the SBC and, of course, our Secretary of Trade and Industry, to look at this interest rate? It is 1.5 percent per month and the sad fact of the matter is, they compared it with the 5-6 interest, and I think it should

not be that way. So, I would recommend that this interest rate that will be charged to SMEs or MSMEs should be reduced, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker.

REP. ZUBIRI. Yes, Mr. Speaker, Congressman Mark Go, the 1.5 percent was in the original program. I think that is still continuing and we need to deliberate on that very carefully and make sure that our people are not being taken advantage of, especially the small- and micro-finance entrepreneurs. But the new Bayanihan program has a total of 6 percent, I believe, with six months of leeway or meaning to say, six months of – ah, six months of grace period. So, in effect, it is 4 percent per annum, Mr. Speaker, Cong. Mark Go. But I am with you in terms of looking into the interest rates from the old program because I believe conduits are part of the program, and we need to review this, and we need to understand it more carefully, and see where we can cut the interest rates for the common good of our people.

REP. GO (M.). Yes, Mr. Chair, I mean Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor. I think it is very important that we look at the interest, especially when we approve this particular budget for the SB Corporation.

I would suggest that if they can adopt the same interest rate used under the Bayanihan 2, that would be good for our MSMEs because, after all, the conditions even next year will be almost the same in terms of business prospects and probably, you know, the conditions of our economy. So, I would like to state that I support the increase in the budget of the Department of Trade and Industry. That will really help our economy and, at the same time, particularly the MSMEs and the other industries in the country. We need to ensure that those who are here already will continue doing business in the country and those who are not with us will be attracted to come to the country and, of course, this would require a lot of effort on the part of the Department of Trade and Industry. Having said that, that would mean also that we really need to increase the budget of the Department of Trade and Industry.

So, Mr. Speaker, at this point, I would like to manifest that, at the proper time, we will make the appropriate motion to increase the budget of the Department of Trade and Industry, Mr. Chair, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much.

REP. ZUBIRI. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, Cong. Mark Go.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Pimentel). Majority Leader.

REP. DELOS SANTOS. Mr. Speaker, I move to recognize the honorable Rep. Ace Barbers of the Second District of Surigao del Norte.

I so move, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Pimentel). Hon. Ace Barbers is recognized.

REP. BARBERS. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Majority Leader.

May I know if the Gentleman from Bukidnon, a good friend, is willing to answer to a few clarificatory questions.

REP. ZUBIRI. Definitely, Mr. Speaker. I am ready to hear from my good friend, Ace Barbers.

REP. BARBERS. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

To the distinguished Sponsor, at the outset, let me just state for the record that this Representation, Mr. Speaker, joins the distinguished Sponsor and all of our colleagues in the expression of dismay in the reduction of the budget of the DTI. As we all know, and as aptly pointed out by some of our colleagues, the DTI actually handles the backbone of the Philippine economy. And having said that, I feel, Mr. Speaker, that dapat lamang siguro na bigyan pa ng mas malakilaking budget o hindi kaya ay i-restore iyong budget na nawala sa kanila.

So, again, Mr. Speaker, having said that, let me now go on with my clarificatory questions that I would like to ask the distinguished Sponsor. This pertains, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, doon sa usapin tungkol sa Negosyo

Centers, 'no. Pardon my ignorance, Your Honor. I have been reading and hearing about Negosyo Centers. What exactly is a Negosyo Center?

REP. ZUBIRI. Mr. Speaker, Cong. Ace Barbers, to be technical about it, Sir, as mandated by R.A. No. 10644 or the Go Negosyo Act, Negosyo Centers are to be established to promote the ease of doing business and facilitate access to services for MSMEs within their jurisdiction. They also facilitate and expedite the business application process of MSMEs, in coordination with LGUs and other concerned agencies.

REP. BARBERS. So, basically, Mr. Speaker, distinguished Sponsor, a Negosyo Center is a center where business ideas are consolidated, as well as businesses that need to, shall we say, i-process iyong mga requirements under the law. This is what exactly what Negosyo Centers are all about. Am I correct, distinguished Sponsor?

REP. ZUBIRI. Yes, that is correct, Mr. Speaker.

REP. BARBERS. So, there is nothing in the Negosyo Center concept that promotes a type of business?

REP. ZUBIRI. Not necessarily, Mr. Speaker. They can assist and maybe conceptualize, but it is to promote businesses and to assist those who are trying to put up new businesses, to help them create their business.

REP. BARBERS. Yes, Mr. Speaker.

In fact, I am quite impressed with the rationale and the idea of putting up these kinds of centers in order for businesses to thrive not just in the metropolis but also in other parts of the country. For instance, let me ask, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, among negosyo ng Negosyo Center ang natulungan sa, let us say in Bukidnon, in the district of the distinguished Sponsor?

REP. ZUBIRI. Mr. Speaker, Congressman Ace, sa amin po iyong coffee, mag-repack po

ng coffee, iyong mga produkto, added-value items like banana chips, corn chips, pineapple chips, all the food items, and all the jams, and all the other food items that are being manufactured – sila po ang tumutulong po sa amin in terms of even repackaging and in giving us ideas on how to go about selling our products, added-value products.

REP. BARBERS. So, basically, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, this largely depends on the product of a certain town, iyong what the OTOP is all about. Tama po ba?

REP. ZUBIRI. Tama po iyan, Mr. Speaker.

REP. BARBERS. So, for instance, in my district, in Surigao, most of the products there are actually marine products and mineral products. Am I correct, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor?

REP. ZUBIRI. Tama po yan, Mr. Speaker, Congressman Ace. Tama po iyan.

REP. BARBERS. Okay. Mr. Speaker, distinguished Sponsor, the reason why I asked what the Negosyo Center is all about is because, perhaps, it would be worthwhile also to consider as part of the concept of the Negosyo Center to include the research of, say – for instance, if you are going to ask me now, Your Honor, Mr. Speaker, what product does my district have, I would easily answer you by saying it is all about marine products. But there could be other products, perhaps agricultural products, that could be developed and, shall we say, may be sold in the market soon, only if we will be backed up by research and further studies on this. I think it is the Department of Trade and Industry that should give the thriving businessmen in the far-flung areas of the country – siguro dapat mabigyan sila ng idea kung ano iyong mga negosyong puwede nilang pasukan at puwede nilang i-develop.

REP. ZUBIRI. Tama po iyan, Mr. Speaker, Congressman Ace. Yes, that is true and correct.

REP. BARBERS. Well, thank you, distinguished Sponsor, for being in agreement with this Representation because after asking all these questions about Negosyo Centers, I would like to be clarified, ano, on the idea of, is there a policy by the Department of Trade and Industry, a national policy at that, that promotes the “buy Filipino” concept? Is there anything of that sort?

REP. ZUBIRI. Mayroon po tayo ditong programa, ano, not primarily to mandate our people to buy local, but mayroon po tayong mga, for example, iyong mga stores natin na “buy local.” It promotes – but kulang po tayo, to be honest and to be candid, kulang po tayo sa polisiya especially now, during the pandemic. The only way that we will survive, Mr. Speaker, Congressman Barbers, is we need to buy local. That is the only way. Because if we continue to import and continue to be a net importer of a lot of items, this will not balance out. The demand is there, marami po tayong Pinoy na bumibili, the supply is also there, but if we continue to import, masisira po iyong supply and demand po dito sa bansa po natin. And I am in agreement with you. I know more or less where you are driving at, sir. Thank you.

REP. BARBERS. Yes, Mr. Speaker, distinguished Sponsor. It looks like there must be some aggressive efforts on the part of the national government in really promoting the “buy Filipino” concept. If this is the only way that the country – how much by the way, Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, is the percentage contribution of the Philippine exports to our GDP? Do we have any idea on this?

REP. ZUBIRI. About 15 percent, Mr. Speaker, Congressman Ace, 15 percent.

REP. BARBERS. Okay. And out of that 15 percent, which particular industry has the biggest contribution in this 15 percent?

REP. ZUBIRI. Mr. Speaker, Congressman Ace, it is electronics. More than half of it is electronics.

REP. BARBERS. Electronics.

REP. ZUBIRI. Electronics, yes, sir.

REP. BARBERS. So, electronics, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor, is, in fact, a product not inherent in the country. It is just that there is an industry that we assemble these electronics and then export them out. Am I correct?

REP. ZUBIRI. That is true and correct, Mr. Speaker, Congressman Ace, yes.

REP. BARBERS. So, if that is the case, there could still be a lot of room for the country to look at products that we can export more than, perhaps, the electronic sector. What I am saying is—let me move, fast-forward to the mining industry. My district is a mining district and, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, mining has a measly contribution of, if I am not mistaken, less than 1 percent of our GDP, at the moment, so this is one area that we can probably look into. Siguro, if we compare the Philippine mining industry's contribution to the GDP, it is just, say, 1 percent, but in countries like Australia and Canada, they have given more. Australia's has a 7-percent contribution to its GDP and Canada's has a 5-percent contribution to its GDP.

So, marami pa ho tayong products that we can look into for the country to export in the future because this is the only way, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, that we can promote jobs, generate revenues, and generate taxes. We cannot anymore rely on the number of BPOs or perhaps more Filipinos going out as OFWs and sending back their precious dollars to our economy just to let this economy survive. There must be some stimulus in the national government that we do own. What I am saying, kung ano iyong produkto natin, iyon siguro ang dapat nating tutukang i-export. Maybe garments, maybe the nice piña barong material used in the Barong Tagalog of the distinguished Sponsor can likewise be exported. So, iyon ang—that is the policy that we want to see, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, and there must be some aggressive efforts in promoting such. Do you agree with me, Mr. Speaker?

REP. ZUBIRI. I totally agree, Mr. Speaker. I am one with Cong. Ace Barbers with his push to export more rather than to import more. So, better to be a net exporter than a net importer.

REP. BARBERS. Because the country is a net importer at the moment—in fact, even rice and chicken, we import. So, at the moment, the country is a net importer, so there is a disparity in the balance between the export and the import sectors, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor.

REP. ZUBIRI. Mr. Speaker, Congressman Ace, actually, that is why we need to increase the capacity in terms of, I guess, whether it is production of new equipment, either we go semi-mechanized or fully-mechanized to bring up the capacity of our lands and our industries and, at the same time, all the other manufacturing sectors of our country. So, definitely, yes, we are one with you but they need support, Mr. Speaker, Congressman Ace. With support, it means money, more money especially for the Trade Department. They cannot move with a meager budget, Mr. Speaker, Congressman Ace.

REP. BARBERS. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, distinguished Sponsor.

Going back to the Buy Filipino Movement, Your Honor, Mr. Speaker, the government is the biggest buyer of goods and, annually, even in the National Expenditure Program, you will see hundreds of billions of pesos spent on MOOE. Am I correct, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor?

REP. ZUBIRI. That is true and correct, Mr. Speaker.

REP. BARBERS. And part of the MOOE expenditure are items that are needed by the national government and its agencies as well as the local government units in the performance and function of their offices. Is that correct, Mr. Speaker?

REP. ZUBIRI. That is true and correct, Mr. Speaker.

REP. BARBERS. So, for instance, papel, paper, I believe that paper is also being imported by our country. A large chunk of the paper requirement is imported by the Philippine government. But in the past, PICOP, which operated in the district of our distinguished Deputy Speaker Johnny Pimentel, which produces paper, has been closed for the last several decades and has not been producing paper at the moment. So, since there is a big demand for paper, for instance, this is just an example, maybe we can look at all these industries that are sluggish and then try to revive them, Mr. Speaker. Am I correct to say that, Your Honor, distinguished Sponsor?

REP. ZUBIRI. Mr. Speaker, Congressman Ace, I believe it is possible, more than possible especially now during the pandemic. We can even come out with a bill, make it a law, especially for the government to buy local products. I mean, it is our choice. Do we want to survive or do we want to go underneath? But we all have to be united in making sure that these policies are made especially because of the pandemic now and I believe a lot of countries are doing so, Mr. Speaker, Congressman Ace.

REP. BARBERS. Rightly and aptly said, Mr. Speaker. The distinguished Sponsor agrees that there is perhaps a necessity to pass a bill or pass a law to this effect and this Representation, together with the distinguished Sponsor, will be more than willing to look into it and even sponsor it. Is that correct?

REP. ZUBIRI. That is true and correct, Mr. Speaker, Congressman Ace, I am with you definitely.

REP. BARBERS. Another example perhaps, Mr. Speaker, distinguished Sponsor, you will see in our annual national budget that we buy vehicles and this amounts to billions of pesos as well.

Now, I am not saying that the Philippines will start producing vehicles but hopefully soon, just like what Indonesia and Malaysia did, we can assemble vehicles for government

use. Let us say, for instance, the Philippine National Police or the Armed Forces of the Philippines personnel transporters, iyong mga trucks that bring policemen from one place to another, these could be assembled here. But it seems that we are buying from big manufacturers like Isuzu and Mitsubishi. If only an industry that will be well-subsidized and supported by the national government, and the national government compels all its agencies to buy only from these manufacturers, then maybe we can, you know, stimulate activities in this particular industry, Mr. Speaker.

Do you agree with me, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor?

REP. ZUBIRI. I totally agree, Mr. Speaker; and case in point, Congressman Ace. If we cannot, if we do not have the capacity to build our own brand locally, not yet, maybe we can purchase items that are assembled specifically, not branded, for example Toyota or Mitsubishi, for as long as it is a hundred percent assembled in our country, then we will buy that specific unit, that specific brand for our agencies. We can compel them to do that, Mr. Speaker, Congressman Ace.

REP. BARBERS. At least, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, there is a direction that the government will take. If this becomes a law, this will then compel all the national government agencies and local government units to patronize and buy locally produced products, from paper clips to paper to even, perhaps, maybe soon staple wires or even boots that the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the Philippine National Police use, and made in Marikina and all these manufacturing centers. And, only then, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, can we really provide jobs for our countrymen kasi iyon lang po ang ating — our economy is the biggest net importer. We are all dependent on BPOs and OFWs. But soon, maybe if we come up with the right direction, with some aggressive push from the Department to really patronize locally produced products, then maybe that could be the answer to our economic woes.

Am I correct, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor?

REP. ZUBIRI. That is true and correct, Mr. Speaker, Congressman Ace. This will also stimulate the local demand. Actually, may demand. We are 110 million; there is a big market for any and every country that comes in to the Philippines. Why not keep that demand local? Why not or why do we not purchase all local? The DTI is an advocate of buying local. Very, very specific iyong kanilang mga branding. Tumutulong po sila sa mga branding to buy local. In all the malls, in almost all the malls, mayroon po sila, iyong “buy local” na stand and you could see goods from all over the country. And if we can do it in a bigger scale, and I guess we mandate them, our countrymen, to do it in terms of providing the proper laws and policies, then definitely it will work. This is the only way to go, Mr. Speaker, Congressman Ace.

REP. BARBERS. Thank you, Your Honor, Mr. Speaker.

I will not delve anymore on the issue of the MSMEs because this has already been exhaustively discussed by the previous interpellators. It is just that this Representation would just want to see that the Department aggressively push for the “buy Filipino” movement in this case, Mr. Speaker, my distinguished Sponsor. But I guess that would be it. I would just like to state, for the record, Mr. Speaker, that the distinguished Sponsor was convincing enough for this Representation in all his answers to my questions which proves a point, Mr. Speaker, that this Gentleman from Bukidnon is better than Senator Migz Zubiri. That is all, Mr. Speaker, and good afternoon.

REP. ZUBIRI. Marami pong salamat, Mr. Speaker, Congressman Ace, best friend.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Pimentel).
Majority Leader

REP. ZUBIRI. Best friend ngayon.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Pimentel).
Majority Leader.

REP. DELOS SANTOS. Mr. Speaker, I

move to recognize the Hon. Ferdinand Gaité of the BAYAN MUNA Party-List.

Sorry, Mr. Speaker. I move to recognize the Hon. Kaloi Zarate of the BAYAN MUNA Party-List.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Pimentel).
Hon. Carlos Zarate is recognized.

REP. ZARATE. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Maaari po bang magtanong sa ating kagalang-galang na Sponsor para sa budget na ating pinag-uusapan ngayon?

REP. ZUBIRI. Yes, Mr. Speaker, Congressman Kaloi, yes.

REP. ZARATE. Maraming salamat, Ginoong Sponsor.

Mr. Speaker, I fully support the stand of our colleagues who previously interpellated the Sponsor. But, indeed, if you look at the budget of the DTI and several other agencies for that matter, we cannot see that this is a budget that will truly answer the number one problem of the country now, even the world, which is the crisis aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic. And truly disheartening na ang sinasabi ng mga ekonomista, ng mga political observers, the biggest lesson that we learned, and still is trying to cope with it in this pandemic, is the fact na dapat we will place as number one priority our own local economy. And if we speak of local economy, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker, you were saying earlier, and I agree, that the MSME, ito iyong tawag nila, “gulugod,” dito nakasandig nang malaki ang ating ekonomiya dahil the MSMEs employ more than the big corporations in terms of numbers and even their participation in revenue generation, okay. But during this pandemic, ang talagang dumapa at ang iba hindi pa nga nakatatayo hanggang ngayon are the MSMEs. Yet, in our budget, it is not reflected na gusto nating tulungan, na gusto nating buhayin ang ating ekonomiya. So, I fully agree with our colleagues na there is disconnect here in this kind of budget. This is not the budget to recover, to rebound—whatever “R” is that—because it is not reflected in the budget.

So, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker, today, just to drive home the point on the magnitude of this COVID-19 pandemic problem, the last province standing is no longer there. The “Last of the Mohicans,” so-called, is no longer there because Batanes, the only COVID-free province, is now infected with COVID. Mayroon na silang isang kaso today, as confirmed, because of a locally stranded individual na umuwi sa Batanes. So, ibig sabihin, lahat na ng probinsya ngayon ay mayroon nang COVID-19 and that is also being reflected sa daily reportage. So, again, that is the problem. Second, in the news this morning, I saw a construction company, nagbukas sila, tapos itinago ng kompanyang iyan, one week na pala, mayroon nang mga positive, nag-positive, may mga symptoms na ang mga empleyado nila. And when the local government found out, it was too late, nagkaroon na ng malawakang transmisyon doon sa lugar, in Batangas.

Why did I cite these two instances, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker? Malaki ang papel ng DTI dito. Sinasabi ng DTI, and the DTI is a member of the IATF, one of the major parts ng IATF, kailangang buksan na natin ang ekonomiya, nahihirapan na ang mamamayan, hindi na kakayanin ng gobyerno na magbigay nang magbigay ng ayuda. Kailangang buksan na ang ekonomiya. Good, but the downside of this, itinutulak nating buksan ang ekonomiya, hindi natin ihinahanda ang ating mga manggagawa, pinapasok sila. Mayroon bang suporta na nagmumula sa, halimbawa, doon sa usapin ng, sige, buksan ninyo iyong ekonomiya ninyo pero gawing mandatory na mag-test kayo, not rapid test but the standards that we know that are required, ‘no. So, iyon iyong isang nakikita nating problema, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker.

Magbubukas na kayo ng ekonomiya, pero may isang sektor ng ekonomiya na hindi natin itinutulak: bumalik na dapat ang transportasyon, lalong-lalo na dito sa Metro Manila. You know how difficult it is without good transportation, without public transportation, nahihirapan ang ating mga manggagawa. Ang palaging nahihirapan dito ay ang mga mahihirap, ang mga manggagawa. So, this is the disconnect and I hope, Mr.

Sponsor, Mr. Speaker, through the good Sponsor of this budget, it can be relayed to the agencies, ‘no.

Sinasabi natin ito na malaking problema and this was cited by my colleagues. There are a lot of budget allocations dito sa 2021 Budget na hindi kailangan. May giyera pero ang giyera natin dito ay itong pandemya ng COVID. Pero mayroong P19 billion na nandoon sa isang task force na not even a line agency but a task force, the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict, P19 billion. They can distribute a maximum of P20 million per barangay for what? Kung ano’ng gusto – tubig, ano raw, palibing at kung ano-anong mga proyekto. It is pork barrel, pure and simple, na ipinamimigay ng task force na ito. Why not realign this? Kanina, Deputy Speaker Loren Legarda lamented why a budget of P1 billion before is now cut to half, to P500 million, so P1 billion pre-COVID, but now, post-COVID, we will only allocate P500 million. So talagang grave disconnect, at hindi maiintindihan ng mamamayan iyan. So I hope, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker, this is more of a manifestation, but if the good Sponsor will reply before I will go to my next question, then it will be highly appreciated.

REP. ZUBIRI. Marami pong salamat, Mr. Speaker, Cong. Kaloi. Yes, actually, this is true, ‘no, that is why nandito po kami trying to get a bigger budget for them, if we can restore that P1 billion back kasi P500 million na lang ‘ata iyong nabigay sa kanila, eh. Kung puwede po i-restore natin iyong P500 million, gawin ulit na P1 billion, eh mas maganda po iyan, ‘no? That is why I think we are one in making sure that the Department of Trade will be given a bigger budget. This is not, as what was said earlier, my personal opinion or based on my observation and my research. These are not political statements, ‘no. These are true-to-form because I go and visit my areas. I Zoom with the DTI, whether it is on a week-to-week or on a month-to-month basis. We know in the Trade Committee what is needed and what has to be done. And definitely, marami pong mga micro, small, and medium enterprises na kailangan po ng tulong, kailangan po ng pera para umikot uli iyong kanilang mga

maliliit na kompanya o mga establishments po, 'no. That is why I agree with you, Cong. Kaloi and Mr. Speaker, that we really need to pump-prime the MSMEs. We need to give them the necessary support for them to be able to survive this pandemic, Mr. Speaker, Cong. Kaloi.

REP. ZARATE. Thank you, good Sponsor, Mr. Speaker.

At sana po ay maging agresibo rin ang Kagawaran ng Trade and Industry na itulak iyong matagal nang panawagan ng ating mga mamamayan na magkaroon talaga ng free mass testing. I think it is very – it is a condition *sine qua non*, if I may say so, if we really want to aggressively combat this COVID-19 pandemic. Mahirap pong iasa na lang natin, “Ah, antayin na lang natin ang bakuna, ang vaccine.” In fact, that is one issue. For next year, we only allocated P2 billion for that vaccine. So, what will happen to millions of Filipinos na hindi mababakunahan? Pasensiya na lang muna kayo, 'no. So, sana po maging agresibo rin dito. Buksan ang ekonomiya, yes, but we have to also tell the government and tell the private sector, protect your employees. Kung mayroong duda na mayroong transmission diyan, i-mass testing sila.

And again, ibabalik ko iyong sa usapin ng transportation. DTI, you should also – hindi lang ito usapin ng DOTr. If you want the economy to move, provide public transport and the only way to do that is to allow our public transport to go back to the streets while, of course, observing proper protocols. Huwag naman iyong mga imposibleng protocols na ibinibigay ng IATF before na hindi naman talaga kailangan. So having said that, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker, I will end my interpellation. I thank the good Sponsor for allowing me to make this manifestation and ask a few questions.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

REP. ZUBIRI. Mr. Speaker, Cong. Kaloi, yes, I have spoken briefly with the Secretary behind me and definitely, they will discuss and somewhat pressure the transportation agencies to – if we are going to open up the economy, what is the use of opening up

the economy without any transportation? It defeats the purpose. There should be a synergy between the departments and the agencies, and they are working on it, Mr. Speaker, Cong. Kaloi.

REP. ZARATE. Thank you.

Now, Mr. Speaker, considering that no other member of the Minority wishes to interpellate on the budget of the DTI and its attached agencies, I move to terminate the period of interpellation and the deliberations on the budget of the DTI and its attached agencies, Mr. Speaker. (*Applause*)

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Pimentel). Majority Leader.

REP. HERRERA-DY. Mr. Speaker, on the part of the Majority, we join the Minority in their motion to terminate the period of interpellation and debate on the proposed budget of the Department of Trade and Industry, including its attached agencies and corporations.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Pimentel). Is there any objection? (*Silence*) The Chair hears none; the motion is approved. (*Applause*)

PRESIDENTIAL COMMUNICATIONS OPERATIONS OFFICE

REP. HERRERA-DY. Mr. Speaker, I move that we consider the budget – the proposed budget of the Presidential Communications Operations Office or PCOO.

We have with us – may we acknowledge the presence of Secretary Jose Ruperto Martin Andanar, who is joining us in Zoom. We have here in the plenary the following: Undersecretary George Apacible, Undersecretary Marvin Gatpayat, Undersecretary Lorraine Marie Badoy, Assistant Secretary Michel Kristian Ablan, Assistant Secretary Omar Alexander Romero, Director Eugene Earle Jr.; from the Bureau of Communications Services, Director Ma. Florinda Princess Duque; from APO, Chairperson Michael Dalumpines; and from IBC, OIC Corazon Reboroso, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Pimentel). We would like to welcome the PCOO family, headed by Secretary Martin Andanar. Welcome to the House of Representatives.

Majority Leader.

REP. BONDOC. Mr. Speaker, we are in receipt of a letter from the Secretary of the Presidential Communications Operations Office. The letter is addressed to our esteemed Chair of the Committee on Appropriations, the Hon. Eric Yap, and is dated September 29, 2020. The letter reads:

Dear Representative Yap:

I am writing to humbly request that I be allowed to join, via Zoom instead, the plenary hearing of the Presidential Communications Operations Office's FY 2021 Budget which is scheduled today.

It is unfortunate that I have been running a fever since this morning and health protocol dictates that I self-isolate. I sincerely apologize for the inconvenience this may have caused.

It is signed by Jose Ruperto Martin M. Andanar, Secretary, Presidential Communications Operations Office, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Pimentel). Noted.

Majority Leader.

REP. HERRERA-DY. Mr. Speaker, I move that we recognize Rep. Joet Garcia, Vice Chairperson of the Committee on Appropriations, to answer questions on the proposed budget of the PCOO, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Pimentel). Rep. Joet Garcia is recognized.

REP. GARCIA (J.). Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker, I have the honor ...

SUSPENSION OF SESSION

REP. HERRERA-DY. Mr. Speaker, I move

that we suspend so that we could allow all the guests to sit on their proper places in plenary.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Pimentel). The session is suspended.

It was 2:51 p.m.

RESUMPTION OF SESSION

At 3:01 p.m., the session was resumed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Pimentel). The session is resumed.

REP. HERRERA-DY. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move that we recognize Rep. Joet Garcia from the Second District of Bataan, the Vice Chairperson for the Committee on Appropriations, to answer the questions on the proposed budget of the PCOO, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Pimentel). Hon. Joet Garcia is recognized.

SPONSORSHIP SPEECH OF REP. GARCIA (J.)

REP. GARCIA (J.). Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker.

I have the honor of sponsoring the budget of the Presidential Communications and Operations Office and its attached agencies.

The PCOO has a total of P1,587,825,000 in appropriations for Fiscal Year 2021. And aside from the PCOO proper, we have the Bureau of Broadcast Services, the Bureau of Communications Services, the National Printing Office, the News and Information Bureau, the Philippine Information Agency, and the Presidential Broadcast Staff or RTVM. The PCOO is mandated to serve as the platform of the Executive branch in engaging and involving the citizenry and mass media in order to enrich the quality of public discourse on all matters of governance and build a national consensus thereon.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am now ready to answer questions from our honorable colleagues.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Pimentel). Majority Leader.

REP. HERRERA-DY. Yes, Mr. Speaker, I move that we recognize Minority Leader Benny Abante from the Sixth District of Manila.

SUSPENSION OF SESSION

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Pimentel). Minority Leader Benny Abante is recognized.

The session is suspended.

It was 3:03 p.m.

RESUMPTION OF SESSION

At 3:06 p.m., the session was resumed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Pimentel). The session is resumed.

REP. HERRERA-DY. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move that we recognize Minority Leader Benny Abante for his questions.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Pimentel). Representative Abante is recognized, our Minority Leader.

REP. ABANTE. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I believe that the good Secretary of PCOO is with us through Zoom. A letter was read by the Majority Leader on the physical absence of the good Secretary. But I also would like to appreciate that the Undersecretaries are also with us today, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, Mr. Sponsor.

I would like to begin by asking the good Secretary, because the PCOO was created by virtue of an Executive order of then President Benigno S. Aquino III, Executive Order No. 4, and it has not been changed, Mr. Speaker. I just would like the good Secretary to tell us what

is the mandate of the PCOO, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Chairman, Mr. Sponsor.

REP. GARCIA (J.). Mr. Speaker, the PCOO is the communications arm of the Executive branch. So, it is the premier arm in engaging and involving the citizenry and the mass media in order to enrich the quality of public discourse on all matters of governance and build a national consensus thereon.

REP. ABANTE. Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, Mr. Sponsor, according to Executive Order No. 4, "x x x the task of informing and communicating to the Filipino people the policies, programs, official activities, and achievements of the Office of the President and the Executive Branch presently involves, aside from the Office of the Press Secretary, several offices and agencies, the functions of some of which overlap; x x x" It says right here, in one of the "whereases," Mr. Speaker, there is a vital need to reorganize and effect functional changes within the Office of the Press Secretary and create an office to systematize, rationalize and complement the existing structure to achieve a more efficient and systematic interaction between the people, the Office of the President, and the Executive branch. It also says that one of the mandates of the PCOO is to tell the Filipino people the official activities, the programs, the achievements of the Office of the President, and the Executive branch.

Recently, Mr. Speaker, Undersecretary Lorraine Marie Badoy spoke against some of the Members of this Chamber, particularly the Makabayan bloc that belongs to the Minority bloc. May I ask, Mr. Speaker, all of the things that Undersecretary Badoy said, like this statement:

Ang mga Representante ng Makabayan bloc na sina Arlene D. Brosas ng GABRIELA; France L. Castro ng ACT TEACHERS; Sarah Elago ng KABATAAN; at Eufemia Cullamat, Ferdinand Gaité at Carlos Isagani Zarate ng BAYAN MUNA Party-List ay mga matataas na ranggong

kasapi ng Communist Party of the Philippines-New People's Army, National Democratic Front, na ang layunin ay pahinain at wasakin ang ating gobyerno upang pabagsakin ang demokrasya at tuluyang itatag ang komunismo. Ang mga ito ay walang kahihyan at walang tigil sa paggamit ng kakayahan ng gobyerno upang sirain at pahinain ang gobyerno mismo. Inaalisan nila ng sigla at kinang ang isang bansang ang mga mamamayan ay may isipan, progresibo at may mabubuting kalooban.

Ito, mayroon siyang ibinigay na hamon at inilagay po niya na siya ay Undersecretary Lorraine Marie T. Badoy, NTF-ELCAC Spokesperson. Matanong ko lang po, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor, iyon po bang mga statements ni Usec. Badoy ay ayon sa mandato ng PCOO?

REP. GARCIA (J.). Mr. Speaker, ayon po kay Secretary Martin ng PCOO, ang mga binitawan pong salita ni Usec. Badoy ay sa kaniya pong sariling mga komento, sa kaniya pong sariling mga opinyon ukol po sa mga ilang Miyembro ng atin pong Mababang Kapulungan. Hindi po ito opinyon ng PCOO at gusto pong idiin ni Secretary Martin na ang PCOO ay isa pong platform kung saan ito po ay maaaring gamitin ng iba't ibang ahensiya ng pamahalaan para sa kanila pong information dissemination, Mr. Speaker.

REP. ABANTE. So, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor, ayon sa inyong salita, na itinatanggi ng PCOO na ito mismo ang official statement ng PCOO, itong mga sinabi ni Undersecretary Badoy, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Chairman.

REP. GARCIA (J.). Kung tama po iyong aking nadinig, Mr. Speaker, hindi po mga statement— itong mga statement ni Usec. Badoy ay hindi po galing sa opisina ng PCOO.

REP. ABANTE. Okay. So, I would accept, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Chairman, na inamin po ng PCOO that this is not an official statement of

the PCOO. What Undersecretary Badoy spoke of are her own personal opinions. Subalit, Mr. Speaker, bakit po niya inilagay— na alam ninyo, kung siya po ay private person speaking ay wala pong problema sa akin iyan, opo. Katulad po iyan, halimbawa, sa aking distrito, kapag nagsalita ang sinumang constituent ko laban sa akin, tatanggapin ko, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor. Bakit po? Because he is saying this in his private capacity. Pero dito po, nakalagay po dito, pagkatapos niyang sabihin, nakalagay po sa kaniyang statement, ginamit niya ang kaniyang posisyon bilang Undersecretary at inilagay niya na siya po'y NTF-ELCAC Spokesperson. Ibig sabihin, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, na itong kaniyang statement ay ginagawa niyang official statement ng NTF-ELCAC. Matanong ko nga po, ano po ba ang ibig sabihin ng NTF-ELCAC, Mr. Speaker?

REP. GARCIA (J.). NTF-ELCAC, Mr. Speaker, National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict.

REP. ABANTE. National Task Force to End...

REP. GARCIA (J.). ... to End Local Communist Armed Conflict.

REP. ABANTE. Pero nabanggit po ninyo, Mr. Speaker, this is not the official statement and the official message of the PCOO and, therefore, Usec. Badoy should not be using her position in the PCOO in a statement like this, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Chair.

REP. GARCIA (J.). Mr. Speaker, katulad po noong aking nabanggit kanina, hindi nga po ito posisyon ng PCOO. Tama po ang ating Minority Leader, Mr. Speaker, na nakalagay po doon sa post ni Usec. Badoy na "NTF-ELCAC" sapagkat dito ho sa Executive Order No. 70, siya po ay itinalaga bilang representative or spokesperson ng NTF-ELCAC. Kaya iyong kaniya pong post at iyong kaniya pong mga binanggit doon ho sa kaniyang post, iyon po ay hindi sa PCOO kundi po iyon po ay posisyon ng NTF-ELCAC.

REP. ABANTE. So, iyan po iyong posisyon, Mr. Speaker, ng NTF-ELCAC.

REP. GARCIA (J.). Tama po iyon, Mr. Speaker.

REP. ABANTE. Ito po bang NTF-ELCAC, Mr. Speaker, ay nasa ilalim ng PCOO?

REP. GARCIA (J.). Ang NTF-ELCAC ay hindi po nasa ilalim ng PCOO.

REP. ABANTE. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, hindi niya dapat gamitin ang posisyong Undersecretary because she is an Undersecretary of the PCOO, Mr. Speaker.

REP. GARCIA (J.). Inilagay niya po iyong NTF-ELCAC doon ho sa kaniyang post kasi siya po, si Usec. Badoy, ay siya po iyong spokesperson at saka siya po iyong Head Convenor of Strategic Communications ng NTF-ELCAC, Mr. Speaker.

REP. ABANTE. Yes, Mr. Speaker, that is given already, pero sa akin po, ito po ay hindi official statement ng PCOO kundi ng NTF-ELCAC. Ibig sabihin po niyan, hindi niya puwedeng gamitin ang opisina ng PCOO bilang Undersecretary sa mga statements pong ganito, Mr. Chairman, Mr. Speaker. Now, gusto ko pong ituloy ano po, I would like to say and declare publicly that I am not a communist, Mr. Speaker. I am against all kinds of armed conflict, whether they be communists, rightists, Muslim terrorists, whatever it may be, basta't armed conflict. Any armed uprising to topple a duly-constituted government, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Chairman—I am against it, I am against it.

I do not have any personal quarrel with Usec. Badoy but may I state for the record, Mr. Speaker, that being the Minority Leader of the Eighteenth Congress, it is my duty to correct some misimpressions and to be able to speak for and on behalf of the members of the Minority. So, I am going to end my questioning to be able to make a manifestation, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Chairman, and speak about the manifesto of the Minority bloc, signed by all of the Minority members, Mr. Speaker,

Your Honor. May I now read it:

The House Minority stands united in the pursuit of peace and justice in our country. We uphold the Filipino core values and the exercise of basic human rights and liberties enshrined in our Constitution.

The House of Representatives is composed of elected public servants mandated to legislate laws and reforms that benefit the welfare of the citizenry and the whole country.

Congress is currently deliberating the proposed 2021 national budget and, as Members coming from the Minority, we do our utmost to effectively and constructively scrutinize the same, even to the last centavo, when possible, if only to make it responsive to the primordial needs of our people and country, especially in this crisis aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, these past days, the proposed budget briefing of the Presidential Communications Operations Office became a cause of great concern for the House Minority. The PCOO has made use of its resources...

Now, considering, Mr. Chair, Mr. Speaker, that the statements of Usec. Badoy are not the official statements of the PCOO still, being part of the PCOO, damay po ang buong PCOO dito. Ang sakit po ng kalingkingan ay sakit ng buong katawan, to speak of it, Mr. Speaker. So, gusto kong gamitin dito ang PCOO ngayon.

To continue:

The PCOO has made use of its resources through Usec. Badoy to peddle fake news, disinformation, and attacks on critics and the opposition, in an attempt to curtail dissent. In particular, [she] has issued numerous statements in various media platforms falsely tagging as terrorists the members of the Makabayan bloc who are members of the House Minority.

At the forefront of these attacks is PCOO Usec. Lorraine Badoy. Her

actions as an appointed government official do not uphold the basic Filipino core values and deliberately disrespect elected public officials who were mandated to serve their constituencies. These relentless attacks of Usec. Badoy through her social media platforms, which even incited her followers to issue threats or harm against sitting Members of the House, are not acceptable to the Minority, and we will not take them in stride or sitting down.

[And, therefore,] we demand the following:

1. that the PCOO and all its officials and personnel take down all its social and other media posts that disrespect and slander the House Members belonging to the Makabayan bloc;

2. that the PCOO issue a public apology for this grave misconduct against them;

3. and finally, the removal of Usec. Badoy from her post as she does not embody the proper conduct of a civil servant. Usec. Badoy's malicious terrorist tagging of the Makabayan bloc Representatives are putting in jeopardy not only the security, but more importantly, the lives of sitting Members of the House.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor, kung puwede pong gawin ito ng isang appointed official ng gobyerno sa Makabayan bloc, puwede rin pong gawin ito sa kahit na sinong Member ng House of the People.

To continue:

As we consider the budget of the PCOO, it should commit to take necessary and immediate measures to hold itself accountable. It should make sure that the PCOO platform will not be used to propagate misinformation and incite hate and violence against critics and even perceived critics of the administration. The PCOO should take down all social media posts that attack groups and individuals for criticizing government policies.

The 2021 proposed national budget should revolve around the pertinent issues of health, education, social services, and economic recovery. We are still under the public health and economic crisis brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. Government agencies and their officials are expected to serve the Filipino people and prioritize their welfare at all times.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor, if indeed, in a very honest way, there is truth to the statement of Usec. Badoy, I would like to request her not to use the court of public opinion and make it a trial by publicity. If indeed what she said is true and she has documents to speak of the Makabayan bloc being a terrorist group and have terrorist Congressmen and those who believe in armed violence, then I would like to challenge Usec. Badoy to go to court against them. That is my challenge, Mr. Speaker. If I would not hear Usec. Badoy apologize to this Body, I would move for deferment of the budget of the PCOO.

REP. GARCIA (J.). Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned earlier, katulad po ng aking nabanggit kanina, iyong mga binitawan pong salita o mga posts ni Usec. Badoy, kung makikita din po nating lahat, iyon po ay mga komento sa mga posts ng NTF-ELCAC. Kaya po ito po ay opisyal na posisyon ng NTF-ELCAC, ito ay supposed to be vetted and confirmed by NTF-ELCAC. Kaya po ayon na rin po kay Usec. Badoy, hindi po nila kasama ang NTF-ELCAC, hindi po nila puwedeng basta tanggalin ito pong mga naka-post sa social media, Mr. Speaker.

REP. ABANTE. Well, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor, inyo pong sinabi na ito po ay hindi official statement ng PCOO; therefore, ito po ay mga personal and private statements of Usec. Badoy. Pinag-uusapan po natin dito ang budget ng PCOO. Mr. Speaker, sa akin pong pananaw, nais ko lang pong banggitin na dapat lamang pong igalang ng sinumang official ng gobyerno ang Tahanan ng Taong-bayan. This is the House of the People and anyone can be open to any kind of malicious statements like that.

So, Mr. Speaker, kung tayo po ay magmamatigas po dito, ang request ko lamang po, Mr. Speaker, ay sabihin niya na ito ay kaniyang personal statements. Tanggalin niya iyong mga statements niya sa social media platform. Mag-apologize siya sa Body, opo, at pagkatapos po, kung talagang totoo na ito pong Makabayan bloc na ito mga terorista, idemanda niya sa proper court, hindi po dito, not in the court of public opinion but in the judicial courts themselves, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor.

REP. GARCIA (J.). Mr. Speaker, naiintindihan ko po iyong manifesto na binasa ng ating Minority Leader, lalo na bilang kapwa Miyembro ng Mababang Kapulungan, ngunit katulad po ng binanggit ko po kanina, ito nga pong mga posts ay bukod sa personal na opinyon na inilagay o isinulat ni Usec. Badoy; ito po ay official position ng NTF-ELCAC na kung saan siya po ay representative at saka spokesperson. Mr. Speaker, kanina po nabanggit ng ating Minority Leader na siguro lahat po tayo, kasama po ang ating Minority Leader, ay ayaw ng armed conflict. Ayaw po natin ng kaguluhan sa ating bansa. Ayaw po natin ng mga movement o mga aksyon para ipatumba ang ating pamahalaan at iyon lang din naman po ang objective ni Usec. Badoy kaya po ayon na rin po sa inyong manifesto, willing po siyang i-take down, willing po siya humingi ng paumanhin basta po ang atin pong mga kasamahan dito ho sa Mababang Kapulungan ay lahat magsa-sign din o kaya po ipapaalam din sa lahat na sila ay laban sa kahit anong armed conflict para patumbahin ang ating pamahalaan.

REP. ABANTE. Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor, maraming, maraming salamat po. Alam ninyo po, hindi ko po ipinagtatanggol dito ang NPA. Hindi ko rin ipinagtatanggol dito ang NDF, Mr. Speaker. Tulad po ng nasabi ko sa inyo, ako po ay laban sa lahat ng mga armed conflict. Ayaw po natin ng armed conflict. Nais po natin sa ating bansa ay kapayapaan, Mr. Speaker. Ayaw po natin nito. Nagkakaroon po ng ganitong mga problema sa ating bayan sapagkat mayroong oppression at mayroong poverty. Pero palagay ko po sa

ilalim ng administrasyon ng ating Pangulo, ito po'y puwedeng i-address. Ito pong oppression na ito, ito pong poverty na ito, ito pong korapsyon na ito, ating nakita ang statement ng ating Pangulo, Mr. Speaker, na handa siyang mag-resign dahilan po naiinis na po siya sa korapsyon.

All of these can be addressed if only – kung tayo po ay laban sa mga nag-i-incite ng rebellion, eh dapat laban din po tayo sa nag-i-incite ng mga flaming statements na siyang magbibigay sa ibang mga tagasunod ng dahilan na magkaroon ng violence, Mr. Speaker. Pero ako po ay nagpapasalamat sa pahayag ni Usec. Badoy at sana po ay marinig po sa kaniya, sa pamamagitan po ng Sponsor natin, na kaniya pong tatanggalin ang kaniyang mga sinabi sa social platform, at siya po ay mag-a-apologize, Mr. Speaker. At kung talagang totoo na ito pong Makabayan bloc na kasama natin ngayon dito sa House of Representatives ay mga terorista, then let her go to court, let the NTF-ELCAC go to court against them, but not in the court of public opinion.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask for a two-minute suspension of the session.

SUSPENSION OF SESSION

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Pimentel).
The session is suspended.

It was 3:34 p.m.

RESUMPTION OF SESSION

At 3:39 p.m., the session was resumed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Pimentel).
The session is resumed.

REP. BONDOC. Mr. Speaker, our parliamentary status is that we are discussing the proposed budget of the Presidential Communications Operations Office. Once again, I move to recognize our esteemed Minority Leader, the Hon. Benny Abante.

I so move, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Pimentel).

Honorable Minority Leader Benny Abante, you are recognized.

REP. ABANTE. Mr. Speaker, I would like to reiterate that I do not have any personal quarrel with Usec. Badoy but I also felt insulted, Mr. Speaker, when some Members of this Chamber were tagged as terrorists, Mr. Speaker. You can look at Cong. Sarah Elago. Tingnan po ninyo iyong kaniyang mukha. Siya ba ay terorista? Mukha bang terorista, Mr. Speaker? Puwede ba siyang maging terorista, Mr. Speaker? And I think that apologies, Mr. Speaker, should not have any conditions. Ibig sabihin, kung talagang mag-a-apologize po si Usec. Badoy, tinatangal po niya iyong mga conditions, Mr. Speaker, at magkakaroon po tayo ngayon ng agreement na, you know, you can – there are a thousand ways to skin a cat, Mr. Speaker. Hindi ba, Mr. Sponsor, there are a thousand ways to skin a cat. Pero hindi po ganoon, hindi po violent, hindi po iyong nangyayaring ganito, Mr. Speaker, using the social platform for that.

Mr. Speaker, with even regret, I move for the deferment of the budget of the PCOO, Mr. Speaker.

I so move, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Pimentel).
Majority Leader.

REP. BONDOC. Mr. Speaker, there is a motion to suspend the deliberations on the budget of the Presidential Communications Operations Office from our Minority Leader, effectively deferring discussion on this agency.

We support the motion of the Minority Leader to defer the discussion on the budget of the Presidential Communications Operations Office. The motion is to suspend the discussion on the proposed budget of the Presidential Communications Operations Office.

I so move, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Pimentel).
Is there any objection? (*Silence*) The Chair hears none; the motion is approved.

Majority Leader.

REP. BONDOC. Mr. Speaker, next is the

budget of the Civil Service Commission, but based on the objection of the honorable Deputy Speaker Rodante “Dante” Marcoleta, the discussion on the budget of the Civil Service Commission is likewise deferred, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Pimentel).
Any objection? (*Silence*) There being none, the motion is approved.

SUSPENSION OF SESSION

REP. BONDOC. Mr. Speaker, I move for a few minutes suspension.

I so move, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Pimentel).
The session is suspended.

It was 3:42 p.m.

RESUMPTION OF SESSION

At 3:46 p.m., the session was resumed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Pimentel).
The session is resumed.

Majority Leader.

GAMES AND AMUSEMENTS BOARD

REP. BOLILIA. Mr. Speaker, I move to begin the consideration of the proposed budget of the Games and Amusements Board.

I so move, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Pimentel).
Is there any objection? (*Silence*) The Chair hears none; the motion is approved.

REP. BOLILIA. Mr. Speaker, I move that we recognize the Vice Chairperson of the Committee on Appropriations, Rep. Luis Campos of Makati, for his sponsorship.

I so move, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Pimentel).
Hon. Luis Campos is recognized.

REP. CAMPOS. Thank you, Mr. Speaker,

Your Honor. This Representation is ready to be interpellated on the budget of the Games and Amusements Board for Fiscal Year 2021.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Pimentel). Majority Leader.

REP. BOLILIA. Mr. Speaker, before we recognize the first interpellator, may we acknowledge the presence of our guests here from the Games and Amusements Board. We have Chairman Abraham Khalil Mitra, we have the Supervising Admin/Planning Officer Rommel U. Gutierrez, and Admin Officer IV Josephine Alfonso.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Pimentel). We would like to welcome the family of the Games and Amusements Board, welcome to the House of Representatives.

Majority Leader.

REP. BOLILIA. Mr. Speaker, I move that we recognize Hon. Carlos Zarate of the BAYAN MUNA Party-List for his interpellation.

I so move, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Pimentel). Hon. Carlos Zarate is recognized.

REP. ZARATE. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the good Sponsor – will the good Sponsor entertain some clarificatory questions on the budget of GAB?

REP. CAMPOS. Yes, certainly, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor.

REP. ZARATE. Maraming salamat po at magandang hapon. Iilang katanungan lang po sa GAB – ang mandato ng GAB ay isa siyang regulatory body para sa professional sports. Tama po ba iyon?

REP. CAMPOS. Tama po, Mr. Speaker.

REP. ZARATE. Well, dahil nga dito sa nangyaring pandemya ng COVID, isa ito sa sektor na matinding tinamaan. Hindi lang masyado sigurong napag-uusapan, pero napakaraming apektado rin. So, ang

unang katanungan ko, Ginoong Sponsor, Mr. Speaker, ano po ang naging intervention ng GAB, lalong-lalo na doon sa ating mga apektadong mga manggagawa, mga atleta, at iba pang stakeholders sa usapin ng games and amusements, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker?

REP. CAMPOS. Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, ang GAB po ay nakipag-ugnayan sa DSWD na nagbigay naman po ng tulong para sa atin pong mga boksingero. Pero iyon nga lang po, mga boksingero lang po ang ating natulungan through the DSWD. Ang mga atleta po – ang GAB po ay walang pondong nakalaan na pang-alalay o pang-ayuda sa mga atleta kung kaya kinakailangan po na tayo ay makipag-ugnayan at humingi ng tulong mula sa mga ahensiya tulad ng DSWD po, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor.

REP. ZARATE. Salamat po, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker. Nabanggit ko po iyan dahil, even as we speak now, ay wala pa ring kasiguruhan kung itong mga industriyang ito ay makakabalik na rin. At siyempre, halimbawa sa usapin ng horse racing, wala naman sigurong problema iyong mga may-ari ng mga kabayo at may-ari ng horse racing clubs, but iyong mga ordinaryong manggagawa dito ay certainly affected. Ganoon din sa ibang professional sports, 'no. So, iyan po ang gusto nating malaman. Totoo, maliit ang budget ng GAB, but how – even doon sa convergence, pinaghahandaan ba ito ng Kagawaran, 'no, ng ahensiya, ng Board considering na we are not yet certain hanggang kailan pa itong problema natin sa pandemya ng COVID, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker?

REP. CAMPOS. Kung tama po ang pagkakaunawa ko, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, sa ating the Honorable Zarate, ang GAB po ay nag-aadministra doon po sa betting o sa off-track betting aspect ng racing. Ang pangangarera po itself is under Philracom, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor.

REP. ZARATE. Yes. But just the same, may mga – iyong mga stakeholders sa usapin na iyan ay kasama na rin iyong GAB.

Isa sa mandato ng GAB kaya ito itinayo

ay para nga doon sa usapin ng ilegal na pagsusugal. So, nitong mga nakaraan po, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker, ay naging malaganap pa rin iyong usapin na iyan. In fact, isa sa pinakamalaking problema natin ngayon ay iyan ngang ilegal na pagsusugal. So, puwede po bang magbigay lang ng update ang kagalang-galang na Sponsor, Mr. Speaker, kung ano po ang ginagawa ng GAB patungkol dito. Previously, the GAB, you know, submitted to this Congress a legislative proposal to strengthen its powers to really run after these illegal, for example, illegal bookies and others who are involved in illegal gambling. So, may we be apprised as to that push by GAB at this point, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker.

REP. CAMPOS. Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, it is the position of GAB to strengthen its policing and monitoring capabilities.

Sa kasalukuyan po, nakikipag-ugnayan ang GAB sa NBI at saka sa kapulisan, gayundin sa PNP, dahil wala pong – well, actually, wala pong naka-assign na permanent PNP or NBI personnel under GAB kung kaya naman po limitado rin ang accomplishments ng ating ahensiya pagdating sa anti-illegal gambling operations. Sa katunayan ho, ang Anti-Illegal Gambling Unit ay isang permanent section sa loob ng Games and Amusements Board. Kailangan lang po nating bigyan ng ngipin itong section na ito para maisagawa po ang anti-illegal gambling operations on a regular basis and with regular accomplishments, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor.

REP. ZARATE. Thank you, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker.

So, along that end, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker, for next year, ano ang staffing complement na tinitingnan ng GAB to comply or to fulfill its mandate, especially as earlier mentioned by the good Sponsor, Mr. Speaker?

At this juncture, Deputy Speaker Pimentel relinquished the Chair to Deputy Speaker Deogracias Victor "DV" B. Savellano.

REP. CAMPOS. Ang staffing complement po ng GAB for Fiscal Year 2021 will be

the same as 2020. Pagdating po sa Anti-Illegal Gambling Unit ng GAB, wala po tayong nakahanda na additional manpower complement kung kaya siguro kailangan nating gawan ng proposal ito dahil there seems to be a conflict with the PNP dahil according to the PNP, the anti-illegal gambling operations fall within their mandate. That is all, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor.

REP. ZARATE. Thank you, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker.

At bilang panghuli na lang po, curious lang ako rito, maitanong ko lang, sa part ba ng regulation ng GAB, kasi doon sa professional sports, 'no, part ng kanilang mandato ang boxing; ang basketball, kasama ba diyan sa mandato ng GAB?

REP. CAMPOS. Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, kasama po ang basketball pagka propesyonal po.

REP. ZARATE. Yes.

REP. CAMPOS. At nag-resume na po ang practice and on October 11, magre-resume na 'ata ang palaro natin.

REP. ZARATE. Yes, that is actually my question, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker. Dahil nga dito sa pandemya ng COVID, itinatanong ngayon ng marami na nasa sports world community, kailan kaya babalik, halimbawa, iyong professional boxing, na makakakita na naman tayo ng boxing? Kailan kaya babalik iyong PBA, iyong MPBA? And, of course, we know that – sa mga sumusunod – dito sa laro ng basketball sa Amerika ay bumalik na nga ito, iyong mga tinatawag nilang bubble. And locally, I think by October, PBA will also engage, launch this kind of new setup, the bubble setup. So, ang tanong ko lang diyan, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker, proactive ba ang GAB along this line and in setting up guidelines to ensure, just to ensure the safety of the athletes and even those personnel who will be working in this new setup called the PBA bubble? Because probably for a long period, ito iyong magiging setup nito, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker?

REP. CAMPOS. Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, in reply to the Honorable Zarate's query, proactive po definitely ang GAB pagdating dito sa mga bagay na ito. Katunayan po 'pag nag-submit po ng protocols o ng mga guidelines ang mga liga at ang mga sports associations, they are immediately reviewed and then are immediately remanded to the associations or the leagues with the appropriate corrections, if ever, para maituloy po kaagad. Lalong-lalo na po ngayon sa kapanahunang ito, ang mga atleta po marami, no-play, no-pay. Kung kaya naman po ayaw nating maging pabigat sila sa lipunan, ang GAB, for itself and by itself, is doing all that it can to be able to resume iyong regular po, if possible, na mga palaro. Ang boksing po ngayon ay puwede na, pero dahil po sa cost implications ng promotion, which includes testing et cetera, hindi pa po ito nagre-resume, pero puwede na po. Iyon lang po, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor.

REP. ZARATE. Well, thank you, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker. Ano lang, short follow-up. So, are there already guidelines issued by GAB on this resumption of, for example, league, for the season of the PBA thru that bubble? All-Filipino season nila beginning this October. Are there already guidelines na inilabas ng GAB on this score, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker?

REP. CAMPOS. Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, mayroon po in coordination, of course, with the IATF which has to give its concurrence.

REP. ZARATE. Thank you, Mr. Sponsor. And finally, cockfighting, you know, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker – sa Davao, isa ito sa naging cause ng transmission noong COVID-19, and even in other areas. So again, may guidelines ba on this score, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker?

REP. CAMPOS. Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, I would like to request the Honorable Zarate to kindly repeat.

REP. ZARATE. Well, doon ho sa usapin ng sabong o cockfighting, dahil noong nakaraan po, especially during the first months of the lockdown, isa sa naging cause ng local

transmission sa Davao ay iyong sabungan. So,, is there a plan now, at least as far as GAB is concerned, na buksan na iyong mga sabungan sa buong bansa, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker, just like in-allow na natin iyong basketball, in-allow na natin iyong ibang professional sports, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker?

REP. CAMPOS. Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, cockfighting falls under the purview of the local government unit. Iyon pong mga international cockfight derbies lang po ang sakop ng GAB pero sa kasalukuyan po, wala pong ganoon. So, mabalik po tayo doon sa cockfighting at the local level, it has to be with the concurrence of the IATF. Only the IATF can give the go signal for it to resume.

REP. ZARATE. Thank you, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker. Iyon lang po ang ilang mga paglililaw ko na mga katanungan.

Considering, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker, that no other member of the Minority wishes to interpellate on the budget of the Games and Amusements Board, I move to end, terminate the deliberation on the budget of the Games and ...

I withdraw that manifestation Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Savellano). Majority Leader.

REP. BOLILIA. Mr. Speaker, I move to recognize the Hon. Ace Barbers from the Second District of Surigao del Norte for his interpellation.

REP. BARBERS. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Savellano). The Hon. Ace Barbers is recognized.

REP. BARBERS. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Majority Leader. May I know if the distinguished Gentleman from Makati is willing to accede to clarificatory questions?

REP. CAMPOS. Certainly, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor.

REP. BARBERS. Okay. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

While I was listening to the interpellations of Congressman Zarate, I was waiting for the information with respect to cockfighting at mukhang iyon ang kaniyang huling katanungan. Because all the while, he was asking questions tungkol sa basketball and all others, and boxing, and all those games, professional games that are being regulated by GAB for that matter. So, ang tanong ko lang, may I know Mr. Speaker, distinguished Sponsor, magkano ho ang budget ng GAB for 2021?

REP. CAMPOS. Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, in answer to the Honorable Barbers' question, we have a total NEP provision of P140,000,598.

REP. BARBERS. And ...

REP. CAMPOS. Ah, P598,000.

REP. BARBERS. P140 million?

REP. CAMPOS. P 140 million.

REP. BARBERS. And in this P140 million, how much is the budget for Personnel Services?

REP. CAMPOS. Personnel Services is P83 million, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor.

REP. BARBERS. So, that is around 70 percent. Am I correct, Mr. Speaker, distinguished Sponsor, 70 percent of the budget is for PS?

REP. CAMPOS. Approximately, Mr. Speaker.

REP. BARBERS. Okay. Mr. Speaker, the reason why I asked that question to the distinguished Sponsor is because most of the people in the provinces in the country are actually boxing, basketball, and cockfighting aficionados. For instance, in Mindanao, in the region where my district belongs, in CARAGA, I would assume that about 90

percent of the residents of the region are actually cockfighting aficionados. So, along this line, Mr. Speaker, distinguished Sponsor, do you not think it would be logical for, say, GAB to appoint personnel in the different regions in the country to monitor and perhaps even regulate the conduct of games, Mr. Speaker, distinguished Sponsor?

REP. CAMPOS. While this Representation finds wisdom in the Honorable Barbers' suggestion, it is unfortunate that cockfighting is really under the control of the local government unit and it would take a stretch to be able to put that under the purview of the powers of GAB, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor.

REP. BARBERS. Is it not correct, Mr. Speaker, distinguished Sponsor, that in the previous years, cockfighting was under the auspices of GAB? So, since when did they transfer the power to the local government unit in the management, monitoring, and regulating cockfighting, Mr. Speaker, distinguished Sponsor?

REP. CAMPOS. One-minute suspension, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor.

Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, historically, it was under the Gamefowl Commission which was, thereafter, absorbed into GAB, and the powers to regulate cockfighting were devolved to the local government units.

REP. BARBERS. May I know what year was this, distinguished Sponsor?

REP. CAMPOS. It was prior to the, if my memory serves me correctly, it was prior to the enactment of the Local Government Code.

REP. BARBERS. So, okay. Mr. Speaker, I do not want to belabor that point anymore. It is just that I wanted to get some sort of clarification as to which agency really is in charge of regulating and monitoring cockfighting kasi hindi ito maliit na industriya. This is a multibillion-peso industry. In fact, even the breeders all over the country, if you look at the value of the industry, I would roughly estimate it to be about a P5- to

P10-billion industry and this is no joke, Mr. Speaker, distinguished Sponsor. Kaya nga, there must be strict regulation dito.

I, myself, am also an aficionado of cockfighting. In fact, I tried in the past cock breeding as well but, you know, there must be some sort of support on how well we can promote, and support, and help this thriving industry. This could even be a more than P5-billion annually industry, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor. Kaya siguro dapat it should be GAB that should be helping, monitoring, regulating, and assisting this industry. Is that not a correct assumption, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor?

REP. CAMPOS. Again, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, this Representation finds wisdom in what my honorable colleague is saying. But then again, this is all moot and academic at present because it would take probably an act of Congress for us to be able to take that step and consolidate the governance of the cockfighting industry under the umbrella organization, umbrella agency which is GAB, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor.

REP. BARBERS. Okay, thank you, Mr. Speaker, distinguished Sponsor.

On my last point, I honestly believe that the very miniscule budget that GAB has for 2021 would not enable GAB to do its functions as mandated. So, the questions that I was raising were more of questions to ensure that GAB has a mandate to perform and has an opportunity to be able to expand its mandate. Because kapagka na-transfer na nga iyong regulation diyan ay parang pinaliit natin iyong ahensiya and that is just the point of this Representation, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor.

REP. CAMPOS. Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, am I correct that my honorable colleague is suggesting that we add to the current NEP budget provided for GAB?

REP. BARBERS. Yes, yes, Mr. Speaker. Yes, Your Honor. In fact, if there is a proposal from the good Sponsor to ask Congress to increase the budget of the GAB, this Representation will certainly support that move, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor.

REP. CAMPOS. Thank you, Your Honor. Mr. Speaker, the Honorable Barbers, we actually are in possession of an additional budget proposal—miniscule also, a measly amount of P42 million—to be added to the P140 million and supported by an outline of equipment and services, which we will be providing, for the added service that GAB can give to our country and our athletes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor.

REP. BARBERS. Is it correct to assume, Mr. Speaker, distinguished Sponsor, that one of the mandates of GAB is also to provide equipment for sports in different provinces? Is that correct? For instance, boxing equipment, boxing ring, boxing equipment—does GAB provide that to, say, the Congressional district of the distinguished Sponsor?

REP. CAMPOS. Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, sports development programs and equipment fall under the PSC. But for GAB and its regulatory powers over professional boxing, basketball, there is no provision in its budget for equipment. But if Congress would find it prudent to provide for that, it would be more than welcome, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor.

REP. BARBERS. That is the point of this Representation, Mr. Chair, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, because as I stated earlier in the beginning of my interpellation, there are a lot of regions in the country where there are actually sports aficionados, specifically boxing, basketball, and cockfighting. In Mindanao, iyon po ang kakulangan. For instance, in my district, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, there is a dire need for a boxing ring so that we can develop talents in the caliber of Sen. Manny Pacquiao and the rest. I am sure there are a lot of Manny Pacquios out there. Only if given the proper training and given the proper equipment, they would probably even be more of a pound-for-pound champion in the future, Mr. Speaker, distinguished Sponsor.

REP. CAMPOS. Noble, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, noble, noble ideals indeed but, again, we are constrained by the budget.

REP. BARBERS. So, if Congress, Mr.

Speaker, distinguished Sponsor, will be able to increase the budget of GAB, would there be some sort of an assurance, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, that equipment such as boxing equipment will be provided to the district of the good Deputy Speaker Savellano, this Representation, Cong. Kit Belmonte, and Cong. Ruffy Biazon? Is that correct to assume, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor?

REP. CAMPOS. Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, given the budget, if Congress gives the budget to GAB, GAB can allocate it, it can have budgetary provisions for boxing equipment, et cetera, and they can also provide Congress with a list of recipients so that we can be assured that our districts can benefit, if ever there are any worthy recipients from our districts, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor.

REP. BARBERS. Yes, Mr. Speaker, so this Representation is convinced with the answers, the replies of the Gentleman from Makati, the distinguished Sponsor, especially on the point that this Representation raised on the possible granting of equipment to several if not all congressional districts for the development of sports in the different districts in the country. Having said that, Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the Gentleman from Makati for his replies and his patience to this Representation. And since there are no other Member who wishes to interpellate, I would like to have the privilege of moving for the termination of the deliberation on the budget of GAB and for its approval as well.

I so move, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Savellano).
Majority Leader.

REP. ZARATE. Mr. Speaker, we join the motion of the Majority to terminate the deliberations on the budget of the Games and Amusements Board.

I so move, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Savellano).
Majority Leader.

REP. BONDOC. Mr. Speaker, we join the Minority in its motion to close the period of sponsorship and debate on the proposed budget of the Games and Amusements Board.

I so move, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Savellano). Is there any objection? (*Silence*) I hear none, then the motion is approved. So, we would like to thank the Sponsor. Hopefully – we are waiting for all the promises.

REP. CAMPOS. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, my honorable colleagues.

REP. BONDOC. Mr. Speaker, also, we would like to acknowledge the presence of and thank the Games and Amusements Board family, headed by its Chairman, former Congressman, former Governor, the Hon. Abraham Kahlil B. Mitra; as well as Rommel Gutierrez and Josephine Alfonso, Mr. Speaker.

PHILIPPINE POSTAL CORPORATION

REP. LACSON-NOEL. Mr. Speaker, I move that we begin the deliberation on the proposed budget of the Philippine Postal Corporation.

I so move, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Savellano). Is there any objection? (*Silence*) I hear none, then the motion is approved.

REP. LACSON-NOEL. Mr. Speaker, I move that we recognize the Hon. Ruffy Biazon for his sponsorship of the budget of the Philippine Postal Corporation.

I so move, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Savellano). The Hon. Ruffy Biazon is hereby recognized.

SUSPENSION OF SESSION

REP. LACSON-NOEL. I move to suspend the session for a few minutes, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Savellano).
The session is suspended.

It was 4:20 p.m.

RESUMPTION OF SESSION

At 4:23 p.m., the session was resumed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Savellano).
The session is resumed.
Majority Leader.

REP. LACSON-NOEL. Mr. Speaker, I move that we acknowledge the presence of our guests from the Philippine Postal Corporation. They are Postmaster General and CEO Joel L. Otarra and his team: Maura M. Baghari-Regis, Joel L. Zamudio, Maximo C. Sta. Maria III, and Carol C. Terrado.

I so move, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Savellano).
Welcome to the House of Representatives.
Majority Leader.

REP. LACSON-NOEL. Mr. Speaker, I move to recognize the Deputy Minority Leader, Rep. Carlos Isagani T. Zarate of the Party-List BAYAN MUNA for his interpellation.

I so move, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Savellano).
The honorable Deputy Minority Leader Carlos Zarate is recognized.

REP. ZARATE. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor.

Will the good Sponsor yield to some clarificatory questions?

REP. BIAZON. With pleasure, Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague.

REP. ZARATE. Thank you, Mr. Sponsor. With the advent now of technology, a lot of people are saying, "Relevant pa ba iyong Philippine Postal Office?" What can you say to that, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker?

REP. BIAZON. Yes, Mr. Speaker,

distinguished colleague, nandito nga po tayo ngayon sa kalagayan kung saan ang technology ay nag-take over sa communications. Ngunit meron pa rin hong relevance ang Philippine Postal Corporation dahil may ibang serbisyo pa rin pong inihahatid at iyong kanilang existence ang kinakailangan. Halimbawa po, sa mga parcels, they are still part of the logistics of delivering parcels as well as other documents wherein the government sends communications using traditional media or paper. In fact, in 2019, the Judiciary was the lead user of the PHLPost, with 5,895,000 posted communications handled by the Philippine Postal Corporation.

REP. ZARATE. Yes, thank you, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker.

I certainly agree with the Sponsor. Despite the advances in communications ay malaki pa rin talaga ang papel ng Philippine Postal Corporation. But in these past years, isa ang Philippine Postal Corporation, if I am correct, na talagang affected sa advances ng technology.

May I inquire, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker, doon sa staffing complement ng Philippine Postal Corporation. Compared to, say, five years ago and to now, how will you compare it? Tuloy-tuloy pa ba iyong attrition noong mga empleyado ng Philippine Postal Corporation?

SUSPENSION OF SESSION

REP. BIAZON. A minute's suspension, Mr. Speaker, as we get that data from the PHLPost officials.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Savellano). There is a request for a minute's suspension. Is there any objection? (*Silence*) Hearing none; the motion is approved.

It was 4:27 p.m.

RESUMPTION OF SESSION

At 4:28 p.m., the session was resumed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Savellano).
The session is resumed.
Majority Leader.

REP. BONDOC. Mr. Speaker, our parliamentary status is that we are in the period of sponsorship and debate on the budget of the Philippine Postal Corporation. The Sponsor is the Hon. Ruffy Biazon and interpellating is the Hon. Kaloi Zarate.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Savellano). The Honorable Biazon, please proceed.

REP. BIAZON. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, although the Philippine Postal Corporation officials right now do not have the exact figures, they do confirm that over time, because of the advancements in technology and the automation that the agency or the corporation is undertaking, there has been attrition of personnel over the years. They can provide the exact figures at a later time, Mr. Speaker.

REP. ZARATE. Yes. Thank you, Mr. Sponsor. We will gladly get the data later.

But I asked that question because, as you mentioned, relevant pa rin iyong function ng Postal Corporation as far as logistics is concerned, iyong delivery of parcels, et cetera. In fact, that is one of the big businesses now, especially during this time of COVID-19 pandemic na people tend to have a logistics company deliver all things, including, in fact, food.

Now, to my next question, Mr. Sponsor, there is a proposal now here in Congress in relation to the 2022 election that at least for one sector, the elderly sector, and probably even persons with disabilities, that they be allowed to vote via mail. So, ang question ko diyan, in the event that this will be adopted and becomes a law prior to 2022, is the Philippine Postal Corporation ready for this kind of service doon sa alternative voting via mail? Siyempre, iyong mga usapin diyan, security of the ballot and the others related to that, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor.

REP. BIAZON. As I inquired with the officials, Mr. Speaker, they are supportive of the idea and they are prepared to embark on it if they are given the mandate to handle

both by mail, although this is just limited to senior citizens.

REP. ZARATE. Yes. Yes.

REP. BIAZON. So, if there is no indication that they may be overwhelmed – but they are prepared and they are willing, Mr. Speaker.

REP. ZARATE. So, even with the present complement now, personnel complement, and logistics requirements of the Philippine Postal Corporation, handa po sila sa ganitong possibility without necessarily, you know, dagdagan iyong kanilang pondo? For example, in anticipation of halimbawa in 2022, ano, because we are talking now of the 2021 Budget, although hindi pa naman ito batas, ano, so iyon lang iyong nire-raise ko dito, how ready is the Philippine Postal Corporation once this possibility will be a reality, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker.

REP. BIAZON. Yes, Mr. Speaker, siguro po logical naman na kung bibigyan natin sila ng karagdagang responsibility in relation to the elections, mangangailangan ng karagdagang pondo at sana nga po kung magkaroon ng desisyon ang Legislative Department, ano, na ipatupad ito para po sila naman ay mabigyan din natin ng suporta. But as it is, iyong kanilang kahandaan ay naroroon, pero logically, kailangan hong dagdagan ng appropriation para sa kanila.

REP. ZARATE. Thank you, Mr. Sponsor. And finally, gusto lang talagang ipatanong ito: It is a government-owned and -controlled corporation; therefore, it generates income. Ang tanong po, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker, bakit po kailangang mayroon pang budgetary allocation sa General Appropriations Act ang Philippine Postal Corporation?

REP. BIAZON. Ang karagdagan po na hinihingi ng Philippine Postal Corporation ay iyong tinatawag natin na “reimbursement on franking privilege.” Iyong “franking privilege” po, iyan iyong sistema kung saan ang mga selected offices ng ating pamahalaan ay nakakapagpadala ng communication sa

mga constituents o sa mga kliyenteng siniserbisyuhan nila nang hindi ho nagbabayad iyong ahensiya, ano. Kasama ho tayo, ang Kongreso, doon sa may franking privilege at tulad po ng nabanggit ko kanina, ang may pinakamalaking allocation na nagagamit dito ay iyong sa Judiciary. Siyempre po dahil sa mga bilang ng kaso na mga ipinapadala nila na communication, malaking tulong din po iyan sa delivery of justice dahil po doon sa mga pinapadalang communication niyan. It is also followed by the Executive Department and again, na-mention po natin iyong Legislative.

So, iyon pong appropriation na hinihiling nila ay para po matustusan iyong franking privilege na iyan, para po maipagpatuloy nila. Medyo nabawasan nga po kasi compared doon sa kanilang 2019 record, iyong actual nila na posted na mga communications, that is about 8.9 million po na mga komunikasyon iyong kanilang na-shoulder doon sa franking privilege; whereas, ang ibinigay lang po na amount for 2021, ng DBM, ay less than what they had back in 2019. So, nauunawaan po natin kung bakit may reduction, but still, kung mapapagbigyan, of course, na ma-retain iyong dati nila ay maa-appreciate iyong serbisyo.

Thank you.

REP. ZARATE. Thank you, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker. Through the good Sponsor, probably mayroon namang puwede sigurong ma – ang Committee on Appropriations, ano, and I agree, ano, dapat maibalik man lang sa level ng 2019. Napakalaki ng tulong noong franking privilege, lalong-lalo na sa mga ahensiya ng pamahalaan at kung mababawasan iyon, ang ibig sabihin niyan, mababawasan din iyong serbisyo na mai-deliver ng Philippine Postal Corporation sa usapin na ito. So, probably, at the proper time ay kailangang i-move din natin na madagdagan iyong pondo ng Philippine Postal Corporation. Iyon lang po ang aking mga clarificatory questions. Maraming salamat, Ginoong Sponsor. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

REP. BIAZON. Salamat din po.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Savellano). Majority Leader.

REP. DELOS SANTOS. Mr. Speaker, I move to recognize the Hon. Geraldine Roman from the First District of Bataan.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Savellano). The Hon. Geraldine Roman is hereby recognized.

REP. ROMAN. Magandang hapon po, Mr. Speaker, at aking mga kasamahan, and Mr. Sponsor.

Ang mandato po ng Philippine Postal Corporation is to “plan, develop, promote, and operate a nationwide postal system with a network that extends or makes available, at least ordinary mail service, to any settlements in the country” and to “provide for the collection, handling, transportation, delivery, forwarding, and exchange of postal matters between nations.” At katulad na rin po ng sinabi ng ating Sponsor, malaking bahagi rin po ng government communications ang gumagamit po ng ating Philippine postal system through our franking privilege.

At this juncture, Deputy Speaker Savellano relinquished the Chair to Deputy Speaker Henry S. Oaminal.

Sa madaling salita, hindi po matatawaran ang kahalagahan po ng Philippine postal system sa pagtulong sa ating pamahalaan, especially sa mga key agencies such as the Department of Justice, the Department of Agrarian Reform at kung ano-ano pa po. Bilang Kinatawan po ng Unang Distrito ng Bataan, Mr. Sponsor, nais ko pong malaman, ano po ba ang problema ng Philippine postal system kung bakit nakakarating po sa akin, pati na rin po ang aking mga constituent ay nagsusumbong sa akin na maraming mga government notices ang hindi nakakarating sa kanila? Minsan, dumadating na po sa kanila ang notice mula sa, let us say, to give an example, Department of Agrarian Reform, nang late na po at hindi na po sila nabibigyan ng pagkakataong makatugon doon sa mga notices na iyan. So, nalulugi po

silang at nadedehado sa kanilang mga kasong nilalakad, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal). The distinguished Sponsor, please respond.

REP. BIAZON. Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, as of now, nahihirapan po ang PHLPPost sa deliveries nila during this time of COVID. Of course, understandable iyong pagdating po sa mga quarantine in certain areas, iyong protocols that are being implemented with regard to their staff. We hope that this will be resolved together with the resolution to this pandemic, although medyo matagal pa nga po. Understandable po at this time why there are such delays, lalong-lalo na po doon sa mga medyo liblib o malayong lugar na pinaghahatiran ng mga parcels and letters.

REP. ROMAN. Mr. Speaker, nauunawaan ko po iyan sa sitwasyon ng pandemya pero ang masasabi ko po, base po sa naiuulat sa akin ng aking mga constituents at pati na rin sa nababalitaan ko sa iba't ibang lugar ng ating bansa, this is not just a problem during the period, the time of COVID. This is a chronic problem and, I might venture to say, that ang PHLPPost po ay may malaking suliranin. Number one, kulang sila sa tao. Alam ninyo, ang typical na postman po dito sa aming lalawigan sa Bataan— you have one satellite office serving several towns and they do not even have any mode of transportation, minsan naka-tricycle pa. And I went around to ask bakit, tila nabuking ko na nga po at na-discover ko noong ako'y nag-imbestiga na iyong mga ilang postman ay natatambak po ang kanilang mga sulat na dapat i-deliver sa kanilang mga tahanan at tila wala pa silang timeline or schedule o disiplinang dapat sundan. So, maaari ko sanang tanungin ang ating Sponsor, mayroon po bang sistema ng pagdidisiplina ng mga personnel ang PHLPPost para garantiyahin po ang timely delivery ng kanilang mga mails na hina-handle po? Napakahalaga po ng oras and the sense of urgency sa pagde-deliver po ng mga notices, lalo na po ang mga government notices.

Maraming salamat, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal). Distinguished Sponsor, please respond.

REP. BIAZON. Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, as relayed by the Postmaster General, they have a system of disciplining their personnel. But I guess, admittedly, as you have mentioned, there are some instances where this system is not fully implemented and the Postmaster General conveyed to us that these problems would be addressed, especially when their attention is called, through the cluster heads that are assigned at different areas. There is that assurance by the Postmaster General, Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague.

REP. ROMAN. Mr. Speaker, nais ko sanang samantalain ang pagkakataong manawagan na rin sa PHLPPost. You are a government corporation and I believe that you should adopt a different kind of attitude in running your agency. I wish it were run like a private corporation, with checks and balances and a system of accountability. At kami naman po sa Kongreso, Mr. Speaker, tayo naman po sa Kongreso ay handa namang tumugon sa inyong pangangailangan but, of course, you have to deliver. Kaya nga inuulit ko, sana ang panaginip natin para sa PHLPPost, magkakaroon tayo ng uniformed personnel who ride their official modes of transportation, whether they be motorcycles, tricycles, trikes, what have you, at sana po maging very professional na po ang kanilang handling.

So, sa ganang akin po, nananawagan din po ako sa ating mga kasamahan sa Kongreso, kung sana ay mataasan pa natin ang budget ng PHLPPost. At, of course, when we give additional funds, there should be greater accountability. Hindi po natin dapat hayaan na patuloy pa ring ganyang kabagal at ka-inefficient ang ating system. I understand ang sitwasyon po ng PHLPPost at ang kaniyang budgetary limitations, which makes me wonder, P500 million na kayo last year, bakit P500 lang po ulit ang in-ask ninyo? If you have any kind of sincere desire to improve the efficiency of your services, then by all means, dapat siguro'y humingi kayo at nag-push sa amin na pataasin pa lalo ang inyong budget.

So, Mr. Speaker, sa pagkakataong ito, Mr. Sponsor, nais ko rin po sanang manawagan, taasan na po natin at ibalik po doon sa 2019 level ang budget po ng PHLPost, but please, gawin ninyo na po ang dapat gawin para ma-improve po ang services na ibinibigay ninyo sa sambayanang Pilipino. Maraming, maraming salamat po, Mr. Speaker.

REP. BIAZON. Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, thank you so much for the concern that you have expressed for the PHLPost.

And if I may just share, there have been other appropriations given to PHLPost wherein facilities that were much needed were constructed. As of June 16, 2020, there were about P5.7-million worth of infra projects given by the DBM for the PHLPost and I do believe that we could still support them. And one just final word, as an example, doon po sa sarili kong distrito, noong nagsimula po, in another administration, nangungupahan iyong PHLPost doon sa isang maliit na puwesto sa palengke. And it really contributed to the degradation of service dahil masikip iyong lugar, tambak ang mga parcels and letters. Through the help of the local government, we were able to secure for them a space in one of the malls. It improved their service delivery because of the support given to them. So, it is not just through an appropriation through Congress but even through the assistance of the local government, we can help them improve. So again, on behalf of the PHLPost, we thank the distinguished colleague for the support in expressing the wish that we could still add to the budget of the Philippine Postal Corporation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

REP. AGLIPAY. Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal). Majority Leader.

REP. AGLIPAY. Mr. Speaker, I move to recognize the Hon. Ria Vergara of the Third District of Nueva Ecija to interpellate the Sponsor.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal). The distinguished Lady is recognized.

REP. VERGARA. Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker.

Mine is not an interpellation, rather it is a call to—can you hear me, Mr. Speaker, honorable Sponsor?

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal). Yes, loud and clear.

REP. VERGARA. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I quote the sentiments of the Hon. Geraldine Roman, we would like the PHLPost to be more transparent. Inevitably sometimes, they get beholden to certain unscrupulous individuals and they connive in delaying or even faking a signature on an important document. And I know that PHLPost is an organization, it is national, and the problem is not so much in the system but with the people on the ground. I would just like to say that with an increased budget that we will request for PHLPost, we also request for them to do a good job. And as a government agency, like what Congresswoman Roman said, we call on them to be effective, honest, and transparent government officials who will serve all Filipinos equally, regardless of position. That is all, Mr. Speaker, honorable Sponsor.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal). The distinguished Sponsor, please respond.

REP. BIAZON. We acknowledge the manifestation of the Honorable Vergara and we do agree with her as well. And we also call on the PHLPost to improve on the integrity of the delivery of their service. Even this Representation has heard similar comments from our citizens.

Again, thank you.

REP. VERGARA. Thank you, Mr. Sponsor. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for this opportunity to air my side. Good afternoon, sir.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal). Okay. Thank you very much, the Honorable Vergara.

Majority Leader.

REP. BOLILIA. Mr. Speaker, I move that we recognize Hon. Carlos Zarate of the BAYAN MUNA Party-List.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal). The distinguished Hon. Carlos Zarate of the BAYAN MUNA Party-List is recognized.

REP. BOLILIA. Mr. Speaker, I withdraw my motion to recognize Representative Zarate, but I move that we recognize Hon. Janette Garin from the First District of Iloilo.

I so move, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal). With the manifestation of the Majority Leader to withdraw the earlier recommendation for the recognition of the Honorable Zarate, in lieu of him, the Hon. Janette Garin is recognized from the Minority.

REP. GARIN (J.). Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, there being no Member from the Minority who wishes to ask more questions insofar as the proposed budget of the Philippine Postal Corporation is concerned, we move that we terminate the period of interpellation and debate on the budget of the said agency.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal). Majority Leader, there is a motion from the Minority. May we hear from the Majority.

REP. BOLILIA. Mr. Speaker, on the part of the Majority, we join the Minority in its motion to terminate the period of interpellation and debate on the budget of Philippine Postal Corporation.

I so move, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal). There is a motion from the Majority and the Minority to terminate the period of interpellation and debate on the budget of the Philippine Postal Corporation. Is there any objection? (*Silence*) The Chair hears none; the motion is approved.

Majority Leader.

DEPARTMENT OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

REP. AGLIPAY. Mr. Speaker, I move for a few minutes suspension to allow the—sorry, Mr. Speaker, I withdraw that motion.

Mr. Speaker, I move that we begin the consideration of the proposed budget of the Department of Science and Technology.

I so move, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal). There is a motion to open the deliberations on the budget of the Department of Science and Technology. Is there any objection? (*Silence*) The Chair hears none; the motion is approved.

The floor is now open for the deliberations on the budget of the Department of Science and Technology.

Majority Leader.

REP. AGLIPAY. Mr. Speaker, I move that we recognize the Sponsor of the budget, the honorable Rep. Rozzano Rufino Biazon of the Lone District of Muntinlupa, for his sponsorship speech.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal). Before the Chair recognizes the Hon. Ruffy Biazon for his sponsorship speech, may the Majority Leader acknowledge the presence of the officials of the DOST who are present today to defend their budget.

REP. AGLIPAY. Mr. Speaker, I move for a few minutes suspension to allow the officials to enter the plenary hall.

SUSPENSION OF SESSION

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal). The session is suspended.

It was 4:51 p.m.

RESUMPTION OF SESSION

At 4:52 p.m., the session was resumed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal).
The session is resumed.
Majority Leader.

REP. AGLIPAY. Mr. Speaker, before we start, I would like to acknowledge the presence of the officials of the Department of Science and Technology. They are Secretary Fortunato De la Peña, Undersecretary Renato Solidum, Assistant Secretary Teodoro Gatchalian, Assistant Secretary Maridon Sahagun, Administrator Vicente Malano, Director Edgar Garcia, Deputy Executive Director Rod Allan De Lara, Deputy Director Albert Marino, and Regional Director Jose Patalinjug III.

Mr. Speaker, I now move that we recognize the Hon. Ruffy Biazon of the Lone District of Muntinlupa for his sponsorship speech.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal). Before the Chair recognizes the Honorable Biazon, the Chair will take this opportunity to welcome the official family of the Department of Science and Technology, headed by its dynamic Secretary, Secretary Fortunato De la Peña, to this budget deliberation on your 2021 proposal.

The Hon. Ruffy Biazon is now recognized to deliver his sponsorship speech for the DOST budget.

SPONSORSHIP SPEECH OF REP. BIAZON

REP. BIAZON. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the distinct honor and pleasure to present the budget proposal of the Department of Science and Technology, whose mandate is to provide essential direction, leadership and coordination of scientific and technological efforts, and ensure that the results therefrom are geared and utilized in areas of maximum economic and social benefits for the people. For 2021, the agency has been given by the DBM an amount of P23.8 billion, as opposed to their request of P36 billion. And if we break down the appropriation or the allocation given to the Department, 8 percent of that budget is given for Capital Outlay, 18 percent for Personnel Services, and 74 percent for MOOE. This Representation is now ready to answer questions, Your Honor.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal). Majority Leader, the distinguished Sponsor is now ready.

REP. AGLIPAY. Mr. Speaker, I move to recognize the Hon. Sarah Jane Elago of the Party-List KABATAAN to interpellate the Sponsor.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal). The Honorable Elago of the Party-List KABATAAN is recognized for her interpellation of the distinguished Sponsor of the DOST budget or her manifestation. You are recognized.

REP. ELAGO. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Magandang hapon.

Will the honorable Sponsor be willing to respond to a few clarificatory questions from this Youth Representation?

REP. BIAZON. Gladly, from the distinguished Lady, Mr. Speaker.

REP. ELAGO. Maraming salamat ho.

Ang Representasyon po na ito ay natanggap ang ibinigay na sagot o impormasyon ng Department of Science and Technology mula sa Secretary nito na si Secretary Fortunato De la Peña tungkol doon sa mga proyekto, programa at iyong mga items na hindi po na-consider sa NEP ngunit napakahalaga sa ating paglaban sa gitna ng pandemya, at gayundin, pagpapaunlad ng agham at teknolohiya, ng pananaliksik, at ng mga usaping pangkaunlaran dito sa ating bansa.

Ginoong Speaker, let me read an excerpt from the said communication from the DOST.

These are the items that were not considered by the DBM per allotment class:

For the Personnel Services, the items that were not considered were the lump sum for the creation of new positions at the Philippine Science High School, and the salaries and wages of the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration or PAGASA, amounting to P212 million and P226 million, respectively. On the MOOE, the bulk of the MOOE is for financial assistance and subsidy amounting to P5.3

billion to implement programs and projects, and research and development, technology upgrading for micro, small, and medium enterprises, and science and technology assistance to communities, among others. And lastly, on the Capital Outlay, not considered were the building and other structures, and machinery and equipment, amounting to P2.2 billion and P2.3 billion, respectively.

Ginoong Speaker, bilang isang kabataang Pilipino, bilang iskolar ng bayan, alam ko po kung gaano kahalaga ang agham at teknolohiya sa hinahangad natin na likas-kaya na pag-unlad o sustainable development na kung saan atin pong tinitiyak na ang kaunlaran ay may pagtatanggol at may proteksyon sa ating kalikasan, may paglalagay sa tao sa puso ng mga plano sa ating mga programa, sa mga proyekto at gayundin paggamit ng pagiging malikhain ng talino, ng galing, ng lakas sa inobasyon at sa paggamit ng teknolohiya ng mga Pilipino sa pagtutalak ng mga kinakailangan para ma-address iyong mga puwang at iyong mga hamon na hinaharap natin sa kasalukuyan. Kaya naman po nababahala tayo sa laki ng hindi pinayagan o hindi isinama na pondo para sa 2021 para sa pagsuporta sa mga bagong posisyon sa Pisay o kaya naman para sa PAGASA sa panahon na tayo lagi ay naghahanap ng regular, nasa oras at napapanahon na mga ulat mula mismo sa PAGASA. Gayundin ang financial assistance at subsidy sa ating mga science workers, sa mga estudyante ng agham at teknolohiya, at sa lahat ng nais gamitin bilang pundasyon, iyong mga nakuha nila mula sa State universities and colleges natin para sa ibayo pang pag-aaral.

Ginoong Speaker, maaari po ba nating malaman, sa ating distinguished Sponsor, kung ilan pong mga beneficiaries ang maaapektuhan ng hindi naisamang mga items na ito para sa financial assistance at subsidy sa MOOE ng DOST? More currently, Mr. Speaker, the bulk of the MOOE, the lion's share goes to financial assistance already. Marami po dito sa pangangasiwa ng SEI, na marami rin sa constituents ng Representasyon na ito ang mga beneficiaries. Ngunit bukod sa kanila, sino pa po ang maaapektuhan ng mga hindi mapopondohan na programa na ito kung

hindi gagalaw ang Kongreso para dagdagan ang mga items na ito?

REP. BIAZON. Mr. Sponsor, distinguished colleague, doon po sa tanong na kung ilang tao ang maaapektuhan, mga 200 positions iyong hiniling ng Department of Science and Technology na hindi po napagbigyan ng Department of Budget and Management. Pagdating naman po doon sa mga MSMEs na kanilang matutulungan, walang growth. Hindi po sila makakapagdagdag kung anuman ang naging accomplishment nila nitong nakaraang taon. Kaya nakikiisa po ako doon sa opinyon ng ating kasamahan na maganda sana na mapagbigyan ito. Kaya po isa ho siguro sa tamang panahon kung maisusulong natin, sasamahan ho natin iyong ating kasamahan mula sa KABATAAN Party-List na isulong kung kaya pa nating mairekomenda ang pagdadagdag ng pondo.

REP. ELAGO. Ginoong Speaker, maaari ba nating malaman, sa kasalukuyan, ilan pong mga MSMEs ang nakikinabang na mula sa mga subsidiya at iba pang mga financial assistance na nagmumula sa DOST?

REP. BIAZON. May nagbibilang na around 800, mga 800 MSMEs ang nakikinabang po.

REP. ELAGO. At para sa 2021, wala pong pondo ito?

REP. BIAZON. Wala hong pagbabago, so ang mangyayari po ay parang ano lang tayo, walang growth. The same delivery ang magagawa ng DOST.

REP. ELAGO. Ginoong Speaker, ang isa po sa mga pinakaapektado ng pandemya, mga naging restrictions pagdating sa mobilidad, pagkilos, pagbibiyaheng ating mga kababayan ay ang mga MSMEs. Sa pag-monitor po ba ng DOST, mayroon na po bang mga nagsara o nagkaroon ng mga plano na mag-trim down muna ang kanilang operations dahil sa epekto ng pandemya? Kung ganoon, paano po nakikipag-ugnayan naman ang DOST sa ibang mga ahensiya para po tulungan ang mga

MSMEs na ito na mapreserba ang kanilang operasyon?

REP. BIAZON. Sa ngayon, Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, ang estimate ay may mga 20 porsiyento ang nagsara sa panahon ng pandemya. Bagaman hindi naman po lahat iyon ay permanenteng nagsara, may mga bilang diyan na lalampasan lang itong pagsubok na ito at mananatili pa rin namang mag-operate when it is possible.

REP. ELAGO. Ginoong Speaker, hayaan ninyo naman po akong magpunta doon sa mga hindi nakonsidera na mga proyekto sa ilalim ng Capital Outlays. Saan po dapat mapupunta ang P2.2 billion para sa bagong building at iba pang istraktura na pinlano ng DOST na bigyan ng kaukulan na financing para po sa 2021?

REP. BIAZON. Iyong mga panukala na infrastructure ay mga new proposals. Iyan po ay kinailangan sana, malaking improvement sana sa serbisyong maihahatid, ngunit hindi nga ho naaprubahan. Isa ho sigurong maibibigay natin na example diyan ay itong construction ng FNRI building na kung saan ito ay may halagang P358 million. Naniniwala rin sana tayo na ito ay isang function ng DOST na maganda nating mabigyan ng pansin, lalo na na isa sa mga naging pagsubok na lumabas dito sa pandemyang ito ay kagutuman at kamakailan nga ay may nabasa nga po akong artikulo na sinasabi sa isang survey na 3 out of 10 Filipinos have experienced absolute hunger, so definitely affected ang nutrition. So, iyong epekto nito sa mga darating na panahon, maganda sana kung nasusuportahan natin.

REP. ELAGO. Ginoong Speaker, hindi po ba kabaliktaran o hindi po sang-ayon sa direksyon na nais nating tahakin—ang resilience, sustainability para po sa mga kababayan natin na apektado ng pandemya, para sa ating ekonomiya, sa paglikha ng trabaho—ang napakalaking pagkakait ng pondo na ito na hinihingi ng Department of Science and Technology?

Kabilang na po diyan sa kanilang Personnel Services ang para sa Pisay, iyong mga bagong posisyon sa Pisay. Ano po ang maapektuhan nitong P212 million na ito na hindi po nakonsidera na pondo? Sa kasalukuyan po, tayo rin ay nakikipag-ugnayan sa faculty union, sa education support personnel na naggigiit ng suporta sa komunikasyon, sa connectivity subsidy para sa mga pangangailangan sa blended distance modalities na atin pong ginagamit ngayon para matiyak pa rin ang learning continuity sa gitna ng pandemya.

REP. BIAZON. Mahirap ma-quantify talaga iyong masasabi nating epekto, lalo na kung sa larangan ng edukasyon, pero nakikita natin na down the line, kung hindi tayo makaka-recover sa ganitong klaseng reduction ng support, iyong aftereffects ng pandemic, nakikita natin—na malaking epekto iyan. So habang tayo ngayon ay nakikipaglaban sa COVID, na kung saan ang resources ay apektado dahil nga rin sa slowdown ng economy, naunawaan natin iyong predicament ng ating gobyerno ngayon sa paglalaan ng mga pondo. Kinakailangan down the line, sa darating na panahon, once we are able to recover economically, iyong ating pamahalaan ay magbigay ng pansin doon sa suporta, lalong-lalo na sa field of education. Personal experience na lang sa akin, Mr. Speaker, mayroon akong mga anak na ngayon ay undergoing online distance learning. Nakikita ko iyong difference ng regular natin na pamamaraan ng edukasyon versus what we are experiencing now. So in short, what we are saying here is that, while we do understand the difficulty of the government in providing the resources to our agencies, owing to the slowdown of the economy, once we have that ability to bounce back, we must put our support into this field again.

REP. ELAGO. Ginoong Speaker, napakahalaga po ng ating suporta sa mga personnel, lalong-lalo na sa agham at teknolohiya, at nais po nating malaman sa datos po ng DOST, ilan po sa kasalukuyan ang inyong items ng mga scientists at researchers? Ito po ba ay mga regular na nakakatanggap

po ng suporta? Sila po ba ay hired na sa ilalim ng ating mga attached agencies? At kung sila po ay regular na parte ng Departamento at ng attached agencies, ilan naman po ang nasa ilalim ng contract of service? Ilan naman po ang mga agency hired?

REP. BIAZON. Mr. Speaker, batay po sa impormasyon na pinamahagi ng DOST para po sa taong 2020 na Staffing Summary, ang permanent positions ay 5,560 na, kung saan ang filled ay 4,809, with an unfilled of 751. Para naman po sa mga non-permanent na positions, iyan ay mayroong 3,152. Ang datos na ito ay as of August 31, 2020.

REP. ELAGO. Ginoong Speaker, bakit po napakalaki noong ating mga nasa non-permanent positions? Ano po ang kanilang nature ng serbisyo sa Departamento at sa mga attached agencies?

REP. BIAZON. Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, with regard to the unfilled positions, these are positions that are about to be taken up or filled because of the new initiatives of the DOST. With regard to the non-permanent positions, these are project-basis positions. So once the project—they are just there for the duration of the project, Mr. Speaker.

REP. ELAGO. Ginoong Speaker, nagkakaroon po ba ng espasyo para makausap din po ng DOST at ng attached agencies na ito itong mga researchers, mga science workers po natin na kasama doon sa mga project-based po natin na activities?

Ang Representasyon po na ito, nagkaroon po tayo ng mga tatlo nitong nakaraang taon at isa po sa mga pangunahin nilang idinadaing ay iyon nga pong—well, bukod po sa mga delays sa mga stipends, marami po ditong mga research assistants din, mayroon din silang worries or grave concerns pagdating naman sa security of tenure. Nandiyan iyong hindi sila sigurado na matatapos nila iyong kanilang dissertation o kung saan man silang parte ng proyekto. Isa pa pong concern iyong kung saan ba sila papasok pagkatapos ng partikular na proyekto kung saan po sila involved. Ang isa po sa mga karaniwan na

naibabahagi sa Representasyon na ito ay iyong pagkakaroon nga ng parang employee-employer relationship at kung paano po ba natin pinapaunlad iyong ganoong ugnayan sa pagitan po ng ating mga scientists, mga researchers, mga science workers at lahat po ng nag-aambag sa pagpapaunlad ng agham at teknolohiya, and R&D po dito sa ating bansa.

REP. BIAZON. Mr. Speaker, this Representation fully agrees with the Lady with regard to the need to put importance on R&D.

With regard to the point or the complaints that were given by some personnel, rest assured that, first, it is not a fault about the non-delivery or non-payment of what is due but it is mostly about the lack of proper reporting of those institutions involved. Iyong DOST po, ibinibigay nila iyong pondo in bulk to these different institutions at gaya rin po sa ibang mga ahensiya na pagka hindi ka pa nakakapag-liquidate o nakakapag-report ng usage ng pondo ay nagkakaroon ng delay sa release. It is not because there is a problem in the entire system. It is more of the individual failures or shortcomings by concerned officials with regard to liquidation and reporting.

REP. ELAGO. Ginoong Speaker, maaari po ba nating makuha ang commitment ng DOST na pag-aaralan po kung paano aayusin iyong mga nagiging bara pagdating po sa financing ng ating mga proyekto na pinopondohan ng DOST? Kung may kailangan na pakikipag-ugnayan lalong-lalo na sa mga SUCs na karaniwang nagha-house po nitong mga proyekto na ito ay matutugunan natin nang mabilis, napapanahon para hindi rin nasasakripisyo iyong mismong timeline ng proyekto at sa parte naman po ng ating mga researchers, na hindi rin po nakakaranas ng discouragement sa pananatili dito sa ating bansa para mag-offer ng kanilang serbisyo para sa mga pangangailangan natin sa S&T.

REP. BIAZON. Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, may commitment po ang ating Kalihim ng Department of Science and Technology, Secretary Dela Peña, na titiyakin

nila na maaayos iyong gusto na iyon. But siguro rin ito ay isa ring panawagan doon sa mga concerned institutions na maging ano rin po sila, maging responsive at maging alert doon sa pagkakarereport nila sa mga paggamit nila ng pondo para hindi rin po magkaroon ng delay.

REP. ELAGO. Ginoong Speaker, sang-ayon po ang Representasyon na ito na kailangan talaga iyong mahigpit na koordinasyon para maiwasan iyong mga delays pagdating sa pag-abot mismo ng pondo doon sa mismong project managers at iyong kanilang mga kasama na science workers. Ngayon, Ginoong Speaker, marami din po sa mga beneficiaries ng DOST ay mga graduate school scholars. Sa ngayon po, ilan po ang mga nagte-take ng MS at PhD scholars natin na – ilan po ba dito ang nakaka-graduate? Kumusta po ang monitoring sa ating mga scholars sa gitna ng pandemya, na marami sa ating mga proyekto at programa ang apektado o talagang naantala na?

REP. BIAZON. Isang halimbawa, Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, for the year 2019 to 2020, mayroong mga 1,563 na PhD. Mayroon pong 4,278 na Masters at 27,485 sa Bachelors. At para po sa 2020, ang datos po natin sa mga nag-graduate, sa Masters program mayroon pong 4,264; sa Doctoral program, mayroong 1,927.

REP. ELAGO. Ginoong Speaker, lahat po ba ito, nakaka-graduate? Kumusta po ang kalagayan ng ating scholars?

REP. BIAZON. Correction lang po, Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, iyong figures na nasabi ko po kanina ay mga ongoing courses po. Ang graduates for the Masters are about 1,600; the Doctoral are about 740.

REP. ELAGO. Ginoong Speaker, tayo po ay manghilingi na lamang ng ulat mula sa DOST tungkol sa kalagayan ng mga scholars. Gayundin po, follow-up din doon sa mga DOST scholars po natin na nanghilingi rin ng palugit or magkaroon ba ng accommodation din doon sa mga requests na kung sila ay apektado,

hindi makalabas o may mga kapamilya po na may sakit at talagang nahirapan doon sa compliance ng mga requirements, iyong mga requests para i-extend iyong eligibility ng mga scholars. Gayundin, pagdating naman sa grants and aids, iyong necessary adjustments para padaliin po iyong proseso sang-ayon sa kinakaharap natin ngayon na sitwasyon, na krisis ay magawa ng Departamento.

REP. BIAZON. Magbibigay po ng ulat ang Department of Science and Technology tungkol po doon sa concern ng ating kasamahan, Mr. Speaker. Just an additional information, as relayed to me by the Secretary, during the pandemic, they have also relaxed their rules a bit to take into consideration the difficulties that our people are experiencing now.

REP. ELAGO. Ngayon, Ginoong Speaker, tungkol lang po sa dalawang attached agencies na napakalaki po ng hindi ibinigay na pondo, sa PAGASA at saka sa PHIVOLCS, nasa P1 billion – tama po ba, sa PAGASA at sa PHIVOLCS, nasa P320 or P330 million?

Itong dalawang mga ahensiya na ito, Ginoong Speaker, ay mga ahensiya na kapag sinuportahan natin, talagang makakatulong sa pagsasagip ng buhay, lalong-lalo na po na ang Pilipinas ay nasa isa sa pinakabulnerable na rehiyon sa buong mundo sa mga natural calamities. Sa harap pa ng climate emergency, sa krisis sa klima, lalong kinakailangan na suportahan ang ating mga ahensiya na maghahanda sa atin, sa ating mga propesyonal, sa mga kinakailangan nilang equipment, machinery para iwasan at tiyakin ang kaligtasan ng ating mga kababayan sa gitna ng kalamidad.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal). The distinguished Sponsor may respond.

REP. BIAZON. Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague. Tootoo po na kapag tiningnan natin ho iyong figures, nakakabahala iyong pagkabawas, lalong-lalo na ho, isang example, iyong PHIVOLCS. Karamihan po nito ay mga equipment, mga ICT equipment and sensors that they need to add to their capability. But as our Director of

PHIVOLCS has assured us, iyong capability naman po nila ay hindi naman talagang mababawasan. Nandoon pa rin po iyong kanilang kakayanan na bigyan tayo ng tamang impormasyon sa mga volcanic events or other geographic incidents. Iyon lang, medyo setback lang doon sa mga pinaplano, but the public is guaranteed or assured that the PHIVOLCS will remain vigilant and capable of delivering its mandate.

REP. ELAGO. Ginoong Speaker, nagagalak tayo at nandiyan ang kapasidad ng ating mga scientist, ng ahensiya na apektado ng hindi ibinigay na pondo para sa 2021, ngunit ipakita natin ang buo – at buong-buo po ang suporta ng Representasyon na ito at tinatawagan natin ang lahat ng ating mga kasamahan sa Kapulungan na ito na suportahan ang pondo ng DOST at lahat ng attached agencies nito. Lalo na po sa gitna ng pagbangon natin, tinitiyak natin na walang maiiwan sa lahat ng ito, lalong-lalo na ang libo-libo nating mga kababayan na dumadanas din ng pangangailangan pa sa rehabilitation mula sa nakaraang taon na sunod-sunod po ang malalakas na bagyo, ang mga earthquakes sa Mindanao at nitong January lamang, sa pagbubukas ng 2020, ang pagsabog ng Bulkang Taal. Napakarami pa po ng kinakailangan na suporta para sa kanila. Habang tinutugunan natin ang pangangailangan nila para sa assistance sa kabuhayan, sa pagkain, sa muling pagbangon, dapat inihahanda na rin po natin ang kapasidad ng mga ahensiya na ito para sa mga susunod, mas magiging handa tayo, may kakayanan tayo para paunlarin iyong ating kakayanan para ma-prevent iyong mga mas malalaki pa na epekto sa ating mga kababayan.

Ngayon, sa akin pong huling katanungan, Ginoong Speaker, tungkol lamang po sa role, sa gampanin ng DOST pagdating sa COVID-19 pandemic response at sa pakikipag-ugnayan sa iba't ibang mga bansa na kasalukuyan pong nananaliksik para sa bakuna.

REP. BIAZON. Ang papel na ginagampanan, Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, patungkol sa COVID-19, ang papel na ginagampanan ng DOST ay napakahalaga dahil ito ay may kinalaman doon sa pag-

develop ng vaccine at alam naman po natin na isa sa mga proven means to address a pandemic or an outbreak is through the method of vaccination. So, ito pong DOST ay bahagi doon sa proseso na kung saan ang ating bansa ay, eventually, sana magkaroon na rin tayo ng access to vaccines. So again, iyong relevance ng science, ng research and development ay talagang makikita natin, na ang experience nating ito ay enough reason for us to give importance in supporting the DOST.

REP. ELAGO. Ginoong Speaker, sa ating partisipasyon sa mga clinical trials, gayundin ang pagtulong sa development ng vaccines sa kung anumang kapasidad na makakaya ng Pilipinas, kinakailangan po na ilagay natin iyong karapatan at kapakanan, hindi lamang ng ating S&T and R&D stakeholders, ng buong community nito, ngunit po ang taong-bayan. Sa ating sama-samang paggaling, sama-samang pagbangon, kinakailangan natin ang buong-buong suporta at dagdag na pondo. Ipakita natin iyan para sa 2021 Budget.

Maraming salamat, Ginoong Speaker. Maraming salamat po sa ating distinguished Sponsor.

REP. BIAZON. Maraming salamat.

REP. ELAGO. Mabuhay po ang ating mga siyentista, mga iskolar ng bayan! Maraming salamat po.

REP. BIAZON. Maraming salamat din.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal). Thank you very much, the Honorable Elago. Majority Leader.

REP. AGLIPAY. Mr. Speaker, I move that we recognize the Hon. Edward Vera Perez Maceda of the Fourth District of Manila to interpellate the Sponsor.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal). The Hon. Edward Maceda of the Manila District is hereby recognized.

REP. MACEDA. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can you hear me?

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal). Yes, loud and clear. You may proceed now with your interpellation.

REP. MACEDA. Yes. Magandang hapon po sa lahat ng mga kasamahan ko sa Eighteenth Congress, also to my good friend, the good Sponsor, Cong. Ruffy Biazon, and also the whole DOST family, headed by Sec. Fort Dela Peña.

Iyong DOST plays a very important role, isa sa pinakaimportante na Departamento iyan sa panahon ngayon ng pandemya, and moving forward as we go into the Fourth Industrial Revolution na kasing sigurado ng sikat ng araw ay darating.

May I just ask a few questions to the good Sponsor.

REP. BIAZON. Yes, please, with pleasure, we will be responding to your questions. Go ahead.

REP. MACEDA. Yes, my first issue, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor, is with regard to one of the pet bills of this humble Representation which the Seventeenth Congress passed and I believe that was signed by President Duterte on June 15, if I am not mistaken, of 2018, and that is the Balik Scientist Program. I know that is very close to the heart of Secretary Dela Peña and I remember the last time I saw him was in the Bicam of that bill. I defended that bill, together with Cong. Aris Aumentado, the Chairman of the House Committee on Science and Technology, along with the other principal authors – Congressman De Venecia, Cong. Yul Servo Nieto, and Congressman Salceda, among others. And I remember, we were in a Bicam with Sen. Bam Aquino and Sen. Nancy Binay, and it proved to be a very successful Bicam.

My question is, what role has the Balik Scientist Program played, if any, at this time of the pandemic? Because I believe that right now, what we really need is a vaccine and a cure and the DOST is one of the departments that play a very vital role in coming up with that through research and development, through coordinating with other countries. So, what role has the Balik Scientist Program

played? Has it been implemented? Is there enough budget for it? Was it given enough budget in 2019? And I hope there is enough budget for 2021 for the program because I believe it will help us in finding a cure for this COVID pandemic and a vaccine for this COVID virus, Mr. Chairman, Mr. Speaker.

REP. BIAZON. Yes, Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague.

The Balik Scientists that we have right now play a big role in our efforts to control or to counter COVID-19. Some of them are involved in the development of the vaccine and in the clinical trials and the proposed establishment of the Virology Institute. So, we see the value of our Balik Scientists who bring with them not just their patriotism but their technical skills in their respective fields. It is a very good program and we really thank those who have made this possible.

REP. MACEDA. Yes, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor.

Especially since before the Balik Scientist Program was passed, we saw a large exodus of our scientists and even our R&D people. There is a huge brain drain with regard to that and, in fact, the data from way back in 2012 showed that per 1,000,000 Filipinos, we only have 165 R&D people. Is that still the case up to now or are there more R&D people and scientists per 1,000,000 Filipinos, Mr. Chairman, Mr. Speaker?

REP. BIAZON. The figure given to this Representation, Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, is about 280 per million. That is the ratio that we have.

REP. MACEDA. So nadagdagan ng from 165 to 280. Pero, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker, I would think that the good Sponsor would agree that that is not enough and we should ramp up our efforts to make sure that we retain our R&D people, our scientists, prevent them from going abroad. The main reason why they go abroad, anyway, is because, I guess, of better pay, because they cannot get it here in our country. I think the good Sponsor would agree.

REP. BIAZON. Yes, Mr. Speaker. This Representation definitely agrees with our distinguished colleague. This experience of 2020 should really be a wake-up call for us to give more importance to scientists, and science and technology because we are now in the era where decisions should always be based on science and data, and the challenges that we face during this time clearly tell us that ramping up our capability in terms of science and technology is the way to go in the coming future.

So, as the Secretary informed me, the target is to have 380 to a million scientists. And if we can support that kind of target, definitely, that would be a step in the right direction.

REP. MACEDA. Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor.

And in fact, the Balik Scientist Law that we passed way back in the Seventeenth Congress, ang parang hinihiram lang natin uli ay iyong mga Pinoy na nag-abroad na kahit na hindi 100-percent Pinoy, kahit 10-percent Pinoy lang ay hihiramin natin sila para pumunta dito para magamit iyong talino nila. But I guess if we have 100-percent Filipinos who are capable and ready, then we will have less need for the Balik Scientist Program. But in the meantime, I am happy that it is being implemented. I hope there is more budget for the Balik Scientist Program because it will play a vital role in finding a vaccine and a cure.

And on to my next point, Mr. Chairman, Mr. Speaker. Again, together with Cong. Aris Aumentado, Congressman Nieto, Congressman De Venecia, Cong. Joey Salceda and other Members, I am also one of the principal authors of the Philippine Space Agency Act that was passed in the Seventeenth Congress. And especially recently, there were several bills filed in the Committee on Basic Education, like there is the PSOFT bill, the Public Schools of the Future in Technology, principally authored by many Congressman, Congressmen rather, among which includes this Representation. That looks towards getting our public schools ready for, as I said, the Fourth IR, the digitization and setting up of the necessary ICT or IT infrastructure to be able to catch up with other countries. So that,

I think, the Philippine Space Agency plays a vital role in that. And also, it will also play a vital role in helping other attached agencies like the PHIVOLCS, in giving us an earlier warning about natural disasters to come.

So, I was wondering na what the development is with regard to the Philippine Space Agency and has it been funded well in 2020 and I hope it will be funded well in 2021, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal). The distinguished Sponsor may respond to that.

REP. BIAZON. Yes, Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague. The Philippine Space Agency is already operational, and research and development are going on with regard to the development of our own satellite. In fact, there is a target for a launch sometime in 2021. The relevance really of the Space Agency is not so much as Filipinos stepping on the moon, but it has a significant impact on various fields such as agriculture, defense, communication, and as you mentioned, the tracking of the weather. So, the DOST is on track with regard to the Philippine Space Agency, and we are hopeful that we will see the fruits, at the earliest, around 2021.

REP. MACEDA. Yes. Well, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor, this humble Representation is very happy, as one of the principal authors of that bill, that it is well on its way. It may still be a work in progress, but I think with enough government support, I think that it will help our country in a big way in our development in many fields, as you said.

Now, related to that, if I may follow up on the point raised by the Honorable Elago before me, as regards the natural disasters, if I heard it correctly, nabawasan iyong pondo para doon sa kanila, although sabi ninyo nga, kaya pa rin nila gawin iyong trabaho nila, pero sana madagdagan ang pondo noong PHIVOLCS. Sana madagdagan ang pondo ng mga attached agencies ng DOST na nakakatulong na magbigay sa atin ng warning kung may darating na natural disaster tulad ng earthquake o kaya ng mga—well, wala

naman tayong tsunami, pero matagal na nating pinag-uusapan, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor, iyong “the Big One,” na iyon ang pinaghahandaan natin, na talagang hindi pa naman tayo handa doon, pero naunahan tayo ng COVID. Pero it is always a possibility that in the future, it will come. I mean, I hope it does not. We all hope that “the Big One” will not come but in order to be prepared for any kind of natural calamity or natural disaster, importante na mapondohan iyong mga ahensiya na namamahala diyani.

If I may just say, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor, sa Japan, grabe ang ano nila doon, ang pondo nila para diyani. Pati iyong mga routine sa eskuwelahan, araw-araw mayroon silang earthquake drill, tsunami drill. Iyong mga building sa Japan, they use the best kind of materials and then they conform with the building code 100 percent. I can say that even in this country, not every building conforms to the building code; it is suspect. Sa Japan, lahat iyon ginagawa nila — ang ganda ng materyales, ang ganda ng building, ang ganda noong pagsasanay, ang ganda noong warning system nila pero, at the same time, kapag nagkaroon ng earthquake doon o ng tsunami, daang-libo pa rin iyong namamatay. So, can you imagine, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor, dito sa Pilipinas, na we are not nearly at the level of Japan, they are 100 levels higher than us when it comes to disaster preparedness or disaster response. So, siguro, iyong isang bagay lang na makakatulong sa atin dahil dehado nga tayo sa bagay na iyon is mas maaga tayong ma-warningan. And, in that sense, I hope mabigyan ng pondo iyong mga ahensiya na namamahala dito. So, I support the call of Congresswoman Elago na dapat madagdagan pa. Kahit kaya gampanan, sabi nga ni Director Solidum, as you said, sana madagdagan pa rin ang pondo. I am all-in for that, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor.

REP. BIAZON. Yes, distinguished colleague, Mr. Speaker, we agree with the Gentleman when he is proposing, when he is positing that we should be putting in more support for science and technology. He mentioned the preparation for possible disasters. Let me just share the information given to me by the DOST that around 20 percent of research and

development goes to disaster risk reduction. So, there is still that effort to ensure that we are prepared by studying and researching ways and means for us to be more resilient, and we join the distinguished Gentleman with regard to his call for more support for the Science and Technology Department. I am thankful that I had the privilege to sponsor the budget, to be in a place where I could matter with regard to giving more support. But, of course, bottom line is what the government can do to manage its resources to meet various challenges. But it should be a wake-up call for us that in the future; we should give priority to science and technology.

REP. MACEDA. Yes, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor, I agree totally. Sabi nga nila, kailan ba dapat tayo maghanda para sa “the Big One”? Ang sagot ay kahapon pa. Kailan dapat tayo maghanda para sa pandemic tulad ng COVID? Kahapon pa.

But on to my last concern, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor — thank you for your patience. My last concern is as regards the funding for creative industries. I am part of this bloc in Congress, the Arts and Culture Bloc, which is headed by my cousin, the distinguished Gentleman from Pangasinan, Cong. Toff De Venecia, and we are really battling for the creative economy and the creative industries. It is doing very well with very little support from the government. There is such huge potential for this industry and for the creative economy, in general, and I believe that Secretary Dela Peña wrote Congressman De Venecia saying that he needed support, budget wise, from Congress with regard to the creative economy. I have here a list: P124 million for the PTRI — iyong PTRI ay marami po siyang — iyong mga artisans natin ay ginagamit iyong mga textiles natin. Mayroon iyong P150 million for the Forest Products Research and Development Institute. You know, we have a lot of trees that are endemic to the Philippines, that are of very good use to the country. Kasama na rin diyani, of course, iyong bamboo na ipinaglalaman ni Deputy Speaker DV Savellano. There is also rubber wood na para pag naubusan tayo, for example, o kinulang tayo sa abaka na ginagamit natin sa mga artisanal products natin doon, mga

furniture na nakikilala na sa buong mundo o kaya ng bamboo, iyong rubber wood ay puwede na rin nating gamitin. So humihingi rin sila ng pondo diyan—ang DOST, at kasama na rin diyan iyong National Research Council of the Philippines—na P85 million.

So, marami dito ay makakatulong sa ating mga artisans. Marami dito ay makakatulong sa ating creative industries at creative economy which have very, very great potential. They are a potential growth sector with minimal government support. So, if they are given the support that they need and the boost that they need, then we believe—and I, luckily—as part of ACCIB, under Congressman Toff De Venecia’s leadership—that it can help us, especially post-COVID when we are trying to resuscitate our economy, which is right now, as they say, we are in the ICU and we are trying to get the economy standing up again or going to the regular room first and eventually standing up again and walking out of the hospital.

So, nabigyan ba ng pondo iyong mga—nadagdagan ba ng pondo, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Chairman, tulad ng hinihingi ni Secretary Dela Peña, itong mga attached agencies ng DOST na makakatulong sa creative industries at sa creative economy?

REP. BIAZON. Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, maganda po iyong na-bring up ng ating kasamahan with regard to the creative industries. The Department is fully aware of the potential of these industries, that is why they also have their involvement in the development of the said industries. Again, ang talagang challenge lang natin sa ngayon ay iyong fund allocation para sa kanila at nakikiisa ako doon sa initiative po ng ating kasamahan na si Cong. Toff De Venecia and, in fact, I joined as a signatory to the letter ...

REP. MACEDA. Yes.

REP. BIAZON. ... which was proposed for us to put in funds for those specific areas of interest which would benefit the creative industries.

As far as the Department is concerned, on board din ho sila. Iyon nga lang, iyong pag-allocate kasi ng pondo ay siyempre dumadaan

din sa ibang ahensiya. So siguro po, kung maiparamdam natin, baka mapagbigyan iyong ahensiya na ito na mabigyan ng additional funding.

REP. MACEDA. Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor. I agree totally and I also thank the good Sponsor for his support to the call of the Arts and Culture Bloc for more funding for the creative economy.

Alam ninyo, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor, sa ASEAN, pagdating sa creative economy, we are lagging behind sa creative services. Ayon sa isang report galing sa UNCTAD, sa creative services, tayo ay nangunguna, milya-milya, pero pagdating sa creative products, eh karamihan diyan, iyong mga artisanal products natin na gumagamit nga noong mga textile, ng mga kahoy, ng mga iba-ibang produkto na endemic sa atin sa Pilipinas, but we are lagging behind. So, kung mapapataas natin iyon, then we can compete. That being said, I would like to thank the good Sponsor, Mr. Speaker, for being patient with the questions of this Representation. I am all-out in support of the DOST. Secretary Dela Peña and his team have done a good job, and I hope that they will be given more budget, not only for the creative sector, but as I said, for the Balik Scientist Program, for that Space Agency, and for the entire packet, the entire portfolio of the Department of Science and Technology, and all its attached agencies because I know that pagkatapos po ng pandemya, hindi puwedeng hiwa-hiwalay ang mga departamento, ang mga ahensiya. Kailangang may commonality of interest, kailangang may whole-of-nation approach. They have to be tied together and ...

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal). Well, thank you very much, the Hon. Edward Maceda, for your brilliant interpellation. Majority Leader.

REP. AGLIPAY. Mr. Speaker, I move to recognize the Hon. Carlos Zarate of the Party-List BAYAN MUNA for his interpellation.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal). The Hon. Carlos Zarate of the BAYAN

MUNA Party-List is recognized for his interpellation.

REP. ZARATE. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Magandang hapon muli sa ating kagalang-galang na Sponsor.

Ngayong araw po, may nabasa akong article na ang DOST ay nagbigay ng parang grant sa apat na mga eskuwelahan, if I am not mistaken, for P800,000 para sa pag-pursue nila ng kanilang mga research projects as scholars ng DOST. Tama po ba iyong nabasa kong article kanina along this line?

REP. BIAZON. Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, personally, hindi ko po nabasa iyong article. Pero ang nabanggit po ni Secretary Dela Peña ay may siyam na eskuwelahan daw po ang nabigyan nila ng grant, tulong po doon sa mga researchers doon po sa mga paaralan na iyon.

REP. ZARATE. Thank you, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker. So siyam pala, hindi lang walo.

Ang nabasa ko nga doon, each school will receive P800,000 grant to pursue research based sa kanilang gustong magawa.

Pinauna ko hong tanong iyan para po doon sa aking next na tanong actually. As we speak now, ilan po ba iyong mga scholars ng DOST na sa kasalukuyan?

REP. BIAZON. Sa kasalukuyan, Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, para po sa school year 2020 to 2021, ang total po ay 44,398, na kung saan ang 9,307 ay Philippine Science High School scholars, ang 28,900 ay bachelor's degree scholars, at 4,264 for Master's, at 1,927 para po sa PhD.

REP. ZARATE. Okay. Maraming salamat po. Marami po pala, libo-libo.

So, ang sunod ko pong tanong, ilan po ba ang staff ng DOST who handle the scholars and what office is in charge of this, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker?

REP. BIAZON. Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, may bilang na 130 personnel ang nagha-handle ng tanggapan na nangangasiwa dito po sa ating mga scholars.

REP. ZARATE. One hundred thirty, 1-3-0 po?

REP. BIAZON. One hundred thirty-one personnel.

REP. ZARATE. Well, hindi po ba parang may problema doon? Tagibang ano? We have 44,000 scholars and we only have 130 personnel to handle all of these. Ilan lang iyong mga personnel na naghahawak nito, rverything, sa usapin ng lahat, administrative, et cetera. I think this will only lead to, you know, problems on the quality and even, probably, it will only delay kung ano iyong objective natin why marami tayong scholars under the Department of Science and Technology, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker.

REP. BIAZON. Distinguished colleague, Mr. Speaker, iyon pong nabanggit natin na 131 personnel ay doon po sa ating central, parang central office. Mayroon din pong mga tauhan ang Departamento sa bawat region na tumutulong sa pag-manage ng ating mga scholars. Per region, mayroon po silang tatlong coordinators in the universities.

REP. ZARATE. May I inquire, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker, what particular office ng DOST ang in charge sa ating mga scholars?

REP. BIAZON. Ang tanggapan po na nangangasiwa, Mr. Speaker, ay iyong Science Education Institute.

REP. ZARATE. Yes, the Science Education Institute or the SEI and, in fact, iyong programs ng SEI, tiningnan ko naman doon sa budget, medyo lumaki naman. But iyon pa rin iyong point ko, kung iilan lang ang personnel ng SEI. Because it handles thousands of scholars, it will affect the operation and, in fact, our objective of producing quality scientists and scholars in the future. So, iyon lang iyong isang gusto kong mensahe diyan, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker, na siguro dapat tingnan ng Kagawaran, ng Department to augment its personnel na mag-handle doon sa mga usapin ng ating mga scholars, 'no, iyong mga scholars ng bayan dahil kung iilan lang ito.

Dahil kahit sa usapin lang ng paghahatid ng mga benepisyo sa kanila, paghahatid noong mga allowance nila, hindi po ba if you only have a few personnel, it will, you know, result in delays? I hope the Department will also—probably, this is trivial and minor but in the long term, I think this will have an effect doon sa usapin ng how we are producing and protecting the interests of our scholars in the Department of Science and Technology, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker.

REP. BIAZON. Distinguished Gentleman and Mr. Speaker, bagaman 131 personnel, mayroon din po naman kasing augmentation in the form of the digital systems, computerized systems that the agency has. Like, for example ho, iyong distribution ng mga allowances are now through ATMs, automated na siya. Some transactions are done online. While we do acknowledge that malaki iyong number ng mga scholars compared to the 131 personnel in that office lang, mayroon pa rin naman ho kasing nasa regional offices and coordinators in the respective universities. The automated system helps them cope with the volume of transactions. But of course, the Department would do its own evaluation whether manpower really is needed to accommodate the load.

REP. ZARATE. Thank you, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker. I will not dwell too much on that, but it is only a constructive suggestion to the Department kung gusto natin talagang hindi masayang iyong ginugugol natin na pondo sa ating mga scholars dahil lang sa kawalan ng personnel, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker.

Now, on to my other questions and interpellation, sa panahon ho ng krisis and we learned this, in fact, during the 2008 financial crisis. This crisis underscored that research and development must be prioritized. Unfortunately, in times of crisis, doon din natin nakita na ang research and development tend to drop when a disaster or when a crisis strikes. So in fact, maraming may mga pag-aaral diyan.

This COVID-19 pandemic has brought about a new thinking paradigm for many countries. In fact, they are shifting paradigms. Some countries are even beefing up their

research and development programs to come up with ways to combat the virus and protect their people. In fact, scientists are saying this will not be the first nor will this be the last pandemic that the world will probably experience in the next years to come dahil din sa ginawa natin sa ating environment. So, parang payback time ng nature ito na haharapin ng mga mamamayan.

Now, in our budget, I observed that there is an entry for the Advanced Science and Technology Institute, and the budget, for 2021, we have P508,058,000. The organizational outcome of this institution is supposedly to increase the benefits to Filipinos from scientific knowledge and technologies in ICT and microelectronics.

As it is now, DOST is supposedly working on these following research initiatives related to COVID. There is the project on mobilization of satellite images called “PEDRO,” if that is correct, the Philippine Earth Data Resource Observation Center. And there is also the Data Science Help Desk or the DATOS Project that the office is working on. It basically shows how many vehicles can be seen in that satellite image. There is also this partnership with the Philippine Genome Center, and the Department is also engaged in the development of thermal scanners for our frontliners.

So, the idea supposedly for the latter projects, itong development of thermal scanners and partnership with the Philippine Genome Center is to develop a small attachment, that can be fitted to a phone to take advantage of its availability and prevalence, that allows the temperature to be read and it will be displayed in the phone’s screen through an application. And also, nakalagay din doon that there is also this provision of facility support for the FASSSTER project or FASSSTER—meaning, Feasibility Analysis of Syndromic Surveillance using Spatio-Temporal Epidemiological Modeler for early detection of diseases. Napakahabang pangalan noon but ang acronym niya is “FASSSTER,” and it is led by the Ateneo de Manila University and funded by the DOST-PCHRD or the Philippine Council for Health Research and Development. So, mayroong mga programang ganito.

Ang tanong ko dito, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker, granting that there is no problem of funding, for example, there is no problem of money, what projects would the Department prioritize and recommend to properly and effectively address our pandemic requirements now, considering that even the government, the administration admits that our number one problem really, as we speak now, and even until next year is itong COVID-19 pandemic, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker?

REP. BIAZON. Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, iyong katanungan ay, if funding were not a problem, what would be the priorities of the DOST?

Ayon po kay Secretary Dela Peña, kung hindi ho problema ang pondo, ang kanilang bibigyan ng priority in relation to the pandemic is drug development, iyon pong magagamit nating panlaban sa COVID, whether it be panggamot or pang-prevent, vaccine development, which is prevention at iyong pangatlo po, iyong mga medical devices. Generally, ang direction niyan is kung tayo ay magiging self-sufficient. Because as the distinguished Gentleman mentioned, there is or there should be a shift in paradigm during this time and I completely agree with that. And my view even is that the paradigm shift is how we view what is the greatest threat to our country or national security and I would say it is another pandemic. Because of the experience that we have had now with COVID-19, we see that life has been disrupted. So, this is not the last pandemic; there will definitely be another one.

REP. ZARATE. Yes.

REP. BIAZON. Just as we talk about “the Big One” in terms of earthquakes, there will be another pandemic. So, we might as well learn from this experience and prepare, and what better way to do it than through science and technology?

One of the favorite programs of the Secretary is the development of home-grown medicine because there has been experiences of discoveries of effective antibiotics, for example, that were derived from resources

within the country and initiated by local talent. We have a wealth of biodiversity, both on land and in the sea, and those can be a source of medicine and drugs. So, if money were not a problem, the DOST would venture into those three top priorities.

REP. ZARATE. Thank you, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker.

But, indeed, money is a problem. Alam po natin iyan. In fact, sa 2021 Budget natin, in figure, it is very big, it is historical, P4.5 trillion. But again, our question here is how do we prioritize our very limited resources, our budget? And we both agree that science and technology should be given precedence, given priority, given the fact na, sabi nga natin, this will not be the first nor this will be the last. But will the good Sponsor agree na hindi naman nare-reflect iyan sa ating budget, iyong pag-prioritize natin sa pagbibigay ng solusyon sa pandemya ng COVID because—that is why I asked my first question, if money is not a problem, ano iyong priorities? But in reality, kung titingnan natin itong budget natin ngayon, napakaliit ng pondo na inilalaan natin diyan. So, may we ask the good Sponsor, Mr. Speaker, how do we remedy this kind of prioritization, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker?

REP. BIAZON. Well, kung titingnan po natin, ano, isa na rin ho ako sa unang magsasabi na nakukulangan ako sa allocation nating ito sa science and technology. But I guess, in managing the resources of the country, the administration has given different priorities to different concerns. Hindi lang ako—I am just not privy to the logic behind the distribution. But if I may venture a guess, there are other priorities that need to be funded for them to be implemented, while there are others that will be given priority at a later time. There may be some appropriations that we think have to be given urgent funding now and there are others that can be relegated to a later time. So, unfortunately, this Representation will not be able to give an adequate explanation as to the basis of the Department of Budget and Management, but I would venture to say that they did it with a careful study on how

the administration will proceed with different priorities.

REP. ZARATE. Thank you, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker.

Just a very specific question doon sa FASSSTER project ngayon ng DOST: Mayroon bang collaboration ang DOST, for example, with other agencies like the DICT, for example? Isang malaking problema kasi ngayon, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor, up to now, even as we speak now, iyong contact tracing noong mga infected or nakasalamuha ng mga COVID positive na mga individuals. Despite the assignment of the so-called contact tracing czar, alam natin na iyan ang isa sa problema. Ano ang ginagawa ng DOST rito by applying all these projects nila to help the people, even the government, get timely, relevant, and correct data especially during these times, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker, na as I have mentioned earlier, kanina with the other department, wala nang probinsya ngayon na walang COVID? The Last of the Mojicans, so-called, na Batanes has already recorded a COVID-19 positive case. So, may we get a reaction, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker.

REP. BIAZON. Yes, Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague. Isa ho talaga sa mga pinakaimportanteng armas laban sa isang pandemic ay iyong contact tracing. In fact, nandoon din iyan sa Executive Order No. 168, iyong bumuo ng IATF. Isa sa mga responsibility is really to come up with a contact tracing basic tool. Right now, may participation na ang DOST doon po sa program nga ng FASSSTER, na ngayon ay officially adopted by the IATF. Iyon nga lamang, pagdating po doon sa mga contact tracing apps, the lead agency now is the DICT. So, as far as the DOST is concerned, it is playing a supporting role and perhaps the DICT would be the appropriate agency to give us a more detailed account of what the government is doing now.

REP. ZARATE. Thank you, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker. I am now winding up my interpellation. Siguro panghuli na lang.

The DOST being also a health research institution, can the good Sponsor educate us

on what programs, his assessment on our – at this point in time, how do we assess, ang scientific community, itong problema natin sa pandemya ng COVID? I asked this because there are a lot of sometimes even conflicting pronouncements from the IATF. Sometimes, science is relegated to the sidelines sa mga responses ng ating gobyerno. So, may papel ba rito ang DOST to make science, because this a medical and health problem at kailangan natin ng scientific data rito, na sila iyong mangingibabaw especially in times of policy direction ng ating, halimbawa ng IATF, which is in charge of this pandemic interventions, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker.

REP. BIAZON. Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, kung may isang malaking papel na ginagampanan ang DOST sa COVIDo iyong laban sa COVID, ito po iyong pagiging Chair ng TWG on vaccine development. And understandably, dahil kinakabilangan ng pagsasaliksik iyang vaccine development, sila ang naatasan na maging Chair. Maliban diyan, mayroon din pong mga ibang initiative on COVID-19 ang DOST, halimbawa, particularly sa kalusugan, iyong development po ng mga medical equipment such as the local RT-PCR diagnostic kit, mayroon ho silang ginagawa rian, ay iyon pong mga design at development ng personal protective equipment and other gears. So, may papel na ginagampanan ang DOST although parang sa unang tingin po natin, parang supporting role, pero ginagampanan naman po nila iyong tungkulin na iyan ayon din sa mandate nila at sa kanilang expertise. Mayroon din po silang mga initiative on kabuhayan in relation to those affected by COVID-19. Halimbawa po, iyong pagbuo ng mga programa tungkol sa kabuhayan na agri-aqua, so mayroon din po silang pagsasaliksik diyan. For order in handling COVID, iyong gaya po noong nabanggit kanina, iyong contact tracing, may involvement din po sila diyan. So, iyan po ay mga kontribusyon ng DOST tungkol po sa efforts natin sa COVID-19.

REP. ZARATE. Thank you, Mr. Sponsor,

Mr. Speaker. I just wish na dahil nag-agree naman tayo na hindi ito ang una at ang huli na ganitong klaseng pandemya na ating kakaharapin—in fact, kahit sa usapin ng iba pang mga natural disasters, iyong “Big One” na sinasabi natin—magiging mas proactive din ang DOST dahil sila iyong premier department on science and technology.

Now, iyong agham, iyong siyensya ay talagang iyong pagbabatayan natin in the presence of—especially ngayon na kumakalat iyong mga fake news, iyong mga pseudo-scientific practices in response to the pandemic and other misconceptions, for example, on how a vaccine will be developed para panggamot, na ispreyan mo lang ng insecticides, ng gasoline, mga ganoon. Kasi if the science community will just keep its silence on this, marami pong mag-iisip na puwede palang gawin iyon at mas napakadelikado. Kaya ko po itinatanong iyon dahil napakalaki talaga ng papel ng sektor ng agham. And I also wish that in the future ay isang gulugod, sa tingin ng Kinatawang ito, na ng pag-unlad ng Pilipinas ay kung paano rin natin paunlarin ang ating research and development, our science and technology, just like our neighboring countries. If we will not give the necessary budget to this Department para paunlarin ang ating siyensya at teknolohiya, ang ating agham, ay talagang sa malapit na hinaharap ay mananatili tayo na ganito, umaasa na lamang sa kakarampot na budget at ang ating mga siyentista, ang ating mga scholars, taon-taon nagpo-produce tayo ng mga scholars, mga siyentista, ay lumalabas din ng bansa dahil wala silang makitang fulfillment kung nandito sila sa Pilipinas. At iyong mga naiwan ay frustrated din dahil hindi sinusupportahan ng Estado ang kanilang sektor. Kulang sa suporta iyong sektor ng siyensya, teknolohiya at agham.

So, iyon lang po ang gusto kong maipabatid sa ating kagalang-galang na Sponsor at sa ating Departamento dahil taon-taon na lang, sa ating pagtatalakay ng budget ng DOST ay bumabalik at bumabalik ang ganitong mga usapin habang—gaya nito, sa taong 2020 ay bigla tayong nabulabog, nabulaga at nahambalos ng ganitong napakalaking problema na kalakhan ang solusyon ay nanggaling sa sektor ng

siyensya at teknolohiya. So, maraming salamat, Ginoong Sponsor, Mr. Speaker, again, for the opportunity to clarify some points on the budget of the Department of Science and Technology.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

REP. BIAZON. As a final response, Mr. Speaker, tulad po ng nasabi ng ating kasamahan, tayo ay may pagkukulang pa pagdating sa pagsuporta ng pondo. Pero isa pong good news, to the credit of our scientists, we now rank No. 50 out of 131 countries in the Global Innovation Index, and we are one of four countries cited as having made significant progress in the Innovation Index. So, nandoon ho iyong potential. If we give the support, we can rise higher.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal). Thank you very much to our very hardworking colleague, the Honorable Zarate.

Majority Leader.

REP. DELOS SANTOS. Mr. Speaker, I move to recognize the honorable Deputy Speaker Loren Legarda of the Lone District of Antique.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal). The honorable Deputy Speaker Loren Legarda of the Lone District of Antique is hereby recognized.

REP. LEGARDA. Thank you very much, esteemed colleagues. Mr. Speaker, honorable Chair, Congressman Biazon, I have a few questions and I thank the good Sponsor.

I have been observing our predecessors and I wanted to focus, first and foremost, on the vulnerability of the Philippines. It is clear that the global economy and humanity as a whole have been direly affected by COVID-19. It is also said that climate change and extreme weather events will even be worse, be more intense and more frequent, and the effects of this on a vulnerable nation like the Philippines, an archipelagic and maritime nation at that, will even have worse and more adverse impacts.

In 2015, we, in Congress, passed the PAGASA Modernization Act. It has been five years, Mr. Speaker. May I know whether the full-scale breadth, finances, and resources available have been given to the PAGASA Modernization Act that was meant to upgrade the physical resources and the operational techniques through the acquisition of state-of-the-art instruments, equipment, facilities, to improve the capability for timely and reliable forecasting, not just in vulnerable areas of our country but all over the Philippines? It also meant to enhance research and development capability, establish regional weather service centers and the PAGASA data center to enhance weather data collection and, of course, information dissemination services, and to create a human resource development program. And let me just note the improvement or the upscaling of the salary scale of PAGASA personnel so we can attract the best minds to be able to lead us to reducing disaster risks.

So, I could go on and on about this law which I principally authored five years ago as Senator. Now, as a Representative, with the 300 esteemed colleagues fighting for the budget of research and development, I would like to find out whether the depth of our debates have found fruition in the full funding of the PAGASA Modernization Act. I take note that in 2020, this year's GAA, the budget of PAGASA is a mere P1.4 billion. I take note as well that in the NEP of 2021, it is merely P1.741 billion approximately, and this is what percentage of a P4.5-trillion budget? If my math is correct, the budget of PAGASA, modernized or not modernized, is 0.038 percent of the P4.5 trillion budget. I will go to the DOST later and its various programs. Again, just like in the DTI earlier, we pay lip service and say we value micro enterprises. We pay lip service and pass important legislation, the Innovation Act, and the DOST is part of it. Now, I would like to know whether the PAGASA Modernization Act has actually been fully financed with the resources available. Mr. Chair, I submit.

REP. BIAZON. Thank you, my distinguished colleague who also used to be a colleague of my father in the Senate.

Mr. Speaker, PAGASA is happy to report that the amount of P3 billion for modernization has been given to them and there are accomplishments that have been done. An example would be the installation of a radar that would enable them to make more accurate weather forecasting. They have also installed a disaster recovery system. And in summary, Mr. Speaker, PAGASA is reporting good news that the law that was passed by our distinguished colleague has borne fruit.

REP. LEGARDA. Thank you for that statement and I am happy for that relatively good news. But may I be accurately informed if each element of this modernization program, Mr. Speaker, is actually being funded? Are the physical resources and operational equipment, state-of-the-art instruments actually funded? Do we have PAGASA data centers and weather service centers in regional areas of the country?

REP. BIAZON. Yes, Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, there have been funds allocated for this purpose. The only thing that is not yet fully implemented are those that refer to human resources. Discussion is still ongoing with the Department of Budget and Management to complete that program, Mr. Speaker.

REP. LEGARDA. So, I am happy to note, Mr. Speaker, that you say and PAGASA validates that every region has a state-of-the-art regional weather service center and a PAGASA data center, data collection has been enhanced, and information dissemination up to the LGU level, whether province or LGU city, municipality and perhaps at the barangay level, already exists so that the issues of CCAM and DRR for resilience, to simplify, are actually implemented and PAGASA has the technical arm that should operationalize the NDRRM Law, which your father sponsored in the Senate. Are we able to say that the PAGASA Modernization Act of five years ago is sufficiently funded and, therefore, implemented faithfully to the essence of the law?

REP. BIAZON. Yes, Mr. Speaker, as

PAGASA reports now, they are happy to say that they have been sufficiently funded, as based on the spirit of the law, with that exception that this Representation mentioned with regard to the human resources program, but that is being discussed now with the Department of Budget and Management. And one more thing that would probably need more enhancement is the flood forecasting, which is being looked into by PAGASA now. Otherwise, they report that there is sufficient funding to comply with the law.

REP. LEGARDA. Well, I am glad to hear that. For the first time, I hear a government agency that is not complaining about its NEP allocation.

Let me just proceed with the recently granted GCF grant, and this is not a loan, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Chair; it is a grant. As a member of the board of the Green Climate Fund, I am happy to note that we were able, in our last board meeting, pre-COVID in Korea, we secured a \$10-million grant for PAGASA for the establishment of an advanced forecasting and early warning system in at least four hazard-prone project sites: Tuguegarao, for severe wind and flood; Legazpi, severe wind and flood; Palo, Leyte, for storm surge and severe wind; and New Bataan in Davao de Oro for landslide and severe wind.

May I know whether the processes for PAGASA to receive this Green Climate Fund grant, which this Representation worked on for so long, are actually moving insofar as the snail's pace of the bureaucracy is going? An additional \$10 million has to be "counterparted" by the national government for a total project cost of \$20 million. So, this is a PAGASA grant in these four project sites and this was granted. I would like to know whether PAGASA, along with LANDBANK, which is the accredited entity of the GCF, is supporting it and whether it has moved at all from the board meeting when we approved it.

REP. BIAZON. Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, unfortunately, this one is still under discussion with LANDBANK, so the Green Climate Fund has still to be received by the

DOST, I mean through PAGASA. It is just one snag that we hit. With regard to all these positive news, this one is still under discussion with LANDBANK.

REP. LEGARDA. Oh, may I know, Mr. Speaker, whether there is any reluctance on the Philippine government to receive a grant, not even a loan, from the Green Climate Fund? Because other countries have received grants, including Mongolia, Vietnam, Bangladesh, and we worked so hard for the Philippines to receive a grant. PAGASA claims, because they gave the proposal several years ago, it is a much-needed project. If it is not being worked on by the Philippine government in its maze of bureaucratic red tape, may this Representation know, as one of the board members that pushed for the inclusion of the Philippine project, where lies the snag, if I may ask?

REP. BIAZON. Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, the Green Climate Fund was made available or the offer was made available last year and the discussion was going on until right before the pandemic. So, we can say that this is one of those programs that have been sidetracked because of this pandemic. But talks were going on. There is no reluctance, it is just a matter of the process of negotiation or discussion with LANDBANK. They were just sidetracked by the ongoing pandemic quarantine.

REP. LEGARDA. We take note of that. Thank you for your response, Mr. Speaker.

May I proceed now from PAGASA to the DOST itself and perhaps a little-known organization, but the most important or one of the most important councils populated by the brightest minds, and I am referring to the National Research Council of the Philippines, perhaps the oldest scientific or collegial scientific organization that does basic research in the sciences towards scientific and technological advancement. It is an attached agency of the DOST and it is an advisory body to Congress, to both Houses of Congress. It was in the last two years of my term that NRCP scientists and experts came to my office

to tell me about the sad state of funding – near nil. So, at that time, it was very late in the budgetary process but I was able to include some budgetary insertions or amendments at that time.

May I know if – I see that their allocation from the NEP is a measly P90 million. For the best minds of science doing advising for 300 Congressmen and 24 Senators, for the oldest scientific organization to have a measly budget of P90 million for research and development, I must be seeing wrong, Mr. Speaker. If my eyes are not seeing wrong, then there must be something wrong with our budget to give such a small budget to the oldest collegial scientific organization. In the last three years, the research budget of the Council has stood at P18 million, Mr. Speaker, 1-8. Ang isa pong farm-to-market road, ang minimum allocation ay P12 million sa isang barangay. Ito po, sa pinakamatatalino, pinakamagagaling na siyentipiko sa ating bansa, sa buong taon, ang ibinibigay din po natin ay P18 million. This represents 0.3 percent of the total DOST R&D budget and considered to be the lowest among the councils in the DOST. There are more than 4,000 researchers, scientists nationwide, including both national and local governments, universities, State universities, and stakeholders being served. Under the current budget, I believe, this year, it is P72 million for the whole year. May we know, Mr. Speaker, why are we treating our scientists this way? Why is the budget of such an important council, a collegial organization of scientists who can foster linkages with international scientific organizations, sharing of scientific information, who can give linkages with local governments to reduce disaster risk, who can promote scientific and technological innovations in all sectors of society – may I just be enlightened? Mr. Chair, Mr. Speaker, we claim that we have increased by how many notches in the Global Innovation Index but not with such a measly allocation for the scientific community represented by the National Research Council.

REP. BIAZON. Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, let me quote Secretary Dela Peña. He said a while ago, “remarkable increase,”

and he was describing the increase from the budget allocated in 2020, this year, which is P92 million, to 2021’s P144 million. Indeed, it is a far cry from what it was years ago and we wish we could give more. But the increase that was given now is significant and they are working with the Department of Budget and Management, of course, in order to get what is due our scientists. But for now, it is a piece of good news that there is such an increase.

REP. LEGARDA. When the increase comes to near nil, Mr. Speaker – well, we are grateful. Let me just state as well that in 2020, that P91.8 million, P20 million of that was my amendment and, therefore, the budget in the NEP was much lower than P91 million.

May I also cite what I did in the DTI budget. If you agree, Congressman Biazon, I hope you do, that at the proper time, with your leadership as Chair in defending the budget, we must do so not for districts but a national amendment to the GAB to improve this sector of the national scientists in the NRCP so that they will receive more than P144.5 million. Only if you agree, and I hope that I have the support of my esteemed colleague.

REP. BIAZON. Yes, Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague.

Of course, in principle, this Representation agrees and we would be taking measures or steps to make that proposal. As mentioned in the earlier interpellations of our other colleagues, there are initiatives to help the DOST and, of course, the advocacy of the distinguished Lady is something that I do agree with. And therefore, at the appropriate time, we will make that recommendation.

REP. LEGARDA. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There is another important agency under the DOST and that is the ITDI. May I know whether the ITDI, the Industrial Technology Development Institute, can help insofar as even in brickmaking. Kami po sa Antique, marami ang clay sa lupa kaya tumutulong po ang DOST-ITDI sa paggawa ng bricks. Through the University of Antique ay nag-allocate ako noong ako ay Senador pa para sa

UA, para magkaroon ng brickmaking facility. Sigurado po ako, ang ITDI ay makakatulong sa iba't ibang mga probinsya at distrito para makapagbigay ng tulong kung anuman ang natural resource na available doon. So, I see that in 2020 NEP, there was a P540-million GAA budget. Instead of increasing in the NEP of 2021, it went back to P420 million; more than P120 million was slashed. If we say that we support research and development, should we not increase the budget since the whole budget, in toto, has increased by almost P500 million? But something as important as the ITDI under the DOST received a slash in the NEP in 2021 to P421 million. May I know, Mr. Speaker, what is the reason for the non-increase, in fact, for the decrease of the budget of an important project, an important agency under the DOST?

REP. BIAZON. Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, the reduction in the budget of the ITDI, as we compare 2020 to 2021, is due to the completion of the infrastructure projects that were carried out in 2020. And since there was no need for additional infra for 2021, there were no funds allocated for that. So, the reduction is due to the fact that infra projects were implemented for the year 2020.

REP. LEGARDA. Thank you for that, Mr. Speaker.

I would proceed now to the PTRI.

I worked very closely in the past decade or more with the Philippine Textile Research Institute since the Tropical Fabric Law was passed into law in my first term in 2003. While the agency that is mandated to implement this very important law that I authored in 1998 and passed almost the full term of five years is under the Department of Agriculture, under PhilFIDA, but clearly the PTRI is one of the implementing agencies, along with PhilFIDA. May I know how has the PTRI been actively involved in the propagation of the production of Philippine textiles, in the implementation of the Philippine Tropical Fabric Law, and in innovating the use of natural resources like bamboo, abaca, cotton, banana, even the barks of trees, both for textile and for natural dye? We have countries like Laos that have areas

called "Luang Prabang" where they have weavers and natural dye centers with the lowest kind of technology – slow fashion – but have really attracted tourists, not just from Asia, but from all over the world, and have weaving centers by the Mekong River. May I know whether the PTRI has such a vision, has such a budget so that it can work closely with the PhilFIDA in the implementation of the Tropical Fabric Law which has been there for 17 years and should be implemented by now in every rural weaving community.

REP. BIAZON. Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, on the point of reduction of the budget of the said Institute, in 2020, this year, their Capital Outlays was P31 million and for 2021, it was given only P3 million and that accounts for the reduction. But as to the vision of developing the textile industry of the country, the Institute, the DOST, fully agrees with the distinguished Lady and we would see them continue to do that mandate.

REP. LEGARDA. Mr. Speaker, I am grateful to you for your candor and transparency, saying, "The budget has been cut, but we share your vision." That will not feed stomachs, that will not create jobs and spur economic productivity and rural livelihood, Mr. Speaker, with all due respect, and I am grateful to you for your transparency and candor.

I would like to see the blossoming of weaving centers all over the country and we have to see cotton farms and ginning, and spinning machines, backstrap looms and upright looms. We want to see indigo plantations where we can harvest, dry and utilize them for natural dye. We want to see abaca plantations and bamboo being utilized not just against soil erosion but also for textile. So, there is so much possibility. I do not see why the PTRI is not being given the kind of support that it deserves when it can really be part of the post-COVID-19 pandemic recovery by providing livelihoods along with PhilFIDA of the DA, along with the programs of DTI MSME Development Fund and the OTOP Fund, and the SSF of the DTI. I had a hearing before with all the MSME sector of various agencies and clearly, we should see a

convergence, especially in the post-COVID-19 pandemic recovery, so we spur vulnerable rural livelihoods and create a million jobs from this, Mr. Speaker.

Again, at the proper time, would I have the support of Your Honor, so that we should present a budget to increase or perhaps even rationalize the PAGASA modernization, to make sure that it is attuned to the five-year-old law, and second, that we will have support for the PTRI in the implementation of the Tropical Fabric Law as well as a support for our scientists and technological experts of the National Research Council of the Philippines? I would like to seek the wisdom and the support of the good Sponsor.

REP. BIAZON. Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, this Representation has joined a group of other legislators, actually initiated by our young Gentleman from Pangasinan, the honorable Rep. Toff De Venecia, and we invite the distinguished Lady to join us when we prepare the communication which would give that recommendation of putting more funds to certain aspects of science and technology, which include, by the way, the Textile Research Institute, and at the appropriate time, have it considered by not just the Committee on Appropriations but the plenary as well.

REP. LEGARDA. Yes, Mr. Chair. In fact, I am with you and we are grateful to our young leader, Congressman Toff, for that. I wanted to put it on record. It is not difficult to traverse the budget. I have been doing it for seven years. It is a matter of allocating. These are measly amounts, Mr. Speaker, compared to the P4.5 trillion budget, but the effect it will have, the domino effect in the grassroots will be tremendous. With that, I terminate my question because no matter how long I talk, I do not think it would be commensurate or it would translate to actual budget being allocated for the agencies and the advocacies. But I thank you for your answers and I welcome the DOST family and its attached agencies. I wish I still had the power to add to your budget which I did before, but we are a big bloc now and I hope that we have the support of our colleagues. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal). Thank you very much, Deputy Speaker Loren Legarda.

Majority Leader.

REP. AGLIPAY. Mr. Speaker, I would like to recognize the Hon. Mark Go of the Lone District of Baguio City to interpellate the Sponsor.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal). The Hon. Mark Go, Representative of the Lone District of Baguio, is hereby recognized for his interpellation.

Hon. Mark Go, are you online?

REP. AGLIPAY. Mr. Speaker, Hon. Mark Go is not responding online. May we shift to—I move to recognize the honorable Sr. Dep. Minority Leader Janette Garin of Iloilo for her interpellation.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal). Inasmuch that the Hon. Mark Go is not responding as he is not online, the honorable Minority Leader ...

REP. GO (M.). Mr. Speaker, I am here. Mr. Speaker, this is Go.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal). Okay. You are just in time, before the Honorable Garin could take the floor. So, the Chair reconsiders the recognition extended to the honorable Minority Leader Janette Garin and instead recognizes the Hon. Mark Go. You can go ahead with your interpellation.

REP. GO (M.). Thank you, thank you, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor. Magandang gabi po sa ating lahat.

Unang-una po, I would like to commend the performance of the Department of Science and Technology in terms of its programs, as measured by the improvement in the rank, from as high as 100th out of so many countries and right now, in 2019, they are ranked 54th. I think this is a major milestone as far as the DOST is concerned.

My question here is—Mr. Chair, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor, I worked before for

a semiconductor company and one of the concerns that I raised while I was working there was the fact that the raw materials that we used were mostly imported. The value added is not as much as we expected because we do not have the necessary materials transformed into finished products to be used in this business. Now, I would like to find out from the DOST if they have sufficient knowledge of the business of semiconductor or electronics in the country and how they can provide the support in terms of supplying our companies, probably supplying the raw materials needed for the operation of this industry, Mr. Speaker and Mr. Sponsor?

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal). The distinguished Sponsor may respond.

REP. BIAZON. Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, the raw materials used in the production of such products, as Secretary Dela Peña described it, are a bit advanced, but they have facilities where research and development could be done by companies that are interested in going into that venture. And examples of these would be the Electronic Products Development Center and the Advanced Materials Testing Lab. These can be used by semiconductor and electronic industries, distinguished colleague.

REP. GO (M.). Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor, you know, there are so many raw materials that are used by these electronics companies. If you make the chips in the Philippines, you assemble the chips, you need a lot of lead frame, gold wire, mold compound—these are the materials being used by these electronics companies. We have the raw materials of these, like gold wire.

We, in Benguet, we mine gold here and what we do with this gold is we sell them, ship them out of the country and sell them to other countries, and afterward, these are sent back to us in terms of the so-called gold wire as a finished product. The size of a gold wire, actually, in terms of thickness, is about one-eighth of the size of our hair. So, are there researches being done right now to convert this raw material, gold, even silver, into a

finished product like the lead frame that we use in the electronics industry? Are there ongoing researches now by the DOST—or any company, chartered by probably the DOST—to do this instead of importing the finished product from other countries when the materials are actually from the Philippines that are being done right now?

REP. BIAZON. Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, yes, there are ongoing researches being done under the auspices of the DOST, along with partnerships with at least several universities. And if I may give some examples, we have UP, Ateneo, DLSU, Mindanao State University, even UST. So, there are ongoing researches, Your Honor.

REP. GO (M.). How long have these researches been ongoing, Mr. Chair, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor?

REP. BIAZON. Can you repeat the question again, Your Honor.

REP. GO (M.). How long have these been going on and what is the prospect of developing these materials in the country that will supply our electronics industry?

REP. BIAZON. The DOST, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, has been doing these researches for at least about five years, since they started their PhD Program on Materials Science.

REP. GO (M.). And how much is the budget that we allocate for this? Does the Secretary feel that the budget allocated for this is sufficient to complete and to come out with more, I would say, concrete output in terms of the materials that will be used by this industry, the electronics industry?

REP. BIAZON. Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, there is an estimated, a rough figure of about P100 million allocated for the purpose although the Secretary's opinion is that we could do with more.

REP. GO (M.). Did they recommend in this budget cycle a higher budget for this purpose,

including the other researches that they are doing, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor?

REP. BIAZON. Yes, Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague. The DOST asked for more. Actually, as I opened the sponsorship earlier, I noted that the original request was about P36 billion but what was approved for their budget was P23 billion. So, this was part of those items that were not approved by the Department of Budget and Management.

REP. GO (M.). If we will focus on this important industry in the country, how much additional budget do they think we need to include in the 2021 Budget on top of what was approved by the Department of Budget and Management, which is included in the NEP, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor?

REP. BIAZON. Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, to be more specific, the DOST actually requested for about P508 million, for the Philippine Council for Industry, Energy and Emerging Technology Research and Development. And as he mentioned earlier, there was just about P100 million that was given.

REP. GO (M.). And, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker, would you recommend that we reinstate this original proposal once we go into the Second Reading of this Bill?

REP. BIAZON. Of course, Mr. Speaker. This Representation would go for more. In fact, the initiative that I mentioned earlier was precisely to gather some legislators who would make that recommendation. But again, the reality is that there is a big pie to manage and eventually, the Committee on Appropriations would also have to make a decision that would be at par with, not so far from, what the Executive is asking for.

REP. GO (M.). Thank you.

My other question is, our country is basically an agricultural country and we have seen that the agricultural sector is not providing the raw materials for our various industries. We export raw materials from the

country, from our agricultural sector, and we import finished products. Are there efforts being done by the Department of Science and Technology on how to provide, probably, for research and other necessary efforts so that we can process the agricultural products of our different industries in the country, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor?

REP. BIAZON. Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, the DOST has a new program geared towards the concern raised by Your Honor. They call it the "Smart Food Value Chain Program" and it seeks to address the concern raised by the distinguished Gentleman.

REP. GO (M.). Yes.

I am from Baguio, part of the Cordillera and Benguet. We have a lot of vegetable products here and during the rainy season, we have a lot of problems in terms of, you know, our agricultural products being destroyed. Sometimes during the summer season, also probably during December, January, and February because of the cold season, most of these products, our farmers do not even harvest them because the prices go down very, very low and it is even more expensive to harvest and sell them. I think one of the major efforts that should be done is to come up with probably a cannery or a food processing plant in the country, in this particular part of the country. Is there support that we can expect from the Department of Science and Technology to be able to process itong mga vegetables namin and other products in the area so that we can sell them as finished products, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor?

REP. BIAZON. Yes, Mr. Speaker. The DOST is right now developing the ability to do processing, including mobile processing. So, that is part of the research and development that they are doing. And with regard to storage, they even have a project being done in Benguet to address that concern, Mr. Speaker.

REP. GO (M.). Well, I think we will be happy to receive support from the DOST. Where is that located here in Benguet, in

La Trinidad? And are they now providing services to our people here in the Cordilleras as far as this processing is concerned?

REP. BIAZON. Yes, Mr. Speaker, the storage facility being developed is in La Trinidad, Benguet and there are three others around the country. But as far as the one in Benguet is concerned, it is in La Trinidad.

REP. GO (M.). And it covers the whole of the Cordillera, Mr. Speaker and Mr. Sponsor?

REP. BIAZON. For now, that would be the coverage, Mr. Speaker.

REP. GO (M.). So, we can coordinate with the Department of Science and Technology? Probably, they got also a regional office here in the CAR area.

REP. BIAZON. Yes, Mr. Speaker, the DOST would be very happy to assist.

REP. GO (M.). Do they have a separate budget for this in the 2021 proposal of the Department of Science and Technology, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor?

REP. BIAZON. This particular project, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, is taken from the 2020 budget of the DOST. And just in addition to the concern earlier, the ITDI may also give assistance to Your Honor.

REP. GO (M.). Okay. So overall, if you look at the budget of the DOST given all these programs that they have, are they happy with what was approved and included in the NEP by the Department of Budget and Management, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor?

REP. BIAZON. Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, I will not venture to ask them if they are happy, but definitely, ...

REP. GO (M.). Or I would say was there a—well ...

REP. BIAZON. ... definitely, they would want more.

REP. GO (M.). Is this—well, it is indicated here that their budget has increased from 2020, from P20.5 billion to P23.89 billion in the 2020 N-E-P or the NEP. Now, what was the original proposal of the DOST submitted to the Department of Budget and Management as against the approved P23.8 billion, Mr. Sponsor and Mr. Speaker?

REP. BIAZON. Yes, Mr. Speaker. The proposal of the DOST was P36 billion and P23 billion was approved.

REP. GO (M.). And if we will be given the chance to recommend an increase in the budget, how much do you think, you know, will you have for 2021?

REP. BIAZON. Mr. Speaker, the DOST, in a letter to legislators, is asking for the restoration of about P7.144 billion, if we can grant them that.

REP. GO (M.). So that—yes, so that would mean that they want about P30 plus billion for 2021?

REP. BIAZON. Rounded off, Mr. Speaker, yes, about P31 billion.

REP. GO (M.). And they can perform or they can do all the programs that they have indicated in this budget once they get that P30 billion?

REP. BIAZON. Yes, Your Honor.

REP. GO (M.). Okay. Mr. Chair, I mean, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor, I would like to state that I support the increase in the budget of the DOST from this P23 billion to roughly P30 billion for 2021. So again, thank you very much and good evening to everybody.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal). Thank you very much, the Honorable Go. Your recommendations are duly noted.
Majority Leader.

REP. AGLIPAY. Mr. Speaker, I move for a few minutes suspension.

I withdraw that motion, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal).
Yes, you go ahead, Majority Leader.

REP. AGLIPAY. Mr. Speaker, I move to recognize the Senior Minority Leader, the Hon. Janette L. Garin of the First District of Iloilo for her interpellation of the Sponsor.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal).
The Hon. Janette Garin, Senior Deputy Minority Leader, from the First District of Iloilo, is recognized.

REP. GARIN (J.). Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, if the honorable Sponsor would be willing to yield to a few questions.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal).
Mr. Sponsor, what is your pleasure?

REP. BIAZON. Gladly, Mr. Speaker.

REP. GARIN (J.). Mr. Speaker, we have read and heard the news that the Sputnik vaccine developed by a certain company will also have its Phase 2 or Phase 3 trial together with the Department of Science and Technology. May we have the confirmation with regard to this.

REP. BIAZON. Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, the DOST has entered into a confidential disclosure agreement with the said company.

REP. GARIN (J.). Thank you for that, Mr. Speaker, distinguished Sponsor.

Would the government be spending public funds on this or are we purely contributing our technical experts?

REP. BIAZON. The Philippine government will not spend on the venture, distinguished colleague, Mr. Speaker.

REP. GARIN (J.). Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleagues, do we understand that in all the undertakings for vaccine development,

no government fund will be spent on this, except for our contribution with regard to our technical experts?

REP. BIAZON. Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, the government will be spending on the WHO vaccine Solidarity trials.

REP. GARIN (J.). Pardon me, Mr. Speaker?

REP. BIAZON. The World Health Organization Solidarity trials, that is where the government will be spending money.

REP. GARIN (J.). Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, can we be apprised on this Solidarity trials? We will be spending how much? What will be our contribution? Are these from private companies?

REP. BIAZON. Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, Secretary Dela Peña has informed me that for the WHO Solidarity trials, an amount of P89 million would be spent and it will go to the Philippine General Hospital.

REP. GARIN (J.). I am sorry, Mr. Speaker, I think—for the WHO Solidarity trials, how much will we be spending?

REP. BIAZON. We will be spending the amount of P89 million through the PGH, which would also be shared with other hospitals.

REP. GARIN (J.). And what will we gain from this, Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague? Will the Solidarity trial be beneficial to our country, and to what extent, and how?

REP. BIAZON. Our gain from this, Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, is that the best competitors for the vaccine or developers are part of the Solidarity trials. So, we will be able to gain from that development because of the quality of the vaccine that would be coming out from the best.

REP. GARIN (J.). Mr. Speaker, distinguished

Sponsor, will that translate to discounts? Because these vaccine-manufacturing plants are all private corporations so, if the government will be spending like – was I right in hearing – P89 million for the development of vaccines, will it be coming back to us in the form of subsidized COVID-19 vaccines?

REP. BIAZON. The benefit really, Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, is that we will be able to get the best of the results of a vaccine trial because it will be done in the Philippines where the conditions that are best for our use are available to the trials. So, more or less, we can say that it would be suited to the conditions in the country and, therefore, it would be easier for us to choose eventually what vaccine for us to take.

REP. GARIN (J.). Yes. Mr. Speaker, distinguished Sponsor. Do you mean to say that the Phase 3 trial of the specific vaccines will only be done in the Philippines or will it be involving other countries as well?

REP. BIAZON. The vaccine trials, Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, is going to be done in 80 countries, one of which is the Philippines and, of course, the results of the trials in the Philippines, we can say that is suited to the conditions in our country.

REP. GARIN (J.). Because, Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, with due courtesy, my understanding when we talk about Phase 3 clinical trials will be more on the efficacy of a vaccine and by efficacy, that would depend on the response of the individuals, not the setting of the country. The trigger there is the number of people infected so that you will have positive samples vis-à-vis a control population.

I hope you will not mind, Mr. Speaker, distinguished Sponsor, I am asking this question because I do know that our country is one of the countries with the best experts on vaccinology. We have a lot of good researchers. We have a lot of good scientists. They are actually resources of our country, so much so that with many vaccines from private companies and even governments that would

have their clinical trials in our country, we do not spend any centavo. In fact, it is our scientists, our experts and our country that are being paid by pharmaceuticals because these are private endeavors. Ibig sabihin po natin, iyong mga kompanya na gumagawa ng bakuna, kapag natatapos ang bakuna, iyan po ay ibinebenta nila and the price is, actually, dependent on the status of a country, whether you are a developed country, you are developing country or you are supposed to be a subsidized country. That is why the best that we can give is the service of our people. And since time immemorial, talking about the polio vaccine, the BCG vaccine for tuberculosis, even the hepa vaccine, even the malaria vaccine, even the HIV vaccine that we are developing, the diphtheria tetanus vaccine, the Japanese encephalitis vaccine, and even the dengue vaccine, the expense was or is being paid for by the pharmaceutical companies, not by the country. Because in our situation, Mr. Speaker, distinguished Sponsor, the mere fact that our scientists and our experts are already contributing their efforts and their wisdom is already a big contribution of our country.

I do know that P89 million is a very small fund if you talk about vaccine development, that would be to the tune of billions of pesos or in fact, billions of dollars. My only dilemma here is that we should actually be using our resources and our experts as our contribution, and in fact our scientists should be paid by pharmaceutical companies. Because what I know, in terms of vaccine development, kapag po nagagawa na po ang bakuna, hindi naman po tayo nabibigyan ng discount. We still pay what the other countries pay because we are already a middle-income country. That is just my thought on that, Mr. Speaker, distinguished Sponsor, na baka naman mas puwedeng magamit natin iyong pondo doon sa mga iilang pangangailangan, and instead, this multinational companies should be paying our government, our experts, and our scientists simply because that is what is being practiced previously, even with other countries.

REP. BIAZON. Well, Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, one of the things

that kind of justifies this venture is that we also want to be assured of the availability of the vaccine that will be developed. The funds that are appropriated for this would be paid to those involved in the trials, not necessarily to buy the vaccines for the trials. It will be paid to persons who are involved in the trials.

REP. GARIN (J.). I am sorry, Mr. Speaker, distinguished Sponsor, the budget would be used for?

REP. BIAZON. It will be paid to those persons who are involved in the trials and not to buy that vaccines which are going to be used in the trials, ...

REP. GARIN (J.). Yes, precisely, Mr. Speaker.

REP. BIAZON. ... to persons involved.

REP. GARIN (J.). Yes, precisely, Mr. Speaker, distinguished Sponsor, payment of subjects ...

REP. BIAZON. Yes.

REP. GARIN (J.). ... during trials are actually covered by the manufacturer or the pharmaceutical to that effect, or in some cases, developed countries like Japan, the US or the European Union would put in some investment on that vaccine, then they pay for it.

My only dilemma is that in this pandemic where we still do not know hanggang saan tayo nito aabot, bakit ba kailangang gobyerno natin ang magbigay, maglaan ng P100 million or P90 million for vaccine development? Because merely offering our country as a trial for site development, for vaccine development is already a big contribution. The mere fact that we are offering our country as a venue for the Phase 3 or Phase 2-B trial is already a big contribution because that amount can be used by the Department of Science and Technology for local developments, just like what Deputy Speaker Loren Legarda was saying earlier. Puwede nating gamitin sa development ng mga produkto na nasa

Pilipinas like the experiments on virgin coconut oil, what we have discovered with sambong, the other herbal concoctions and medicines, and even the scientists who are actually innovating purely Philippine-made remedies and innovations.

REP. BIAZON. Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, the Philippines has chosen to go by the track of WHO-guided trials, with the WHO protocols. While it is true that there are other vaccine developers that would even want to pay, at this point they are mostly not part of the WHO Solidarity trials and the choice of the Philippines, of the government, was to go through a track that would be sticking to, or would be in line with the WHO protocols on these trials.

REP. GARIN (J.). With due courtesy, Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, all vaccines undergoing development are part of the WHO collaboration simply because any vaccine being developed, a WHO representative or technical expert or technical panel is usually with them side-by-side, especially in this case that there is a pandemic and the emergency use of some commodities and devices are expected. May I inquire, the WHO collaboration will actually be involving which vaccines and which companies?

REP. BIAZON. At this point, Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, the DOST is still awaiting the announcement of the specific companies for vaccines involved but we do have a Filipino expert in the WHO panel.

REP. GARIN (J.). May we get, Mr. Speaker, distinguished Sponsor, the vaccine expert, the members of the vaccine expert panel insofar as this collaboration is concerned.

REP. BIAZON. Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, the panel is composed of international experts and if, Your Honor, is interested in the name of the Filipino, it is Nina Gloriani.

REP. GARIN (J.). Pardon me, Mr. Speaker, distinguished Sponsor.

REP. BIAZON. The name is Nina Gloriani.

REP. GARIN (J.). And this is the vaccine expert panel created under the sub-technical working group? Because I do not think, Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, somebody hired by the WHO can be involved in a local project. Because they are supposed to be on a neutral side; they are overseeing. They serve as an oversight committee in terms of vaccine development. There is no room for biases in this case. Ang sa akin lang po naman, Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleagues, while I do accept the wisdom of vaccine development and that vaccination saves lives, kailangang-kailangan po natin iyan—I myself, having been trained in Advanced Vaccinology, believe in the wisdom of research and vaccinology. My only dilemma here is that especially at this point in time where we are in a pandemic, bakit naman po iyong bansa natin na hindi gaanong kasing-yaman ng iba at masasabi nating mas mahirap tayo kumpara sa iba, bakit naman po tayo ay gagastos doon sa development ng vaccine especially when it comes to the payment of honoraria for subjects in a trial?

I have never heard of a private company and I do not even think there is a precedent that our government will have to pay for this because we are not part of those private companies nor are we investors. Para pong ang ibig sabihin niyan, mayroong pribadong kompanya, gumawa ng bakuna, even if they are endorsed by the Department of Foreign Affairs, it is a trade issue. Kaya nga po, sa dami-dami ng bakuna where trials were conducted in the Philippines, it was always because we had the experts but our experts will remain non-biased, paid by all participating pharmaceuticals. Kaya po, ang sa akin lang naman po is, sa panahon ngayon na kailangang-kailangan din natin ng pondo, why do we have to pay for vaccine development where in fact our experts alone, our scientists alone is already a big contribution, and the mere fact that our country is allowing Phase 3 or Phase 2-B of those trials is already a big contribution?

REP. BIAZON. Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, as to the question bakit natin pinili

itong track na ito, number one, ito po ay isang trial na isinasagawa sa 80 bansa sa ilalim po ng direction or auspices ng WHO; number two, dito po, mayroon tayong assurance of availability; number three, ang binabayaran po naman ay iyong mga subjects as mentioned earlier, hindi naman po iyong company who is involved in the trials, at dito rin po sa track na ito, mayroon din ho tayong participation, in the sense na mayroong Filipino expert in the panel who would do the evaluation na, of course; number four, kagaya ng nabanggit kanina, having the trials here in the country would give us the sense na suited to our environment and people iyong dine-develop na vaccine.

REP. GARIN (J.). Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, with due courtesy, there is no such thing as developing a vaccine commensurate to the terrain of the Philippines. Because when we develop a vaccine, we look at an area where there are a lot of infections. Kasi kung wala naman pong presence ng virus sa panahon na iyan—kaya nga po na kung dati-rati is inuna sa China, now vaccine development is happening in areas where there are infections. I do agree that we are not paying the company but we are paying and we will be paying the subjects of this trial. Again, that is an expense of the pharmaceutical company. Bakit po ba popondohan ng pera ng Republika ng Pilipinas ang negosyo ng pharmaceuticals? Moreover, Mr. Speaker, distinguished Sponsor, when we talk about the availability of a vaccine during a pandemic, allocation is not in any way affected by venues of clinical trials. Allocation is almost always based on reservation and as a global organization, biases in terms of distribution are never allowed under the auspices of the World Health Organization.

So, I do respect our distinguished Sponsor, Mr. Speaker. I have high regard for our honorable Secretary and the DOST family as well as my distinguished colleagues here who have worked for a long time, but I just want to put it on record. In the whole history of the Republic of the Philippines, we were part of several trials because we have a lot of scientists and we have a lot of experts. But never in the history of the Republic of the

Philippines, or any developing country for that matter, never have we contributed or invested in vaccine development involving a private pharmaceutical dahil mas kailangan po ng taumbayan na ang pera ng Republika ng Pilipinas ay ibinibigay. So my appeal, Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, is that the DOST would put a rider or a provision that in the conduct of this COVID vaccine trials, any peso invested by the government, any peso spent by the Department of Science and Technology, will redound back to us as a discount once the vaccine is commercially available.

Ibig po nating sabihin, kapag naging available ang vaccine sa merkado at 'pag bumili ang Department of Health or ang gobyerno ng Republika ng Pilipinas, kung magkano ang ginastos ng Pilipinas that should be taken as an automatic discount. Because I bet my head on this, that price that we will be getting is the same price that will be offered to other countries, because the prices of vaccines are regulated depending on the socioeconomic status of a country. Socialized po ang presyo ng bakuna. It is subsidized by the rich countries so that poor countries like those in Africa will be paying only 10 to 25 percent of the cost. But the Philippines, because we are already a middle-income country, we pay in full. And that is why it pains me to see that we will be investing a hundred million, more or less, or even more, to private companies developing this vaccine, where in fact, the DOST family has a lot of other needs.

So, ang pakiusap ko lang po is that the honorable Sponsor be willing, if we approve this budget, we place as a special provision that any money spent by our government should be considered as a discount that the pharmaceutical or the company will be giving back to our country when we start procuring the vaccine. Kasi hindi po maganda na maging precedent ngayon na sa gitna ng pandemya, naglalagay tayo ng milyong-milyong pera para gastusan ang research na ang makikinabang naman ay isang pribadong kompanya. If the honorable Sponsor, Mr. Speaker, will agree to my proposal, I know it is something that has not been done but I also know and I am sure that in all the vaccines that underwent

trials in the Philippines, the government never spent a thing. In fact, we are even paid to do that because we are allowing our government resources to be used.

Moving forward, Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, there is a very laudable project, the Philippine Virology Center. May we inquire as to the total budget required for this project.

REP. BIAZON. Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, although an amount of P300 million has been set aside for the virology center, of course, it would only come to fruition if the law is passed creating the center.

REP. GARIN (J.). So, Mr. Speaker, distinguished Sponsor, wala pa po ang batas na ito o tapos na po ang batas na ito?

REP. BIAZON. Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, it has not yet been passed into law. Isa pa rin pa ho siyang proposal na pinag-uusapan dito mismo sa *Camara de Representante*.

REP. GARIN (J.). And how much is the total budget requirement in terms of infrastructure, manpower, initial maintenance and operating expenditure? Magkano po ang suma total na kakailanganin para magamit naman iyong Philippine Virology Center?

REP. BIAZON. Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, a total amount of about P800 million is needed to start up the virology center. The P300 million is with the DOST, while the P500 million is part of the Build, Build, Build portfolio under the DPWH. Again, if Congress would be able to fast-track the passage of the law, this appropriation will not go to waste.

REP. GARIN (J.). Mr. Speaker, correct me if I am wrong, did I hear you right that the total budget needed is only P800 million? Is that the total budget needed?

REP. BIAZON. That is the amount incorporated into the DOST budget, P300 million, and then P500 million is with the DPWH.

REP. GARIN (J.). Yes. My question, Mr. Speaker, distinguished Sponsor, magkano po ang suma total na kailangan natin to make the Philippine Virology Center function? If the P500 million is for infrastructure, what is the P300 million for?

REP. BIAZON. The initial estimate, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, is about P2 billion.

REP. GARIN (J.). Pardon me, Mr. Speaker.

REP. BIAZON. It is about P2 billion, kung lahat-lahat na po.

REP. GARIN (J.). So, we need P2 billion for the establishment of a Philippine Virology Center. Currently, P500 million has been earmarked to build the structure, and P300 million would be for the maintenance? Will it be for human resource, MOOE? Para saan po, Mr. Speaker, distinguished Sponsor ang P300 million?

REP. BIAZON. Yes, initially, Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, those are the amounts na estimated pero nasa atin din po pagdating ng pagpasa ng batas na ma-establish siya, usually, mayroon din namang appropriations clause iyong mga batas na iyan para po doon sa mga kakailanganin pa, pero sa pansamantala, sa simula, ito ho iyong naisantabi nang pondo para sa pagsisimula ng virology center.

REP. GARIN (J.). So, the P300 million will be for infrastructure or para saan po ang P300 million, Mr. Speaker?

REP. BIAZON. It is for the initial R&D and sa operations.

REP. GARIN (J.). It is for the operations, so this will be used for hiring of manpower.

REP. BIAZON. That would – the soft component, yes, Mr. Speaker.

REP. GARIN (J.). My dilemma there is that, Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, kung mayroon na po tayong P300 million

para mag-hire ng mga tao na magtatrabaho or scientists for the Philippine Virology Center pero wala pa po ang imprastruktura, wala pa ang kagamitan, ay baka po hindi ito magamit. I mean, what assurance do we have? And now we are being told that there is no law yet. So, what assurance do we have that the more or less P800 million allocated for the Philippine Virology Center will not become a white elephant? Kasi napakarami po ng pangangailangan ng Department of Science and Technology, bakit naman po hindi natin, una – I mean, I do agree that we are in pandemic mode right now and being in pandemic mode, we have to sacrifice a lot of projects in the pipeline. With that, why proceed with a new project that is still unfunded, not supported by legislative – by a law and moreover, you have P300 million out of the P2 billion that is needed? Ano po ang ating assurance, Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, that this P800 million will not turn into a white elephant?

REP. BIAZON. Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, mayroon naman ho talagang specified purpose itong pondong ito. Magagamit din naman po kung hindi pa agad operational ang virology center, lalong-lalo na iyong sa component ng pagkuha po ng mga researchers, they can proceed with the researches. But we strongly urge Congress to immediately act on that bill that would create the virology center kasi ang pagkakaunawa natin, sa lahat, priority talaga nating magkaroon ng ganitong klaseng establishment. And it was initiated here in the House as well kaya naman nag-anticipate din ang Appropriations Committee ng pondo para kung ma-fast-track natin, mayroon agad itong panimulang panggastos. Titiyakin po ng Department of Science and Technology na hindi siya magiging white elephant. At dahil din naman sa matinding pangangailangan, we doubt that it will become a white elephant.

REP. GARIN (J.). Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, naiintindihan po natin, P2 bilyon ang kailangan para sa isang Philippine Virology Center. Wala pa po itong building, wala pang mga gamit, wala pa ring plantilla positions. We

do not want to waste government resources because while we do believe in research, we also believe in prioritization. And now that we have a lot of disasters on the way, we have a lot of volcanoes that are being watched, we have a lot of equipment that are needed for further upgrading existing programs, ang pakiusap ko lang po, baka puwedeng tingnan muna natin ang mga existing projects rather than putting P800 million on a concept that is not yet supported by a law, that does not have any plantilla position, and does not have any building for that matter. Baka naman po puwedeng unahin munang magpagawa ng building, pagkatapos noon habang ginagawa ng DBM ang plantilla positions ay doon po tayo magkaroon ng mga tao na iha-hire.

At this juncture, Deputy Speaker Oaminal relinquished the Chair to Rep. Juan Pablo "Rimpy" P. Bondoc.

My point here, Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleagues, sa panahon ng pandemya, bawat piso importante, bawat milyon napakahalaga. Almost P1 billion will be spent on a new project but, as I heard from our distinguished colleagues earlier, napakarami ng pangangailangan ng Department of Science and Technology. Again, I leave it to the Executive offices to think and reconsider that every money spent on a new project will actually mean pausing existing projects.

Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleagues, alam ko po na tapos na po iyong aking oras. Allow me to just appeal to the Department of Science and Technology that while we do believe in the wisdom of research and innovation, there are always wants but we should focus on the needs. So, at the proper time, Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, if I may be allowed to put forward proposals for special provisions or possibly amendments so that we focus on the needs rather than our wants so that every taxpayer's money put in the coffers of our government will redound to the benefit of the Filipino people. Again, two points: una, bakit po tayo gagastos ng milyon-milyon para sa mga kompanya na pribadong sektor naman ang magbebenta? Kung gagawin natin iyan, there should be an

immediate corresponding discount equivalent to the government's expenditure. Pangalawa, we will be spending almost P1 billion for a Philippine Virology Center. Drawing pa lang po ito, pero maraming nandadyan na na kailangang tapusin. We can always fund the Philippine Virology Center at the appropriate time, when we have already answered this pandemic. Dahil sa ngayon po, marami pa ang mga mawawalan ng trabaho, maraming pangangailangan ang magsusulputan at mas kakailanganin ng Pilipinas na magtipid at gastusin ang pera sa nararapat.

At this juncture, Representative Bondoc relinquished the Chair to Deputy Speaker Henry S. Oaminal

With that, Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleagues, with the intention to propose amendments and provisions in the proposed budget of the Department of Science and Technology at the appropriate time, and there being no other Member from the Minority who wishes to interpellate further, I move that we terminate the period of interpellation and debate insofar as the proposed budget of the Department of Science and Technology, as well as its attached agencies, is concerned.

I so move, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal). There is a motion from the Minority. What is the pleasure from the Majority?

Majority Leader.

REP. AGLIPAY. Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Majority, I join the Minority in moving to terminate the period of interpellation and debate on the budget of the Department of Science and Technology, including its attached agencies.

I so move, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal). There is a joint motion from the Majority and the Minority to terminate the budget deliberations on the Department of Science and Technology, including its attached agencies. Is there any objection? (*Silence*) There being none, the motion is approved.

Congratulations, the distinguished Sponsor and the official family of the Department of Science and Technology.

SUSPENSION OF SESSION

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal).
The session is suspended.

It was 7:42 p.m.

RESUMPTION OF SESSION

At 7:45 p.m., the session was resumed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal).
The session is resumed.

NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE COORDINATING AGENCY AND NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

REP. LACSON-NOEL. Mr. Speaker, I move that we proceed with the consideration of the proposed budget of the National Intelligence Coordinating Agency and the National Security Council.

I so move, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal).
There is a motion to open the deliberations on the budget of the National Intelligence Coordinating Agency and the National Security Council. Is there any objection? (*Silence*) The Chair hears none; the motion is approved.

Majority Leader.

REP. LACSON-NOEL. Mr. Speaker, I move that we acknowledge first the presence of the guests from the following agencies: first, for NICA, we have Director General Paul Monteagudo, Atty. Jerome Abraham M. Reyes, Ms. Evangeline G. Gabionza; and for the National Security Council, we have National Security Adviser Hermogenes Esperon Jr., Undersecretary Vic Agdamag, Director Acel Pacis, and Director Manuel Tuason, and Director Malou Santelices.

I so move, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal).
Okay, on behalf of Speaker Alan Peter Cayetano of the Eighteenth Congress, I welcome the NICA family, headed by General Monteagudo, and that of the National Security Council, headed by Secretary Esperon.

Majority Leader.

REP. LACSON-NOEL. Mr. Speaker, I move that we recognize the honorable Rep. Ruffy Biazon of the Lone District of Muntinlupa to sponsor the proposed budget of NICA and the NSC.

I so move, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal).
The hardworking Hon. Ruffy Biazon is recognized to present and defend the budget of NICA and the National Security Council. You have the floor.

REP. BIAZON. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleagues. This Representation has the honor to present the proposed budget of the National Security Council and the National Intelligence Coordinating Agency for Fiscal Year 2021. We are now prepared to answer questions, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal).
Majority Leader.

REP. LACSON-NOEL. Mr. Speaker, ...

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal).
The distinguished Sponsor is now ready to answer or respond to any interpellations on the budget of those two agencies.

REP. LACSON-NOEL. Mr. Speaker, I move to recognize the honorable Rep. France Castro of the Party-List ACT TEACHERS for her interpellation.

I so move, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal).
The Hon. France Castro, ACT TEACHERS Party-List Representative, is hereby recognized.

REP. CASTRO (F.L.). Thank you, Mr.

Speaker. So, can you clearly hear me? Am I clear, Mr. Speaker?

REP. BIAZON. Loud and clear, Madam.

REP. CASTRO (F.L.). Okay, thank you po, Mr. Speaker.

So, puwede po bang maipaliwanag ng ating distinguished Sponsor, Mr. Speaker, iyong mandates nitong dalawang ahensiya na ito, itong NICA at saka NSC?

REP. BIAZON. Ang National Security Council po, ito po ang pangunahing advisory body on the proper coordination and integration of plans and policies affecting national security. The NSC consists of two distinct offices, namely, the Council Proper and the Office of the National Security Adviser and Director General of the Permanent Secretariat.

As to the National Intelligence Coordinating Agency, it is basically the agency that operationalizes the policies of the National Security Council, and coordinates the activities of the other intelligence gathering agencies of the government.

REP. CASTRO (F.L.). Okay. So, sa madaling salita, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor, ang NICA at ang NSC ay policymaking, coordinating council at siyempre, may mga programs sila or nagko-coordinate sa lahat ng mga agency concerning intelligence. Tama po?

REP. BIAZON. Ang NSC po iyong policymaking body while NICA, siya po iyong nagko-coordinate ng iba't ibang mga intelligence operations and information gathering ng other agencies of government, feeding into the NSC para po sa pag-assess nila at pag-evaluate, para irekomenda sa Pangulo kung ano ang mgaistratehiya na gagawin para sa kabutihan ng ating bansa.

REP. CASTRO (F.L.). Okay. So, both for local and international concerns, tama po?

REP. BIAZON. That is correct.

REP. CASTRO (F.L.). Yes. So, mayroon po

ditong mga ilang instances na sinasabing mga unverified na mga instances na concerning intelligence pero ang inilabas ay sinasabing unverified at napatunayang mga mali o sablay. Nakitaan din ng mga paglabag sa batas ukol sa privacy, discrimination at iba pang mga karapatan. To name a few, Mr. Speaker, distinguished Sponsor, number one, for example, ay iyong confidential memos issued by the PNP Directorate for Intelligence and lower units of the PNP ordering the profiling of public and private school teachers. So, ito iyong concern, Mr. Speaker, distinguished Sponsor, doon sa ginawa ng PNP na profiling po sa mga teachers simula po noong January 2019. So, mayroon po bang role ang NICA or ang NSC dito sa ginawang ito ng PNP Directorate, Mr. Speaker, distinguished Sponsor?

REP. BIAZON. Kung batay po sa nabanggit ng ating kasamahan, Mr. Speaker, na ang report ay nagmula sa PNP, malamang iyan po ay ang impormasyon na nakalap nila sa iba't ibang pamamaraan mula po sa ground. Ang magiging papel naman ng NICA at ng NSC ay ie-evaluate kung anuman ang ire-report ng different intelligence offices down the line. And kapag sinabi naman po natin kasing "ie-evaluate," there are some information na puwedeng isantabi, balewalain, at mayroong ibang impormasyon na kung may batayan ay nagiging bahagi ng pag-e-evaluate ng mga recommendation na ibibigay sa higher-ups.

REP. CASTRO (F.L.). Okay. So, ito po, Mr. Speaker, distinguished Sponsor, ay nagkaroon na rin ng mga complaint at mga reklamo rin ng mga teachers sa ginagawang ito na profiling ng PNP and Directorate. Pangalawa, Mr. Speaker, distinguished Sponsor, January 31 memo of PNP's Manila Police District also ordered the profiling of Moro students. So, ito po ba ay mayroong role ang NSC or ang NICA kaugnay nito sa profiling po ng ating mga Moro students?

REP. BIAZON. Mayroon naman hong degree of authority na mag-initiate ng information gathering iyong mga operating units sa ground, so hindi po necessarily na

kautusan iyan or initiated by the NSC or the NICA. As I mentioned earlier po, iyong information na nakakalap ng mga intelligence operating units sa ground, iyan po ay subject to evaluation din. Of course, part ng mandate ng mga operating units na iyan iyong mangalap ng information kasi iyon ang trabaho ng intelligence. So, hindi po naman necessarily, gaya ng nabanggit po ninyo, na ito ay nagmula sa isang police unit. Hindi po necessarily na iyan ay initiated or ipinag-utos na nanggaling po sa NICA or sa NSC because they have the authority to operate on their own to gather information.

REP. CASTRO (F.L.). Okay, Mr. Speaker, thank you po for the explanation. Pero ito po, ito po nakaka-worry po iyong profiling ng mga Moro students. In fact, in one of the hearings dito po sa ating Kongreso as regards this po ay nag-ano po, nag-apologize ang PNP dito doon sa ginagawa nilang mga profiling dito sa ating mga estudyante. And, in fact, in the interest of upholding human rights, the Bangsamoro Transition Authority condemned the prejudicial treatment of Muslim youths by the Manila Police District of the Philippine National Police. So, iyong BTA resolution po, authored by the parliament members po ng Bangsamoro. Isa pa po, Mr. Speaker, distinguished Sponsor, ito pong ginawa nilang matrix, iyong the greatest failure na Red October, ito naman po iyong conspiracy theories, plotters, matrix destabilizers daw sa mga eskuwelahan noong mga pinaghihinalaan nilang mga estudyante na mag-aalsa at mag-aano daw, magkakaroon ng mga pag-aalsa, Red October na nag-flag. Ano ba ang masasabi sa atin ng ating distinguished Sponsor tungkol dito?

REP. BIAZON. Well, doon po sa nabanggit na matrix, nakita naman po nating parang wala rin namang kinahinatnan. And, most often, kapag ganoon po, ibig sabihin, Mr. Speaker, na may ano nga, wala namang basis to take action on it, nag-fizzle out na lang. So, ako ho, iyong opinyon po ng inyong lingkod, Mr. Speaker, masasabi natin na maaari nang i-set aside that particular incident because nothing came out of it, Mr. Speaker.

REP. CASTRO (F.L.). Okay.

So, siges, last na po ito, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor, various events like iyong last po, iyong terrorist-tagging post and fake newsfeed by official Facebook pages of the PNP and AFP units. So, this was during the election period hanggang ngayon, at inamin ito under oath ng ilang PNP stations as their official acts doon sa complaint namin sa Comelec for election offense. So, again, Mr. Speaker, distinguished Sponsor, ano po iyong papel dito ng NICA at ng NSC dahil binabanggit din ninyo na nanggagaling sa kanila iyong mga information?

REP. BIAZON. Kung tama po iyong pagkaunawa ko doon sa nabanggit ninyo, may mga complaint na nai-file laban sa PNP officials na may mga ginawang – tama po ba iyong narinig ko na parang mga allegation against certain persons? Again, para ho similar doon sa una ko hong sagot, Mr. Speaker, na iyong operating units on the ground does not necessarily just get their orders coming from the NICA or the NSA because they have their own mandates. Ngayon, kung mayroon silang maling nagawa na dapat panagutan sa batas ay iyan po ang inaasahan nating gawin ng mga offended parties.

REP. CASTRO (F.L.). Okay. Salamat po, Mr. Speaker.

So, sa mga binanggit ko po, Mr. Speaker, distinguished Sponsor, na mga events na sinasabi natin na nanggagaling sa intelligence katulad nito, iyong Red October na iyan, nag-fizzle out na lang, nawala, pero, alam ninyo po iyong magiging epekto nito doon sa mga civilians, sa mga individuals na tina-tag as terrorists, tina-tag as – pino-profile at ang nagiging epekto niyan sa seguridad sa buhay at siyempre doon sa iba't iba pang mga pribadong saklaw ng mga personales na involved. So, mayroon po dito, Mr. Speaker, budget for the NSC about National Security Strategic Planning, National Security Policy and Strategic Studies, and National Security Situational Awareness. So, ito po ay more than ano ito, more than P60 million ang halaga po nito. So, puwede bang maipaliwanag, ma-describe ng kagalang-galang na Sponsor, ano

po halimbawa iyong mga programs? Mga ano ba ito, mga seminars ba ito or kung anuman iyong ginagawa po dito? Puwede po bang maipaliwanag saan ito nagagamit?

REP. BIAZON. Iyong pong ginagawa na National Security Policy and Strategic Studies at iyong National Security Strategic Planning, iyan po, siyempre, may kinalaman sa mandate ng pagsulong ng national security kung saan ang well-being ng way of life of Filipinos ay pinangangalagaan. So, sa pag-aaral na iyan, tinitingnan kung ano ba ang mga patakaran, mga policies na maaaring ipatupad sa iba't ibang larangan ng buhay natin. It may be from health care to delivery of social services, up to the defense of peace and order dahil iyan po ang nasasakop ng national security. And, of course, it involves protecting the Filipinos and the State from any threat to their way of life.

REP. CASTRO (F.L.). Ito po, ito po lahat ay may kinalaman doon sa security ng ating bansa. So, dito po sa isa pang – doon sa budget po ng NICA, iyong direction, coordination, collection and production of intelligence pertaining to national security, and provision of secretariat services to the Anti-Terrorism Council na mayroon po ditong P17,811,000, so nabanggit po iyong Anti-Terrorism Council. So ano po iyong role ng NSC or NICA dito sa Anti-Terrorism Council?

REP. BIAZON. Siya po ang nagsisilbing pinaka-secretariat, iyong nagpapatakbo po ng day-to-day operations of the council, at nagsisilbing coordinator ng iba-ibang mga ahensiyang involved po or bahagi ng Anti-Terrorism Council.

REP. CASTRO (F.L.). Okay.

Kaya dito po sa may binabanggit natin na Anti-Terrorism Council, nabanggit din dito iyong E.O. No. 70. So, ang NICA at ang NSC po ay kabilang din doon sa cluster, 'di ba, doon sa nagpapatupad nitong E.O. No. 70?

REP. BIAZON. Iyong E.O. No. 70 po, ang approach kasi ay ang whole-of-nation approach, kaya po may involvement ang iba't ibang ahensiya. Kung tutuusin po, ang

expected ay lahat ng government agencies ay nakikibahagi sa pagsulong ng objectives ng E.O. No. 70. Of course, mayroon hong tinatawag na "task force" kung saan mayroong mga specific agencies na ginawang bahagi ng task force na iyan and one of those is NICA.

REP. CASTRO (F.L.). So, mayroon po bang specific na budget ang E.O. No. 70 rito na katulad noong binabanggit ninyo na iba't ibang mga agencies?

REP. BIAZON. Ayon po sa E.O. No. 70 mismo, ang initial funding requirements para sa pag-implement ng nasabing kautusan ay charged against existing appropriations noong panahon na in-issue itong E.O. No. 70, such other appropriate funding sources as the DBM may identify and when necessary, contingent fund. Pero para po sa mga kasunod na taon, ang appropriations po for the operation of the national secretariat shall be included in the budget proposal of the Office of the President. The funding requirement for the implementation of the programs, plans and activities in the framework shall be included in the respective annual budgets of the concerned agencies, subject to the usual budget preparation process. So, ang pondo po nila nagmumula doon sa mga pondo ng mga ahensiya na bahagi ng mga plans, programs and activities.

REP. CASTRO (F.L.). Okay.

So, kabilang po ba dito iyong mga plans focusing on terrorist-tagging na ginagawa po ng NICA and NSC gamit iyong pera ng taong-bayan? So, nakikita nating isinapapanganib dito iyong mga buhay ng mga guro, bata at iba pang mga biktima ng mga malisyoso at walang katotohanang paratang na ito. Marami po tayong masa-cite na mga situation na mismong mga eskuwelahan ay ini-influence ng NICA at minsan pa nga ay nagme-memo na gamit iyong NICA. Katulad nito, Mr. Speaker, may memo, halimbawa, para sa mga opisyal at kawani ng DepEd at mga SUCs. Sabi sa memo, ginagawang pagpapatawag na iyon pursuant to the mandate of NICA in implementing Executive Order No. 70, calling for the creation of a task force, specifically the

adoption of the National Peace Framework to End Local Communist Armed Conflict. Noon pong September 17, sa Don Honorio Ventura State University sa Bacolor, kung saan ang Presidente and General Manager ng CLTV 36 sa San Fernando, Pampanga at tatlo pang media practitioners at mga progresibong organisasyon at indibidwal ay direktang nilabel bilang mga terorista ng no other than our Regional Director Rolando Asuncion. So ang sabi, may mga listahan daw sila ng mga rebelde, may mga tinatawag nilang, ano ba, "order of battle" or "list for neutralization." Ano ba ang ibig sabihin nito, Mr. Speaker, distinguished Sponsor?

REP. BIAZON. Nabanggit po, Mr. Speaker, ng ating kasamahan ang involvement, for example, ng Department of Education, may nabanggit din na mga State colleges or universities dahil bahagi rin po sila noong whole-of-government approach. Ang layunin po kasi ng E.O. No. 70 ay tapusin na ang local communist armed conflict. Nang nagdesisyon ang Pangulo na ihinto na ang usapang pangkapayapaan dahil tila parang wala nang paroroonan, ginawa na ang approach na whole-of-government approach na itigil ang armed conflict. So, kasama doon siyempre po ang pag-engage ng different agencies of government in ensuring that the youth is not taken advantage of by forces which seek to bring down the government. Dahil iyan po iyong mandate, pangangalagaan ang way of life ng ating bayan.

So, hindi naman po yata...

REP. CASTRO (F.L.). So, yes ...

REP. BIAZON. ... outside the mandate iyong pag-tap nitong ibang agencies na ito.

REP. CASTRO (F.L.). So, with due respect ano po sa ating kagalang-galang na distinguished Sponsor, 'no, I beg to disagree because ito, halimbawa, iyong pagpapatang, halimbawa, kapag papasok sa mga eskuwelahan, ginagamit iyong mga opisyal ng mga eskuwelahan at pagpapatang nang walang basehan. Halimbawa na lang, ito, parang ano sila dito 'no, nakuryente sila doon

sa pagpapatang as terrorists itong 30 na mga indibidwal including iyong manager ng CLTV. Talagang hindi naman ito nararapat, ano, nagkakaroon lang ito ng threat doon sa mga buhay ng mga taong pinaparatangan nila. Tapos ito nga, pumapasok itong mga ganitong mga sinasabi nilang social awareness sa mga eskuwelahan gamit ang pondo ng ating gobyerno para doon sa pagkakalat nitong misinformation na ito sa mga eskuwelahan natin. In fact, iyong SBS na ito ay mayroon itong kinasuhan din na mga teachers sa Ombudsman kaugnay noong kaniyang terrorist red-tagging doon sa mga teachers natin. So, marami pa ano, Mr. Speaker, distinguished Sponsor, mga informal at formal dialogues with the DepEd, SUC officials, personnel na nire-request po ng NICA via SMS or Facebook Messenger at iba pa, mga press conference din including din iyong, ano, pinasok din iyong seminar ng mga IDP. So iyan po iyong mga nakita natin na ginagawa po.

So, ilan din sa mga nagiging epekto nitong ginagawang red-tagging at terrorist-tagging, Mr. Speaker, distinguished Sponsor, ay iyong epekto rin mismo sa pagbubuo ng unyon and association na naranasan iyan directly, na mismong ang NICA iyong nagpa-practice ng union-busting by terrorist-tagging, red-tagging iyong mga organisasyon ng mga teachers sa Central Luzon. So pakikialam sa mga union activities at iba pang mga certification on elections—so ito po iyong ginagawa nila. To end, Mr. Speaker, distinguished Sponsor, sana po, hindi ba, sana po magamit nang maayos iyong pondo ng ating intelligence agency doon sa—I mean, na effectively and accurately itong mga ganito, 'no. Kasi kung threatened po iyong buhay ng ating mga mamamayan doon sa mga malicious na mga red-tagging at terrorist-tagging ay hindi po naman ito maganda. Iyon lang po, Mr. Speaker, distinguished Sponsor.

Salamat po.

REP. BIAZON. Maraming salamat, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal). Majority Leader.

REP. LACSON-NOEL. Mr. Speaker, I move to recognize the honorable Rep. Eufemia Cullamat of the Party-List BAYAN MUNA for her interpellation.

I so move, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal). The Honorable Cullamat of BAYAN MUNA Party-List is hereby recognized.

REP. CULLAMAT. Mr. Speaker, magandang gabi ...

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal). Go ahead, Your Honor.

REP. CULLAMAT. ... sa ating lahat. (*Inaudible*) Mr. Speaker, ...

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal). Your signal, Your Honor, is not that good.

Technical support, can we check the signal of the Honorable Cullamat.

REP. CULLAMAT. (*Inaudible*) Hello.

REP. LACSON-NOEL. Mr. ...

REP. CULLAMAT. Hello, hello, hello.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal). Go ahead, Your Honor, go ahead.

REP. CULLAMAT. Ang kagalang-galang po ba na Sponsor ay papahintulutan na ako ay magpahayag ng mga iilang paglilinaw?

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal). The distinguished Sponsor may respond.

REP. BIAZON. Mr. Speaker, ikinalulungkot ko po na hindi ko masyadong narinig dahil medyo choppy iyong sound.

Maaari pong paulit lang, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal). She is asking whether or not you are willing to answer any interpellations, which I believe you are in the affirmative, ready and willing.

REP. BIAZON. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Handa po tayong sumagot ng mga katanungan.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal). Okay. The Honorable Cullamat.

REP. CULLAMAT. Maraming salamat, Ginoong Speaker, kagalang-galang na Sponsor.

Ginoong Sponsor, ang gawaing intelligence, ang mga kagamitang binibili para dito, ang mga gawaing ilulunsad para dito, at pati ang mga pagkakakilanlan ng mga ahente na sangkot ng gawaing intelligence ay karaniwang hindi sinasabi o ibinubunyag sa media. Tama po ba, kagalang-galang na Mr. Speaker, kagalang-galang na Sponsor?

REP. BIAZON. Pasensiya na po, kung maaari lang, pakiulit lang iyong bandang huling bahagi. May kinalaman tungkol sa mga kagamitan iyong tanong ng atin pong kasamahan.

REP. CULLAMAT. Sa gawaing intelligence, mga kagamitang binibili para dito, mga gawaing ilulunsad para dito, at pati na ang mga pagkakakilanlan ng mga ahente na sangkot ng gawaing intelligence ay karaniwang hindi sinasabi o ibinubunyag sa media. Tama po ba, kagalang-galang na Sponsor, Ginoong Speaker?

REP. BIAZON. Kung tama po ang pagkaunawa ko, Mr. Speaker, sa tanong na iyong mga kagamitan na binibili at iyong mga gawain ng ating intelligence units ay hindi isinisiwalat sa media, ang sagot po doon ay iyon po talaga ang nature ng intelligence-gathering dahil isa po iyan sa pamamaraan ng Estado para malaman kung mayroong mga panganib or may banta, so iyong pamamaraan po ng information gathering na iyan ay hindi ho talaga isinisiwalat dahil po for security reasons.

REP. CULLAMAT. Tama po. Tama po, ano, na karaniwang sekreto po ang mga ito kasi kung ibinubunyag ang mga ito ay hindi na po ito masasabing intelligence work.

Kagalang-galang na Speaker at kagalang-galang na Sponsor, kung ito po ay ibinubunyag, samakatuwid hindi natin alam kung nagamit sa tama ang pera. Halimbawa po, sinabi ng NICA o ng kung anumang intelligence agency ng gobyerno na gumastos si Juan Tamad, pangalan ng isang ahente or intelligence agent nila, ng napakalaking pera sa gawaing paniniktik. Tapos binigyan din ng gobyerno ang ahenteng ito na si Juan Tamad ng malaking pera para sa sahod, bonus at iba pang benepisyong. Hindi po natin malalaman kung totoo nga na ang malaking perang ginastos para sa intelligence agent na si Juan Tamad ay napunta nga sa intelligence work o napunta sa graft and corruption sa kadahilanang hindi natin alam kung totoo si Juan Tamad, gayon din hindi rin natin alam kung ito nga ang totoong pagkakakilanlan ni Juan Tamad. Tama po ba, Ginoong Speaker, kagalang-galang na Sponsor?

REP. BIAZON. Mr. Speaker, ang kalaban po ng Estado ay kumikilos din nang palihim, pailalim. Kung ang gobyerno na ang mandato ay proteksyonan ang pamumuhay ng mga Pilipino ay ilalantad nila lahat ng kilos nila, lahat ng galaw, lahat ng pamamaraan, eh 'di para na rin po nating pinayagan na paikutan ang gobyerno ng kalaban. Kaya po may pangangailangan na hindi mo maisapubliko, pero hindi po naman ibig sabihin noon na ito na ay parang pinababayaan nating bigyan lang ng blank check dahil mayroon din naman pong sistema sa loob ng gobyerno na kung saan ang confidential and intelligence expenses ay sinusuri. Hindi lang nga bukas sa lahat, pero nandoon pa rin po iyong sistema ng pagsusuri. Pangalawa, kung hindi rin po kasi gagamitin ng mga ahensiyang naatasan o nabigyan ng ganoong klaseng pondo, kung hindi nila gagamitin na mayroon silang production or output, magre-reflect din po iyon sa performance nila at iyong mga nakakataas na may inaasahang may output iyang mga ahensiyang iyan, makikita rin naman kung ginagamit nila iyong pondo nang tama o hindi.

So, kung ang pangamba ay nagagamit ba nang tama o hindi, ang masasabi ko ay mayroong sistema, set procedures para suriin

iyong mga paggastos na iyon at by the very nature of outputs being expected from them, aasahan noong mga nakakataas na may output sila, iyon po iyong magiging basehan kung nagagamit nga iyong intelligence fund or other resources para sa objective na iyan.

REP. CULLAMAT. Mr. Speaker, kagalang-galang na Sponsor, tama po iyon, hindi natin alam kung napupunta nga ba sa tama ang intelligence fund sapagkat hindi natin nasusundan ang paglabas at paggastos ng pera sa kadahilanang sekreto nga ang gawain, pati na ang pagkilanlan ng mga ahenteng ginagamit ng intelligence agency ng gobyerno.

Sa katotohanan nga, isang pagdinig ng House of Representatives hinggil sa kakayahan ng COA na i-audit ang perang tinaguriang intelligence at confidential. Inamin mismo ni Commission on Audit Chairperson Michael Aguinaldo na, practically, helpless o walang kakayahan ang COA na i-audit ang perang pang-intelligence. Ito ay sa kadahilanang hindi natin alam kung sino ang binibigyan ng perang ito at kung ano ang mga pinagkakagastusang ito. Samakatuwid, napakadali pong nakawin ng mga taga-gobyerno ang bilyon-bilyong pisong ito na tinatawag nilang "intelligence at confidential funds." Tama po ba?

REP. BIAZON. Mr. Speaker, may mga ganyang instances na narinig nga po natin na sinasabi ng COA na hindi sila nagkakaroon ng malawak na pag-assess doon sa pagkakagastos. Pero mayroon na rin pong mga instances na kung saan mga opisyal na accountable sa confidential and intelligence funds ay napanagot ng COA kung hindi man napanagot sa pamamagitan ng issuance ng Notice of Disallowance o kaya ay mayroon hong mga recommendations sa COA report. Kaya hindi naman natin masabi na completely na blind or bulag ang sistema natin doon sa paggamit ng confidential and intelligence funds.

REP. CULLAMAT. Ginoong Speaker, kagalang-galang na Sponsor, tama po ang sinabi ko. Madaling nakawin ang mga intelligence funds sapagkat practically helpless nga o walang kakayanan ang COA na i-audit

ang perang ito ayon mismo sa pagbunyag nila. Hindi nila malalaman kung napunta nga ba sa tama ang pera o kung napunta ito sa bulsa ng mga taga-gobyernong nagpapalakad ng mga intelligence agency na ito.

Ginoong Speaker, kagalang-galang na Sponsor, katunayan nga po, sa isang Memorandum Circular na inilabas ng COA, ang tinaguriang COA Circular No. 92-385, na ang perang may taguring intelligence at confidential fund ay pinagmumulan ng graft and corruption.

Ang sabi ng COA circular na ito "liquidation of advances from intelligence and confidential could be a source of graft and corruption." Ibig sabihin po, ang mga perang inilabas mula sa intelligence at confidential funds ay napakadaling nakawin. Tama po ba, Ginoong Speaker, kagalang-galang na Sponsor?

REP. BIAZON. Hindi ko lang nakita pa iyong ulat ng COA, Commission on Audit, na iyon ang sinasabi. Ang pagkakaalam ko lang po by experience is that mayroon pa rin hong submission ang usage ng confidential and intelligence funds. Iyon nga lamang, iyon ay sealed, iyon ay treated with confidentiality, but nevertheless, mayroon pa rin hong submission to the Commission on Audit.

Kung iyon pong nasabi po ninyong opinyon rendered by COA, hindi ko lang po masasabi na iyon ay applicable to all dahil nga by personal knowledge, mayroon na akong mga nabalitaan o mayroon na akong mga kilala na napanagot or hiningian ng further explanation patungkol sa kanilang paggamit.

So, iyan po iyong situation natin na may sistema, wherein funds are made accountable.

REP. CULLAMAT. Ginoong Speaker, kagalang-galang na Sponsor, tama po iyong sinabi ko. Simple ang paliwanag ng COA dito. Kung hindi puwedeng alamin ang pinagkakagastusan at hindi puwedeng kilalanin ang mga taong gumagastos o binibigyan ng ganitong pera ay napakadali ngang nakawin ang mga perang ito ng mga tiwaling opisyal ng gobyerno, ng mga tiwaling pulis at tiwaling militar. Kung ganito po ang

kalakaran at kalikasan ng mga intelligence at confidential fund, napakadali palang ilipat ng mga pondong ito patungo sa iba pang mga pagkakagastusan. Napakadali din po ilipat ang mga pondong confidential at intelligence patungo sa pribadong bank account ng mga tiwaling opisyal ng pamahalaan, gayundin patungo sa bulsa ng mga tiwaling militar at pulis na karaniwang gumagamit ng mga pondong ito. Hindi na kataka-taka kung bakit po halos lahat ng malaki at mayamang ahensiya ng pamahalaan ay may sariling confidential at intelligence funds. Hindi lamang po ang mga militar at pulis ang may sariling intelligence funds. Sa katunayan, mahigit kalahati ng pondong inilalaan ngayon ng Kongreso para sa tanggapan ng Pangulo, aabot ng may P4.5 billion, ay confidential at intelligence funds. Madali pala itong nakawin kapag kinategoryang confidential at intelligence funds. Hindi na po kataka-taka kung bakit napakaraming intelligence agencies at grupo ng Ehekutibo.

Narito ngayon ang NICA, siyempre ay mayroong confidential at intelligence funds ang mga militar at pulis, gayon din ang iba pang puwersa ng pamahalaan. Isa-isa ang function ng mga ito subali't hiwa-hiwalay na tanggapan at hiwa-hiwalay na napakanaglalahang pondo ang ibibigay ng Kongreso sa kanila. Kaya sana po ay pag-isipang mabuti ng Kongreso ang pagbibigay ng mga malalaking confidential at intelligence funds sa mga ahensiyang ito ng gobyerno sapagkat hindi natin alam kung saan napupunta ang mga perang ito.

Kaya sa kasalukuyang kalagayan natin ngayon, humaharap tayo ng krisis ng kalusugan at ng ating ekonomiya, dapat ang ating mga malalaking pondo ay pumunta doon sa mga ahensiya na produktibo, na nagbibigay lunas sa ating krisis, sa hinaharap nating krisis sa ekonomiya at pangkalusugan.

Ito lamang po, Ginoong Speaker, kagalang-galang na Sponsor. Maraming salamat sa ating lahat.

REP. BIAZON. Maraming salamat, Mr. Speaker.

Just as a rejoinder, mayroon pong na-issue ang Commission on Audit, Joint Circular No.

2015-01 dated January 8, 2015. Ang titulo po noong Joint Circular na iyan ay "Guidelines on the Entitlement of Released, Used, Reporting and Audit of Confidential and Intelligence Funds." Patunay lang po ito na ang COA mismo ay mayroon hong guidelines with regard to the use of intelligence funds. So, mayroon pong paraan para malaman na kung ito ba ay nagagamit nang tama o mali.

And as a final point, Mr. Speaker, nauunawaan po natin iyong pangamba ng atin pong kasamahan na baka manakaw, pero ang hindi rin po maikakaila dito na marami nang successful operations laban sa mga terorista, kriminal, kalaban ng pamahalaan na nahuli o kaya ay napatay sa engkuwentro dahil din po sa paggamit ng intelligence funds and those are actual accomplishments.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal). Thank you very much, distinguished Sponsor. Thank you very much, Honorable Cullamat.

Majority Leader. Majority Leader, what is the pleasure of the floor now?

REP. DELOS SANTOS. Mr. Speaker, I move to recognize the Hon. Sarah Jane Elago of the Party-List KABATAAN for her interpellation.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal). The honorable distinguished Representative of the KABATAAN Party-List is recognized.

REP. ELAGO. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the honorable Sponsor be willing to answer a ...

REP. BIAZON. Willingly.

REP. ELAGO. ... few clarificatory questions?

REP. BIAZON. Willingly, Mr. Speaker.

REP. ELAGO. Maraming salamat po.

Included in the mandate of NICA, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, is to direct, coordinate and integrate national intelligence activities, prepare intelligence estimates of domestic

and international situations, take the lead as intelligence collector of the national government, serve as the focal point of the national government's country intelligence activities and operations, and act as the Secretariat to the Anti-Terrorism Council. Is this correct, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor?

REP. BIAZON. That is correct, Mr. Speaker.

REP. ELAGO. Now, Mr. Speaker, the Sponsor has shared to us what makes an intelligence operation a success. Then this Representation would like to know, what makes it a failure? Ano po ang maaaring mga maging katangian o maging dahilan kung magkakaraon ng palpak na intelligence gathering?

REP. BIAZON. Well, intelligence failure, in general terms, siguro masasabi po natin diyan na kung hindi na-meet iyong objectives in gathering the intelligence info, kung mayroong specific target, for example, and there is a specific objective with that target, and there was an error in the information, then I would say it is a failure.

REP. ELAGO. Then, Mr. Speaker, would the honorable Sponsor agree that objectivity is paramount to the success of an intelligence operation?

REP. BIAZON. The audio is a bit muffled kaya hindi ...

REP. ELAGO. Sorry.

REP. BIAZON. Pakiulit lang po.

REP. ELAGO. Then, Mr. Speaker, would the honorable Sponsor agree that objectivity is paramount to successful intelligence gathering and operations?

REP. BIAZON. Objectivity is paramount. The objective is paramount and sometimes it is difficult to just write off a particular intelligence operation or information as a failure because sometimes a negative result

can actually result in a positive outcome. Because information is useful, whether it is the actual thing you were expecting to get or if you got something else pero magagamit pa rin iyon for other purposes. So, it is really difficult to say just outright if something is a failure.

REP. ELAGO. Then, Mr. Speaker, what would make an intelligence operation or intelligence gathering reliable or dependable? As in the vision of the NICA, you know, they ...

REP. BIAZON. Well, there is something that they say...

REP. ELAGO. ... (*inaudible*) intelligence agency that is reliable and dependable as well.

REP. BIAZON. Well, there is something that they say in the circles, if it is an actionable intelligence, then it is successful. It means that they can conduct an operation based on the information that was received, if it is verified. It means there are other sources which would corroborate the findings. Those are examples of what we can say a successful intelligence gathering is.

REP. ELAGO. Now, in the advent of social media, what do you think, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor—what does the distinguished Sponsor think about the role of social media in intelligence gathering?

REP. BIAZON. The role of social media in intelligence gathering, well, social media is a goldmine of information, not only for security purposes but even for business purposes, and even for personal purposes. The wealth of information is there but then in the advent of fake news, of course, unreliable information is also out there. That is why there is such a thing as, you know, intelligence analysis. So, you analyze the information that you gather and determine what is usable, what is reliable and set aside what is basically unusable.

REP. ELAGO. Ginoong Speaker, ang Representasyon po na ito ng KABATAAN

ay may constituency na talagang gumagamit ng social media dahil ito ay mura, mabilis para sa pagbasa ng balita, pagpapakalat ng information. Gayundin sa mga activities sa mga eskuwelahan, nakakatulong ito, lalo na ngayon na nagkaroon tayo ng shift sa blended distance learning. Gayundin, ngayon, nakukunan na rin ito ng news, ng entertainment, at katulad ng sinabi ng Ginoong Sponsor, negosyo. Kaya nga ganoon na lang kalaki ang ating responsibilidad na pigilan ang disinformation, ang fake news habang pinagtatanggol natin ang karapatan sa pananalita, pagpapahayag, ang mga batayang karapatang pantao ng mga users nito. Gayundin, kinakailangan na palakihin natin ang nagiging obligasyon ng mga Internet service provider, Internet content provider at lahat ng social media platforms para labanan ang fake news and disinformation.

Now, Mr. Speaker, in light of the most recent Facebook findings on coordinated inauthentic behavior, it says here, and I quote po, this was released seven days ago, on removing coordinated inauthentic behavior, “Although the people behind this activity,” referring to the coordinated inauthentic behavior, “attempted to conceal their identities, our investigation found links to Philippine military and Philippine police.” It reports presence on Facebook and Instagram, with 57 Facebook accounts, 31 pages, 20 Instagram accounts; followers about 276,000, and advertising cost at around US\$1,100.

May we know the comment of the distinguished Sponsor on these findings.

REP. BIAZON. The findings were made by the company itself, Facebook, and well, for one, personally, I am thankful that they had conducted an investigation because that applies—that investigation should apply to all users, whether for personal purposes or for affecting State affairs.

Second, the identities that were revealed, of course, it is a cause of concern. If they have stepped out of bounds of what is government policy, if they are persons with the government and if there is any legal accountability, then they should face the music. That is how I look at it, how this Sponsor looks at it, Mr. Speaker.

REP. ELAGO. Maraming salamat, Ginoong Speaker, Your Honor, sa pahayag ng ating distinguished Sponsor na kailangan talagang singilin ng pananagutan pagdating sa fake news, mga fabricated statements, doctored images at iba't iba pang tipo ng disinformation na napakabilis na nagiging viral. Samantalang kung iyong mga fact-checked na articles na inilalabas ng mga media organizations na may mahigpit na self-regulatory mechanisms – habang pinapangalagaan natin at ipinagtatanggol ang critical and independent media ay kinakailangang pagtuunan ito ng pansin. Lalo na ngayon, ang Pilipinas ay isa sa mga bansa na may pinakamahabang oras na ginugugol sa social media. Ang top one na binibisita na site sa Internet ay Facebook, pangalawa lamang ang Google at lahat ng mga sites kung saan mababasa mo nang buong-buo iyong mga balita, mga journals, researches at iba pa na mga references. Ngunit ang nakakabahala dito, kapag sa Facebook, kapag gumagamit ka po ng free data, hindi mo nababasa iyong kabuuan ng mga artikulo o ng mga pahayag. Kaya ang tendency ay ang nababasa lamang, ang may access ang ating mga kababayan, karaniwan, iyong mga headlines lamang po. At sa mga pag-aaral na katulad po ng Tracking Disinformation in the 2019 Elections, ipinakita po doon how fake news and disinformation can undermine democracy because of sensationalized headlines na talaga pong misleading, inaccurate and can be weaponized against perceived critics or perceived na enemies po ng mga nasa posisyon ng power.

Ngayon, Ginoong Speaker, ang Representasyon po na ito ay tiningnan din iyong mga profiles na ini-report na po ng Representation na ito sa National Bureau of Investigation pati po sa Commission on Human Rights dahil sa terrorist-tagging at iba pang mga kumakalat na fabricated statements. At nagulat po kami na isa po doon sa mga profiles na naka-report ay ang puno po ng NICA, si sir Alex Paul Monteagudo. Mayroon po ba siyang Facebook page or Facebook personal profile or account?

REP. BIAZON. The Director General of

NICA has a personal Facebook account. I guess many of us have because it is a mode of communication now.

REP. ELAGO. Now, dahil po si DG Alex Paul Monteagudo ang puno ng NICA na siyang ating premiere intelligence agency at napakalaki ng role sa anti-terrorism at sa iba pa pong mga security matters, gaano po kahalaga ang responsibilidad ng ating mga opisyal sa paggamit ng social media? At sa ngayon po ba may sinusunod na mga panuntunan, guidelines, ang ating mga opisyal sa paggamit ng social media para po sa kanilang mga ahensiya?

REP. BIAZON. I am just not aware kung mayroon pong general guidelines applicable to everyone. Mayroon po akong mga nababalitaan na ilang ahensiya na may kani-kanilang mga patakaran on social media use, but I have not heard of one single guideline applicable to all, to which an official could be held accountable.

REP. ELAGO. Ang PNP po mayroon. Ang AFP din mayroon. Ang PCOO may inilabas daw po sila bilang gabay sa ating mga public servants, gabay lamang para hindi naman po ito tumapak or magamit para gipitin ang ating kalayaan sa ekspresyon, ang ating kalayaan sa pananalita. Ngunit ako po ay nababahala dahil po doon sa aming naiulat. May mga frequently shared pages sa personal po na Facebook account at nais ko lang pong malaman kung ang mga pages po ba na ito – kung sino po ang mga nagma-manage at bakit po nakuha ng mga pahina na ito na anonymous ang profile ang tiwala ng ating NICA Director General? Halimbawa po, ang Facebook page na Global Public. Sayang po hindi ko maipakita iyong mismong mga ini-report namin, but I have a copy here, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor. Kilala po ba ng NICA Director General natin ang nasa likod ng pahina na ito? It is called Global Public, yes po.

REP. BIAZON. Global?

REP. ELAGO. Public.

REP. BIAZON. Global Public.

REP. ELAGO. Yes. I just checked now, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, and it has been shared for the past two weeks, more than three to five times. So, the NICA Director General must really trust this Facebook page.

REP. BIAZON. Well, Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, ayon po sa ating namumuno ng NICA, hindi niya kilala ang nagma-manage ng page at paminsan-minsan ay nabibisita niya, na-confirm niya iyon, pero hindi niya daw po kilala ang nagma-manage ng page.

REP. ELAGO. Mr. Speaker, pero bakit po sini-share po iyong mga posts nito? Ang mga nakalagay po dito, halimbawa lang po ha, Ginoong Speaker, Your Honor, nakalagay po sa isang post na shinare din po ng NICA Director General, naka-feature po ang mukha ng tatlong Representante ng BAYAN MUNA Party-List—Ferdinand Gaité, Carlos Isagani Zarate at Eufemia Cullamat—at nakalagay po sa baba ay “Communist terrorist party-list, stealing from public funds to fund terrorism.” Ang signatory po ay Global Public.

So, marami pa pong similar na posts to this post. Mayroon pa pong mga similar posts, same content but different personalities po iyong nakalagay sa kaniyang Facebook account. Kung hindi po alam ang nasa likod ng Global Public, what about Peace Philippines?

REP. BIAZON. Peace ...

REP. ELAGO. The Facebook page Peace Philippines.

REP. BIAZON. Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, the NICA Director General confirms na nabisita rin niya po iyong Peace Philippines as I see it now here on the screen.

REP. ELAGO. Ginoong Speaker, sino po ang nasa likod ng page na ito upang makuha ang tiwala ng ating NICA Director General?

REP. BIAZON. The Director General does

not know the operator or manager of this Facebook page, distinguished colleague.

REP. ELAGO. Mr. Speaker, what about the page Pinoy Exposé? I have listed po the frequently shared pages by the NICA Director General, Pinoy Exposé.

REP. BIAZON. The Director General, once again, does not know the operator or manager of Pinoy Exposé, Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague.

REP. ELAGO. Mr. Speaker, what about the Philippine Untold News?

REP. BIAZON. Philippine Untold News.

REP. ELAGO. Untold News.

REP. BIAZON. Alright, the Director General, likewise, does not know the operator or manager of this Philippine Untold News Facebook page, distinguished colleague.

REP. ELAGO. Then, Mr. Speaker, those are just four of the frequently shared pages, four out of about 21 pages we have listed. Kung meron pong apat na hindi po alam na kung sino ang operator, sino ang manager, kung kanino nanggagaling—napakamapanganib po ng mga nilalaman ng mga post, ipapadala ko po sa distinguished Sponsor. One post includes a photo of me na saying that I am positive of COVID-19. Parang ganoon po iyong itsura noong poster. Kaya hindi biro itong mga inilalabas na mga materials ng mga naturang pages.

Kaya sa tingin ko, Ginoong Speaker, nawa’y magkaroon po—should the NICA DG not be more responsible in sharing these Facebook pages since he is the Director General of the premier intelligence agency of the government?

REP. BIAZON. Well, as mentioned a while ago by the Director General, there has been some posts which he has shared with his people, meaning his personnel, his operatives, perhaps, to advise them what to monitor or look out for. So, it is really a personal act on the

part of the Director General with regard to the pages that he likes or shares on Facebook.

And we understand, of course, the concern on this, but it is a phenomenon that everyone is open to, all the information that is accessible on Facebook. And as we know, the algorithms, once you have visited a particular site or a particular theme, it always reoccurs on your timeline. Like for instance in my case, if I search for one particular product, after that, in my timeline and even in my other social media platforms, advertisements come out because that is how the algorithms do it.

So, as far as those Facebook pages are concerned, the NICA Director General has said that he does not know the operators or the managers, and there were instances when he shared posts there to his personnel.

REP. ELAGO. Mr. Speaker, does the honorable Sponsor think it is justified to do this, share information, dangerous information or vilification of certain individuals in groups without knowing and vetting from whom or from what organization this information comes from?

REP. BIAZON. Well, as I said at the beginning of our interpellation when I was asked, if there are violations that certain persons do online, then they should be held accountable for it. Meaning to say, kung mayroon hong batas na na-violate, then dapat ihabla sila para managot. Iyon pong actions na ginawa ng Director General, if there are parties that feel this is a violation of a certain statute or rule, then I would encourage na proceed with holding them accountable.

REP. ELAGO. Mr. Speaker, ...

REP. BIAZON. But we also have to face the reality that warfare has kind of shifted into the new era, it is cyber warfare already, to the point that an armed force or a security force which does not equip itself to be able to fight that cyber war will end up losing. And as we go back to the mandate of these agencies, we already said that they are set up to protect the way of life of Filipinos and the nation, and that it is their job to secure the State. If there

is cyber warfare going on, then it is their duty to equip themselves and fight that war. And it is no doubt that the NICA is involved there because that is part of their mandate.

REP. ELAGO. Mr. Speaker, is it part of their mandate to spread unverified information, fake news, doctored images, fabricated statements, and baseless accusations?

REP. BIAZON. Well, as we have seen, other persons who have been victims of false information through social media have ultimately paid the price for it. Mayroon na hong mga nakasuhan, na-convict dahil sa mga pagkakalat ng wrong information, false accusation, et cetera. That is why sabi ko nga po at the beginning na then let them be accountable, let us bring it to the proper court of justice. So, at this point, then kung nakikita na siya ay accountable, then we encourage to proceed with prosecuting.

REP. ELAGO. Mr. Speaker, distinguished Sponsor, do you not think it is a violation of the legal mandate of NICA to share unreliable information?

REP. BIAZON. Well, as the NICA Director General told me earlier, he was sharing it with personnel within his scope because part of the mandate of intelligence information is, of course, getting the information to the right people. So kumbaga ho, base doon sa explanation kanina na na-share niya doon sa tauhan nila, iyon ay bahagi noong kaniyang mandate sa kaniyang tanggapan to keep his people informed on what to look out for or to monitor.

REP. ELAGO. Pero, Ginoong Speaker, iyong ating mga pages na na-cite, talagang wala pong accountability eh. Magkamali man sila, tama man o mali iyong information po na nakalagay doon, hindi natin alam kung sino ang pananagutin dahil walang mga pangalan, kung sinong nagsulat, kung sinong gumawa at sa tingin po natin, isa po itong malaking nakakapagpahamak na aktibidad na ang isang opisyal na may napakalaking responsibilidad pagdating sa intelligence gathering, pagdating

sa handling, ano, ng information na may kinalaman sa seguridad, sa paglaban sa kahit anong security threats sa ating bansa, kailangan po na maging responsable at may mga mechanisms na para maging accountable iyong ating mga opisyal kahit pa alam naman po natin na ang kanilang mandato ay para sa mga covert, overt na operations na marami talaga diyan ay confidential. Ngunit hindi po ito nagbibigay ng pahintulot o lisensya para magpakalat naman ng fake news at disinformation. Kaya po ang Representasyon na ito ay gagawa po talaga ng hakbang. Ito po ay nasa harap na ng NBI kaya babalitaan din ng Representasyon na ito, Ginoong Speaker, distinguished Sponsor, ang Kapulungan na ito pagdating po sa development ng ating mga naiulat na mga pages at involvement po ng NICA DG dito, Ginoong Speaker.

Dagdag lamang po, kasama po doon sa mga posts na aming nakuha at ini-report na rin ay may kinalaman po sa mga isyung pambayan. May mga pages po dito na umaatake o may pagsuporta halimbawa sa pagpapasara sa ABS-CBN, ganoon din po sa pagpapasara sa Rappler, pagsuporta sa mga kaso kay Maria Ressa. Kaya nababahala po tayo pagdating doon sa objectivity na mayroon sana ang ating mga nagtatrabaho para sa national intelligence, sa kanilang napakalaki din na impluwensya sa ating bayan.

Ngayon, Ginoong Speaker, nais ko namang tanungin ang National Security Council patungkol po sa kanilang sinabi na milestone na action. Ito po iyong Supreme Court case na tinawag nilang “milestone,” na may kinalaman raw po sa recruitment ng mga child soldiers. Ginoong Speaker, maaari ba nating malaman kung bakit po tinawag na milestone case itong kaso ng petisyon ng Lucena parents? Sa harap ng Supreme Court, sila po ay nagpetisyon ng writ of amparo at writ of habeas corpus laban sa mga aktibista at kasama na rin ang Representasyon na ito ng KABATAAN.

Just to add, Mr. Speaker, the exact quote is this, “This legal action is a milestone in the fight against the communist terrorist group.” Ito po ay hindi lamang nag-red tag, nag-terror tag din sa harap po ng Korte Suprema. Bakit po ito natawag bilang isang milestone?

REP. BIAZON. Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, as I have been informed by the National Security Adviser, the case is a personal case or a private case filed by the parent of the 16-year-old girl and as it came out in the Supreme Court, as you mentioned – may I get verification if the one quoted as saying that it is a milestone case is the NSC?

REP. ELAGO. Yes, General Esperon po.

REP. BIAZON. Well, it may have been considered or just an opinion that it is a milestone case because it establishes a legal precedent with regard to the recruitment of minors or children into a terrorist organization. So, but it is a private case, as was mentioned, and the NSC is detached from that private case.

REP. ELAGO. Mr. Speaker, there is no denying the involvement of the National Security Council, with the NTF-ELCAC, in this case since all of the activities, from the filing up to the press conference, lagi pong nandoon ang NTF-ELCAC, lagi pong may support statement ang National Security Council. At bibigyan po ng Representasyon na ito ang Sponsor ng information din tungkol dito na tayo po ay sumagot sa petisyon na ito.

At, Mr. Speaker, kagalang-galang na Sponsor, nagagalak po ako na ibalita na ibinasura ng Korte Suprema ang petisyon na ito dahil walang batayan. The writ of amparo is improper, writ of habeas corpus lacks merit, and the Supreme Court has decided the young activist is not missing and the young activist can make her own choices.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Maraming salamat po, distinguished Sponsor.

REP. BIAZON. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal). Majority Leader.

REP. LACSON-NOEL. Mr. Speaker, I move that we recognize the Hon. Carlos Isagani Zarate of the Party-List BAYAN MUNA for his interpellation.

I so move, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal). The Hon. Carlos Zarate of the BAYAN MUNA Party-List is recognized.

REP. ZARATE. Maraming salamat, Ginoong Speaker.

Muli, magandang gabi sa ating kagalang-galang na Sponsor.

Mga ilang paglilinaw po at katanungan. Una po doon sa katanungan natin patungkol sa National Security Council. Ang papel po ng National Security Council ay ang pangunahing ahensiya na tagapayo sa Presidente ng Pilipinas sa usapin ng seguridad. Tama po ba iyon, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker? Is that ...

REP. BIAZON. Iyan po ang mandato ng ating National Security Council.

REP. ZARATE. At dahil iyon po ang pangunahing mandato ng konseho na iyan, ano po ang pagtingin ng National Security Council, in the level of threats, nitong tuloy-tuloy na aggressive action ng bansang Tsina sa ating mga karagatan diyan sa West Philippine Sea?

REP. BIAZON. Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, ang tanong po ay kung ano ang pananaw ng NSC on—iyong mga pagkilos ng China doon po sa West Philippine Sea?

Una po, siyempre, ang foreign policy natin ay crafted by the President at sa kaniyang stated na foreign policy, he wants to be an enemy to no one and a friend to everyone.

Ngunit nakita naman po natin ang pahayag ng Pangulo doon sa UN General Assembly, kung saan iginiit niya ang paglabas ng arbitral ruling pabor sa Pilipinas. So, ang kaniyang approach ay sa pamamagitan ng paggamit ng diplomatic means to resolve that issue and, at the same time, trying to engage allies to help us in our other objectives. So, sa tingin ng ating Pangulo at ang advice sa kaniya ng mga advisers ay itong track na ito ay kung saan tayong mas makakakuha ng benepisyo.

REP. ZARATE. Maraming salamat, Ginoong Sponsor, Mr. Speaker.

Sa tingin po ba ng kagalang-galang na Sponsor, Mr. Speaker, at ng National Security

Council, seryoso pa rin ang bantang ito sa ating pambansang soberanya at pambansang seguridad, itong mga agresibong aksiyon na ginagawa ng Tsina sa ating mga karagatan at ibang mga teritoryo, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker?

REP. BIAZON. Tinitingnan ito na patuloy siyempre na mayroon siyang epekto sa national interests natin, lalong-lalo na na ang intrusions sa exclusive economic zone ay may epekto sa ating interes pang-ekonomiya, kaya patuloy na binabantayan ng ating National Security Adviser at ng National Security Council iyang mga pagkilos diyan sa West Philippine Sea.

REP. ZARATE. Salamat, Ginoong Sponsor, Mr. Speaker.

In fact, this was confirmed during the budget briefings by the other agencies na, even as we speak now, halos hindi talaga nahinto iyong mga intrusions ng bansang Tsina, ng kanilang mga barko, especially Coast Guard and probably even the Navy, but also the militias in our territories.

But, of course, totoo rin na sa teritoryong iyan ay interesado rin ang ibang bansa, lalong-lalo na ang karibal ng Tsina na isa ring imperyalistang bansa, malaking bansa, ang Estados Unidos, kaya nga ginagawa nilang parang theater of, if I may say it, theater of arms race or theater of war or whatever you may call it, na nagpapakita ng muscle-flexing itong dalawang bansang ito.

So given that situation, and you mentioned, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker, that in the United Nations General Assembly, the President said that that arbitral award can no longer be just ignored, cannot even be changed by changing governments, et cetera.

Given this situation now and given that foreign policy stand of the President, my question, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker, ano ang nagiging advice ng Security Council sa Presidente ng Pilipinas patungkol dito sa ongoing activities diyan sa West Philippine Sea or sa Spratlys, especially by China, and probably even by other countries, that intrude or impede on our territory or sovereignty or sovereign rights in those areas, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker?

REP. BIAZON. Well, I think that the main gist of the stance of the President is an independent foreign policy. Like, for example, the President can engage other allies to go against China but that would mean him relying and being tied down to those other allies. So, what we see here is that there is a calibrated engagement on one side and the other side. As we can see, nagka-clash iyong dalawang superpowers. So, ang approach ay i-calibrate ang relationship sa bawat isa, individually, to just maintain the balance as of now while we slowly build up our own capability. And makikita naman po natin diyan, iyong commitment to modernize the armed forces ay unti-unting ginagawa. Most likely, until such time na kung capable tayo to make a stand, at least a credible stand, that is the time that we will see a more pronounced shift kung saan nang position tayo.

But I think the approach or being a friend to everyone and an enemy to no one is like buying time until such time that we are able to stand on our own. And as we saw at the UN General Assembly – in previous years, we did not hear that kind of stand made by the President, but he felt it was that time to make that statement and he did.

REP. ZARATE. Thank you, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker.

By the way, may I inquire, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker, from both agencies, the NICA and the NSC, as we speak now, tuloy-tuloy pa ba iyong, halimbawa, iyong activities diyan sa West Philippine Sea, iyong expansion ng mga artificial islands na ginagawa ng Tsina based on their information at this very moment?

REP. BIAZON. Well, the National Security Adviser acknowledges that the presence of the Chinese in the West Philippine Sea gives them much elbow room to make improvements, additions to those islands, the artificial islands that were built. And sa nakita nga po natin nang mga nakaraang taon, puwede pa natin ma-describe siguro na nag-escalate iyong deployment ng armaments.

REP. ZARATE. Yes.

REP. BIAZON. So, habang naka-position sila doon sa mga islands na iyon, talagang mayroon po silang opportunity na magdagdag.

REP. ZARATE. And as you termed it, it escalated in the past years. May I inquire then, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker, the National Security Adviser, the National Security Council for that matter, ano iyong proactive or even mga advice nila or ginawa ng gobyerno on this aspect considering na sila iyong pangunahing ahensiya na tumitingin sa ganitong usapin, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker?

REP. BIAZON. Well, makikita po, Mr. Speaker, iyong hakbang na ginawa ng gobyerno following iyong paninindigan na diplomatic efforts ang ating pangunahing sandata ngayon at sa ilang mga pagkakataon ay agaran din naman pong rumisponde and Department of Foreign Affairs sa paghain ng mga protesta tungkol doon sa mga hakbang na ginagawa ng bansang Tsina sa West Philippine Sea. So, mayroon din po namang direct action that was undertaken by the Philippine government responding to what the Chinese are doing.

REP. ZARATE. Are you saying, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker, na based on the advice of the National Security Council, the National Security Adviser, we filed diplomatic protests on several occasions against this intrusion of Chinese vessels in our territory, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker?

REP. BIAZON. Those actions done by the DFA were part of the continuing action by the National Task Force on West Philippine Sea, which the National Security Adviser is the head of. And as we had heard in public statements by the DFA Secretary, kikilos lang naman po siya kung iyong impormasyon na pinagbabatayan niya ay pinaniniwalaan niya.

Sa aking observation po sa kaniyang mga social media posts, sinasabi niya, maraming nag-uudyok – file a protest, file a protest, pero paulit-ulit niyang sinasabi, magfa-file lang siya ng protest kung ang nagbigay ng abiso ay

iyong members of our Armed Forces o kaya itong nasa Security Council po natin, so the advice came from that body, Mr. Speaker.

REP. ZARATE. Thank you, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker. Just an idea—from January to September, this month, how many such kind of protests were filed by the Philippine government as per the advice of the National Security Council or the National Security Adviser?

REP. BIAZON. Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, although wala po kasi iyong data dito, but offhand, from the top of his head, the National Security Adviser said that during this time, we have had at least around nine protests filed, kasama na doon iyong sa mga marine scientific research at iyong other activities that are being done by the Chinese.

REP. ZARATE. Thank you, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker.

I am a bit disappointed because the National Security Adviser should know kung, halimbawa, ngayong taon, ilan iyong, as per his recommendation, nai-file na protesta dahil as you have mentioned earlier, hindi naman hihinto itong mga activities na ganito ng mga foreign entities like China and the US in the West Philippine Sea. Kaya itinanong ko po iyon dahil while it is, indeed, in this past, in that UN General Assembly speech of the President, parang tinitingnan natin na iyong kaniyang pivot to China is parang bumalik, nag-pivot to the US again.

Pero nakikita po natin, nitong mga nakaraang mga panahon, parang ang dami nang mga nangyayari diyan sa West Philippine Sea. Para pong ang ating mga nasa security sector ay either nagbubulag-bulagan o nagbibingi-bingihan. That is precisely the reason why these foreign entities, especially China, are emboldened to make aggressive, even more aggressive activities.

At gaya nga ng nabanggit ninyo, nag-escalate iyong kanilang occupation, expansion noong kanilang mga artificial islands diyan sa Spratlys and even inside our territory sa West Philippine Sea.

So, iyon po ang gusto kong ipunto, 'no,

gustong i-raise dito. If we really consider that as a serious threat, then I think, even just like what our neighboring countries are doing, kahit na totoo na hindi naman natin puwedeng labanan at par na iyong kanilang puwersa, but, you know, our neighboring countries like Indonesia, Vietnam and even the others, 'no, ay mas may ginagawa silang proactive to protect their respective territories na kine-claim din ng China.

So, why can the Philippine government not do such things, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker?

REP. BIAZON. Well, Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, I am pretty sure that the State's security forces and security advisers are giving much consideration to the situation.

Kung ako lang po, if you will ask me, I am more of the aggressive type with regard to the issue on the West Philippine Sea. But I do understand that there are other factors that I am not aware of. I am not privy to the information that is available to the National Security Council, the President himself. So, their decision may be based on certain considerations that are not within my realm, our realm, but within their scope of knowledge. So, ang nakikita lang po natin dito, as of now, of course, obviously, there is a balancing act being done so as not to put us at a great disadvantage.

REP. ZARATE. Thank you, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker.

Now, on a very specific case. It was reported na this Chinese contractor na siya ring involved dito sa Sangley Airport Project ay the same Chinese contractor na involved din doon sa paggawa ng mga artificial islands sa West Philippine Sea ng Chinese government.

So, ano ang ginawa at ano ang tingin dito ng National Security Council at ng National Security Adviser? Ito ba ay okay lang sa kanila even if this contractor, as already reported, ay siya ring involved sa expansion ng Chinese government diyan sa West Philippine Sea?

REP. BIAZON. Distinguished colleague, Mr. Speaker, the National Security Adviser

has shared with us that, at this point, they do not consider the engagement of that particular contractor as a direct threat and they are still subjecting the contractor to verification or assessment because there are some information that show that this is not the same entity. Sinusubukan pa ho nilang alamin iyong background na iyan but on the surface, it seems to be a deal that would give us development of a new airport. So from the perspective of national development, it was given a green light.

Now, our reaction really is based on the actions taken by the United States because they have a law there which gives them the authority to blacklist or ban that particular contractor who was said to be operating on the reclamation in the West Philippine Sea. Of course, we give it to them, that is their policy. They have a law for that. We do not have that law. So, as far as the NSC is concerned or the National Security Adviser is concerned, this contractor, this particular contractor which has been engaged on this airport project will, of course, be under scrutiny and observation. If they prove to be a threat, then the necessary action would be taken.

REP. ZARATE. Thank you, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker. So it is not a direct threat for now but probably indirect considering — of course, the good Sponsor knows this, that that project is, in fact, malapit doon sa isang ano naman, facility ng Philippine Navy kaya nag-re-raise ng question iyan. Even within the security community, nare-raise iyong issue na iyan. And I cannot understand, at this point, when that project is about — sabi daw magsisimula na iyan and the National Security Council or the security sector is still trying to vet or to verify whether that is the same contractor involved in that artificial island construction in the West Philippine Sea.

But at any rate, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker, as I was saying, these are precisely, if the government is considering this as a serious threat to our security and national sovereignty ay dapat hong tingnan nang maigi iyan. In fact, maraming nire-raise na issues diyan, iyong construction ng mga towers inside our military camps, and I also have to state na while we

are looking at the aggressive activities nitong Chinese, of course, we know also na mayroon din namang mga ginagawang or in fact, there are already camps or facilities ang kalaban din ng China, ang America, dito sa ating bansa na hindi basta-basta rin napapasok even ng ating mga nasa security sector.

So my point is, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker, we are saying we have an independent foreign policy, but actually, iyong foreign policy na iyan is, you know, parang we are accommodating everybody, especially ang China at ang US, at the expense, actually, of our own national sovereignty and this may, in fact, will give a long-lasting negative impact on our country, itong nangyayari ngayong so-called independent foreign policy of the present administration.

But on to my last point, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker. While sa tingin ng Kinatawag ito ay napaka, parang busy ata ang National Security Council, busy ang National Intelligence Coordinating Agency sa kanilang activities related to E.O. No. 70 — sa totoo lang, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker, I was readying to just interpellate on the budget of the NSC. But while I was listening to the responses given earlier to the questions raised by the Honorable Elago ay hindi ko ho maintindihan. Sinasabi na nag-post ang Director General ng NICA ng mga memes and other posts doon sa kaniyang Facebook account at noong tinanong na kung sino ang mga administrator nito ay hindi niya alam. Several times, hindi niya alam.

That goes into the issue of you being the Director General of NICA and you are posting all these things. Even if you are saying that this is a personal account, you are still the Director General of NICA. You cannot divorce yourself from being the Director General of NICA.

And you are posting things that malign private individuals and I really take strong exception to that. This was only brought to my attention tonight, itong post saying that we, as Representatives and Members of this Congress, are stealing from public funds to fund terrorism.

Again, I take strong exception to that. Wala ho akong ninanakaw kahit na isang sentimo para sabihing pinopondohan ang terorismo. Will the Director General say now that itong

post na ito na inilagay niya sa kaniyang Facebook account ay naniniwala siya rito, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker?

SUSPENSION OF SESSION

REP. BIAZON. A minute suspension, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal). The session is suspended.

It was 9:28 p.m.

RESUMPTION OF SESSION

At 9:34 p.m., the session was resumed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal). The session is resumed.
Majority Leader.

REP. BOLILIA. Mr. Speaker, our parliamentary status is that we are in the period of sponsorship and debate. I move to recognize again the Honorable Zarate to continue his interpellation of the Sponsor.

I so move, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal). Thank you very much.
The distinguished Sponsor.

REP. BIAZON. Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, after conferring with the Director General of the NICA, I have been made to understand that, number one, he did not post. He might have liked or shared, as what he had been doing, and his actions were brought out of his sympathy for those who are against communist-terrorist groups and his action of liking or sharing was borne from that shared belief against the communist-terrorist movement. That is the explanation, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor.

REP. ZARATE. Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker, that explanation is not acceptable. I have to remind the Director General of the provisions of R.A. No. 6713, specifically Section 4 (b), "Public officials and employees shall

perform and discharge their duties with the highest degree of excellence, professionalism, intelligence and skill."

Matatawag po ba natin, Ginoong Sponsor, Mr. Speaker, na that is the highest degree of excellence and professionalism? Na sabihin na natin na hindi siya ang nag-post noon, nag-share siya sa kaniyang personal Facebook account without verifying—sabi niya hindi nga niya alam kung sino ang gumawa noon. At ang nakalagay dito, I am only looking at this one photo that was brought to my attention just tonight, "stealing from public funds to fund terrorism." He is the Director General of NICA. Hindi po ba responsibilidad niya as isang professional na empleyado ng pamahalaan na i-verify kung totoo iyan o hindi? Granting that he shared the sentiments of this unknown group, Global Public, hindi niya alam kung sino ang administrator, which I doubt, bago siya mag-post ng ganon—he is not a private individual. All of us here, mga empleyado tayo ng pamahalaan kaya natural na babatikusin tayo, mapupulaan tayo. But sharing, peddling outright lies is not acceptable. That is not an acceptable explanation, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker—"because I shared the sentiments of this person or this group." At hindi lang naman iisang beses, as mentioned earlier by the Honorable Elago, na nagpo-post ng ganito.

Earlier, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker, the House Minority made a collective stand against what the Undersecretary of PCOO also did in the past, and even up to now. Kaya pina-defer namin iyong budget ng PCOO, in fact, even the budget briefing. Dahil the NICA, especially NICA, NICA is the secretariat of the Anti-Terrorism Council, malaki ang papel nila. If NICA will just accept, will just share this information—"nagnakaw ng public funds," what is your proof? Nasa social media mo iyan and your followers, because you shared that, will certainly believe that that is true because you are the Director General of NICA and you shared that post. And hindi lang ito, marami pa, and we are already branded as terrorists. Previously, the National Security Adviser said, "No terrorism," I mean, "Activism is not terrorism," when we were debating the passage of the Anti-Terror Law. There was

this assurance, “Do not worry.” Ngayon, we are here in Congress working, we are now branded as terrorists. That is already a crime, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker. And here we are also being accused of stealing public funds. And that is not made acceptable by just saying na, “I just, you know, I just shared my sympathy.”

So, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker, we are considering here the budget of agencies and when the heads of these agencies, officials of these agencies come here, hindi naman sila pumupunta rito because of their own personal choice. They are here because of their official duties at hindi nila ma-divorce, as I have said earlier, kung ano ang ginagawa nila. And kaya, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker, at least from this Representation, ...

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal).
The Honorable Zarate, the Chair requests ...

REP. ZARATE. Yes, I am winding up, ...

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal).
... the Gentleman to wind up.

REP. ZARATE. ... Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal).
Go ahead with your windup.

REP. ZARATE. I demand, just like what the Minority did sa budget ng PCOO, that NICA Director General, all these unverified – he already admitted, hindi niya alam sino ang mga authors niyan – postings that directly accuse us of crimes of terrorism and crimes of graft and corruption, should be taken down. Hindi ho katanggap-tanggap iyan because this, at least personally, hindi ho ang inilalagay dito sa panganib ang seguridad lang namin, kundi pati buhay namin. I have already showed to our colleagues here, even the House leadership several postings na sinasabi, “Itumba na iyan” mula sa mga ganitong klaseng sine-share na mga posts that accuse us of this and that. So, I hope the good Sponsor will not just take this lightly and take this as just, you know, a private matter because we are all government employees and officials here. We are guided by some norms

of conduct. May we get a response from the Sponsor, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal).
Yes, ...

REP. BIAZON. Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, I had conferred with the Director General of NICA and it was really his opinion that was shared. The Sponsor cannot override another person’s opinion and that is why, again, as I said to the Honorable Elago, if there are aggrieved parties because of actions done by certain government employees or officials, there are legal means to address it. If the NICA Director General would stand by that position that he gave with regard to that particular incident of a Facebook share or a Facebook like on the opinion of another person, this Sponsor, this Representation, of course, cannot impose on him. So, if my distinguished colleague would allow me to once again confer with the Director General of NICA to give these proceedings a chance, that is one thing that I would request. May I confer again to verify if he will stand by the original explanation that was given to me.

REP. ZARATE. Very well, Mr. Speaker.

SUSPENSION OF SESSION

REP. BIAZON. A minute suspension, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal).
The session is suspended.

It was 9:43 p.m.

RESUMPTION OF SESSION

At 9:53 p.m., the session was resumed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal).
The session is resumed.

Majority Leader, what is the parliamentary status?

REP. DELOS SANTOS. Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Ruffey Biazon has the floor.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal). Okay. The distinguished Sponsor.

REP. BIAZON. Yes, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

After once again conferring, Mr. Speaker, with the Director General of NICA, he stands by his opinion which was in sympathy with the cause of the person who made the post referred to by the distinguished Honorable Zarate. As this Sponsor mentioned earlier, we are unable to impose on a personal opinion of the Director General of NICA and coming from where his mandate is, which is fighting terrorism, the sympathy to a cause is something that is innate in him. We do understand the concern of the Honorable Zarate, particularly with what he mentioned about concerns about personal safety as brought about by such posts. But in this case, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, the Director General of NICA has stuck to his opinion.

REP. ZARATE. Would that mean, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker, that the Director General of NICA will not take any responsibility for posting those wild accusations, baseless accusations, and if this will result in placing ourselves in jeopardy, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker?

REP. BIAZON. As I understood, Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, the Director General of NICA is taking responsibility for his personal action of liking or sharing based on his own opinion or belief. But with regard to the actions taken by the person who posted the said post, the Director General of NICA did not have a part in that posting. He takes responsibility for his actions of liking or sharing.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal). Okay, distinguished Sponsor, that will be your last response. Distinguished interpellator, please wind up.

REP. ZARATE. Well, at any rate, Mr. Speaker, we place it on record that those accusations were posted by the Director

General and even in some other social media platforms that I suppose the Director General is aware of. These postings, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker, are direct affronts to us who are Members of this Congress, not only to us but all the Members of this Congress and even this institution. And as I have mentioned earlier, we are guided by some norms. You cannot just say that, even if that is fake news, that is not true, because you sympathize with that group, you will just share that and say that is a personal posting because these things will have consequences.

So, I have to place that on record, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker, that after posting all those things, the highest official of our NICA and even the National Security Council will just say, "Wala kaming— hindi namin responsibilidad iyan." But I know they have to be responsible, they have to be accountable as all of us here will be responsible and accountable for our actions as officials, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you, Mr. Sponsor. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal). Okay. Majority Leader.

REP. LACSON-NOEL. Mr. Speaker, I move that we recognize the Hon. Ferdie Gaité of the Party-List BAYAN MUNA for his interpellation.

I so move, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal). The Honorable Gaité of BAYAN MUNA Party-List is recognized.

REP. GAITE. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, at salamat sa ating mga kasama na mag-alasdiyes na ay kasama pa rin natin sa pagdinig sa budget for the NSC and the NICA.

Mr. Speaker, pahihintulutan ba ng ating kagalang-galang na Sponsor na makapagtanong lang hinggil sa mandato at gayon din sa programa ng NSC, lalo na sa ipinapanukalang budget for 2021, Mr. Speaker?

REP. BIAZON. Yes, please proceed with your questions, Your Honor.

REP. GAITE. Mr. Speaker, naririnig po ba ako?

REP. BIAZON. Pakiulit lang po kung nakapagtanong na po kayo, Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague. Puwedeng pakiulit lang po, hindi ko po narinig nang mabuti.

REP. GAITE. Pasensiya na po. Mr. Speaker. Naririnig ninyo po ba ako?

REP. BIAZON. Yes, Sir. Please proceed.

REP. GAITE. Iyan, pasensiya na po. Salamat po sa ating mga kasamahan at colleagues sa Kongreso, Mr. Speaker, at mabibigyan ako ng pagkakataon kung pahihintulutan ng ating Sponsor para makapagtanong hinggil sa iminumungkahing budget para sa 2021 ng ahensiyang NSC at NICA. Pahintulutan mo po ako, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal). The honorable Sponsor, you may ...

REP. BIAZON. Mr. Speaker, pagpasensiyahan na po, iyong bandang huling bahagi, hindi ko masyado pong naunawaan, something about an activity by the NSC?

REP. GAITE. Mr. Speaker, naririnig po ba ako?

REP. BIAZON. Yes, please.

REP. GAITE. Iyan. Pahihintulutan ba ako ng Mr. Sponsor na makapagtanong ng ilang mga clarifications hinggil sa proposed budget ng NSC at ng NICA for 2021, Mr. Chair, Mr. Sponsor?

REP. BIAZON. Yes, Sir, Mr. Speaker, tungkol po sa budget ng NSC at NICA. Maaari po nating marinig iyong tanong?

REP. GAITE. Pero bago po ako magsimula, medyo nababahala rin ako sa nabanggit na ng ating naunang mga tagapagsalita, sina Congresswoman Elago and Congressman Zarate hinggil sa mga akusasyon ng NICA. Kasi nakakabahala na pine-perceive nila na kami daw ay mga kalaban ng Estado at

ginagamit ang plataporma ng Facebook at iba pa para kami'y batikusin at nalalagay sa panganib ang buhay namin dahil dito sa mga unverified at dishonest na mga accusations na nanggagaling sa isang mataas na pinuno ng isang ahensiya ng gobyerno. At again, tama si Congressman Zarate that we are guided by the Code of Ethical Standards for Public Officials and Employees, that ang isa sa mga norms, nabanggit na ni Congressman Zarate, ay iyong honesty. And I do not think iyong ganitong pagpo-post or even sharing or even liking posts which are not accurate or which are lies has room in the government.

I believe that even the PNP has certain guidelines in sharing and liking ng mga social media posts and kung ginagawa iyan sa PNP, dapat din may similar guidelines sa iba pang top officials ng gobyerno. Nevertheless, tuloy na po ako sa aking pagtatanong, Mr. Speaker, tama iyong sinabi ninyo po. Ang NSC at ang NICA ay responsible sa external and, of course, internal security ng Pilipinas. Tama po ba iyan, Mr. Speaker?

REP. BIAZON. Yes, Mr. Speaker. Bahagi po ng kanilang mandato ang internal security tulad po ng nabanggit kanina.

REP. GAITE. Salamat po. Kanina sinabi ng una nating interpellator na nababahala siya doon sa problema sa West Philippine Sea na kung saan iyong ating claims dito sa West Philippine Sea, iyong ating exclusive economic zone, kasama na iyong mga islang nabanggit, Paracel, Scarborough, Spratly Islands, ay tila iyong ating external security ay threatened because actual lands which we claim or itong mga isla na nabanggit ngayon ay inaagaw sa ating kontrol at ating pag-aari. Pero ang isang—kaya naitanong ko kanina bakit external and internal, kung ang mga lupain natin ay naaagaw, mayroon din akong isang nakababahalang intelligence na nakuha—at ito'y hindi intelligence na confidential kasi ito'y alam ng marami and this has been shared many times over—iyong usapin ng pagpasok, at kanina nabanggit ng ating Sponsor iyong kahalagahan ng information, at ito ay patungkol sa isang telecoms company, iyong Dito Corporation. Despite the violations of

Dito's franchise na nakuha na ito noong 1998, baka po ulit – ngayon, by the way, binago pa iyong pangalan. Dati Mislattel, naging Dito. Eh kahit ho iyong pagpalit ng pangalan ay mayroon palang procedure diyan, hindi basta-basta ginagawa and nakakabahala na itong binabanggit na Mislattel o ngayon ay tinatawag na "Dito" na isang kompanya na 40-percent owned by a Chinese telecom company. So, this is not anymore an external threat, this is an internal threat kasi nandito sila sa loob mismo, doon sa kahalagahan na ang impormasyon na ginagamit ng bawat Pilipino, sa paggamit ng cellphone, ng Internet, ng iba't ibang forms ng electronic communication. Dito, accordingly, has a standing loan of P500 million from the Chinese banking sector, which foreshadows possible greater Chinese control over the company, beyond its 40-percent share. At ang isang nakakabahala, ito na nga ay nabanggit, wala na ho sila sa labas, nasa loob na sila ng bansa because the DND and Dito came out with a memorandum of agreement, allowing the establishment, or putting up of its towers inside their military camps. Wala na po sa labas, nasa loob na po ng ating talagang teritoryo, unless China also claims that the military camps are part of China.

There is the Leo Technologies Infrastructure Corporation, the company contracted by Dito to construct towers in Philippine military bases, which is actually a subsidiary of China Bester Telecoms of Wuhan, China. China Energy Equipment Company is a Dito partnership between the CEEC or China Energy Equipment Company – and it is eyeing to build 10,000 common towers in a period of 12 months. Ang parent corporation nito, iyong CEEC or Energy China ay isang state-owned energy conglomerate. Tanong – ah, iyon pala, Mr. Speaker, ah sige mamaya siguro, medyo perplexed din kasi ako at siguro tatanungin ko na kaagad ito kasi medyo nahilo ako eh. Based sa budget ng dalawang ahensiya, NSC at NICA, nabanggit ninyo po, ang NSC ay konseho at acts as an adviser to the President. Tama po, Mr. Speaker?

REP. BIAZON. Tama po. As a council, sila po ang nagbibigay ng abiso o payo sa ating Pangulo on national security matters.

REP. GAITE. Salamat, Mr. Speaker.

At ang NICA, nag-o-operationalize, iyon nga ang term na ginamit do'n, "nag-o-operationalize," ibig sabihin, sila iyong aktuwal na nagga-gather ng information at nagko-coordinate nito coming from the various, possibly other government offices including the PNP, AFP and others. Tama po, Mr. Speaker?

REP. BIAZON. Tama po na sila iyong nagko-coordinate ng mga information na galing sa iba't ibang mga intelligence agencies to be processed at magamit po ng NSC at ng NSA sa kanilang pagpayo sa Pangulo.

REP. GAITE. Kung gayon, Mr. Speaker, bakit ang budget ng NSC at ng NICA, especially for the confidential and intelligence funds, including the extraordinary and miscellaneous expenses – ito iyong information intelligence gathering agency, and yet, iyong budget nito papaliit? From P145 million in 2019; tumaas ng P224 million in 2020; ngayon, ang NICA will only have P24.8 million, including a portion from the President's intelligence funds. The NSC, ganoon din, from P48 million, tumaas ng P102 million noong 2020; ngayong 2021, P2.7 million.

Hindi kaya, kung bakit – ngayon, ang tanong ko, Mr. Speaker, aware ba ang NSC at NICA sa pagpasok ng mga Chinese companies, lalo na dito sa isang napakahalagang aspeto ng serbisyo sa ating bansa, ang komunikasyon? Iyong nabanggit kong role ng iba't-ibang Chinese companies dito, involvement sa Dito and, as I heard, ang sabi ninyo, iyong pagpapahalaga sa impormasyon – hindi ba dapat na na-flag na ng NSC o ng NICA iyong participation ng China considering na mayroon tayong dispute with China over the West Philippine Sea, Mr. Chair, Mr. Sponsor?

REP. BIAZON. Well, nakakatuwa po, Mr. Speaker, na napuna ng ating kasamahan na nabawasan pa ang NSC at NICA. This just goes to show na the two agencies can also make sacrifices dahil mayroong ibang priority na pinaglagaan ang ating pamahalaan ng mga pondo na iyan, but it does not mean to say

that the capability is diminished. The existing intelligence network of various agencies are still in place. They have human intelligence that they can rely on. They also have electronic intelligence that they can use in gathering information. Of course, it would be better if there is a bigger amount of budget for them, but this is part of the adjustments that the government is making to lessen in particular areas and to add in other areas, Mr. Speaker.

REP. GAITE. Mr. Speaker, hindi ganoon iyong analysis na nakita ko eh. Dahil nga hindi binibigyan ng diin iyong intelligence gathering against sa itong sinasabing genuine external threats na naging internal threat, and iyong scant resources, hindi pa nakukuha iyong mahalagang intelligence para sa pakinabang ng ating mga mamamayan. I find it also very alarming that I think Secretary Año of the DILG, I read an article, that he was dismissive of this supposed establishment of cell site towers within military camps kasi maririnig lang daw ang tsismis. Eh, sa military parlance, kahit iyong tsismis has importance eh, iyong “chatter” na tinatawag, iyong sabay-sabay na may nagsasalita. That is an indication that something is afoot. At sabi nila, kahit iyan, kahit tsismis iyan, the fact that there is communication between certain groups, then that is, they call it “chatter,” if I’m not mistaken.

At this juncture, Deputy Speaker Oaminal relinquished the Chair to Rep. Juan Pablo “Rimpy” P. Bondoc.

So, ito iyong nami-miss, ‘no, na ang problem staring us right in our faces, iyong intrusion sa ating national security ng isang foreign na bansa, na hindi lang simpleng foreign na bansa, isang bansa na mayroon tayong direct dispute. By the way, naipanalò na natin iyan sa Arbitral Tribunal, and yet, iba ang approach natin. Sinabi ng ating kagalang-galang na Sponsor, diplomatic ang approach, pero hindi namin maintindihan, sa mga kapwa niya Pilipino, sa loob ng Pilipinas, ang kaniyang perceived enemies ay itinuturing niya undiplomatically. Kaya, Mr. Speaker, nakakabahala na ganito ang sitwasyon sa ating

byan, na nagagamit iyong resources, not to face actual threats to our security internally and externally, but nagagamit ito para doon sa perceived enemies of the State. Anong tingin po ng ating kagalang-galang na Sponsor, Mr. Speaker, sa paggamit ng intelligence not for the benefit of the people but only for those in power, Mr. Speaker?

REP. BIAZON. Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, iyong pagkabanggit po na parang ang lumalabas, dahil binawasan iyong budget ay parang nagpapabaya, naging Sponsor na ho ako ng budget ng NICA and NSC previously, but I would not equate iyong pagbaba noong budget as diminishing the capability. Baka nga ho magulat pa tayo at the capabilities that they have even with that reduction. And we are pretty sure, I am pretty sure, Mr. Speaker, that there is the capability and there is the effort being undertaken to ensure that we have enough information to make proper decisions in the interest of our national security. Iyon naman po ang mandate at iyon naman po ang tinitiyak natin even with that reduced budget. And with regard to the different threats that are around us, lahat po naman iyan are taken into consideration, at please remember that our intelligence network is not limited to what we have in the NSC, in the NICA, in the AFP, in the PNP, and in other agencies. Please remember, Mr. Speaker, that the engagement of the NSC and the NICA goes even outside, meaning to say, the sharing of intelligence information with other allies, other countries. So, while we would rather have them given a bigger share of the budget pie, the adjustment that was made in bringing down the budget does not equate to a diminishing capability and the scope of what they are looking out for, for the welfare of the country because ultimately, it is for the welfare of the country.

REP. GAITE. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And that is, I think, Mr. Sponsor, a good point regarding – sinasabi ninyo nga na hindi lang naman lahat ng intelligence ay nanggagaling sa NSC at sa NICA, which brings me to the point of our national budget. For the 2021 National Expenditure Program, the lion’s share of the confidential and intelligence funds, wala doon

sa intelligence-gathering agencies, nasa Office of the President, confidential funds amounting to P2.25 billion, those are the confidential funds and the intelligence funds, again a different item amounting to P2.25 billion, for a total of P4.5 billion, to an office which is not even an intelligence-gathering office.

Iyong iba maliliit na lang—mayroon ang DENR; mayroon ang Department of Finance; ang DFA understandably; probably, DILG and PNP. Imagine PNP, they are the same ano, PNP. So, intelligence funds ng Pangulo ay P2.25 billion plus another P2.25 billion for the confidential funds. The DILG, under the PNP, only has P806 million in intelligence funds. The DND has only P10 million in intelligence funds and I would presume that these are the information/intelligence-gathering offices. Eh kung napakaliit ng budget ng mga intelligence-gathering units ay talagang makakalusot iyong Chinese companies sa loob ng ating teritoryo. Hindi pa iyon disputed territory, but iyong established na territory natin. At hindi lang sa established territory, but sa loob pa ng kampo ng mga militar. Hindi ho ba mape-perplex kayo na ganyan iyong sitwasyon na nasa loob mismo ng mga kampo ang mga cell sites? And I do not know if you are aware of this, I was reading an article the other day regarding the Stingray cell-site interceptor. They say that all signals—physically, nasa loob siya ng kampo, mas madali niyang mahagip iyong information and data, forcing cellphones and other electronic means na parang ibinigay mo na sa isang, hindi naman natin tinatawag pang “enemy” ang China, but threat sa ating national security, na mismong nasa loob ng supposedly intelligence-gathering agencies such as the DND and the PNP. Hindi ho ba isang kabalintunaan ito na we have essentially abandoned our national security by allowing in threats to our security, countries which we have disputes with, especially dito sa West Philippine Sea, Mr. Speaker?

REP. BIAZON. Yes, Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, frankly speaking, isa rin ho ako sa mga naging vocal, nagsalita in public about the concerns on having those transmitters or those towers put up inside camps. Nagsalita rin po ako doon

but eventually, who do we rely on to make those decisions? Sa akin po, noong nagsalita ang concerned agencies like the AFP, the National Security Adviser or the NSC, or the NICA, nang sinabi nila na hindi sila papayag na magagamit ito laban sa Estado, kanino ho ba talaga tayo aasa kundi sa kanila rin? Now, kung sila ay pumalpak o sila ay hindi maging matagumpay sa pagbabantay, then we hold them accountable. But as of now, I can speak out but I am not an authority on that. Anyone else can speak out, but they are not an authority on matters of security. So, talagang ang inaasahan natin ay iyong those who are sworn to duty to uphold our security. And if they say that they will not compromise our national security, then we would have to put our trust on them.

Now, with regard to the fund or the budget for confidential intelligence, the point was raised na parang mas malaki ang napunta doon sa Office of the President. Let us also remember that the ultimate user of intelligence information is the President himself. All intelligence roads lead to him. Siya iyong gagawa ng desisyon. Siya iyong magbibigay ng directive and there are processes in place for the President to make use of those funds to meet the goal, and that is to gather information for us to uphold national security and proceed with our national security strategy. So, ganoon lang po iyong setup if the question is raised with regard to the Office of the President having control of that big intelligence fund.

REP. GAITE. Yes, Mr. Speaker.

And my point, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor, is that the Office of the President is not an intelligence-gathering office. There are specialized offices within the bureaucracy which has more know-how, which has more expertise and the Office of the President is not—they are the users of the information, but they are not the gatherers of information. Kaya may pagkakaiba po iyon, hindi iyong ikaw ang may kontrol ng pondo para kumuha ng napakahalagang impormasyon sa pagpasok ng Tsina sa mga isla na kine-claim ng Pilipinas, ang pagpasok ng telecoms tulad ng Mislattel o Dito sa ating information communication services, and many more, ‘no.

Kaya nakakabahala na instead na nafo-focus ang intelligence community doon sa mga threats na ito, ginagamit iyong intelligence mechanism na ito laban sa kapwa mga Pilipino, kasama na rin kami, those who are perceived to be enemies of the State. Ginagamit ang lahat ng mga paraan, including government offices like the PCOO, like Usec. Badoy, like Monteagudo of NICA, to disparage, to make wild accusations against perceived enemies o kundi iyong opposition. Kaya iyan po iyong point na nakakabahala, na ganitong uri ng intelligence office ang mayroon tayo, na sa halip na protektahan ang totoong pambansang seguridad, ang pambansang soberanya, ginagamit ito kontra sa mga kritiko, ginagamit ito laban sa mga lumalaban sa mga maling patakaran ng pamahalaan.

Kung kaya't hindi satisfied ang Kinatawang ito sa mga paliwanag hinggil sa paano nagagamit ang pondo ng NSC at ang NICA, hindi para sa kapakanan ng pambansang seguridad, hindi para sa ating soberanya kung hindi para sa interes lamang ng makapangyarihan. So, iyon lang po ang aking manifestation and I hope the good Sponsor will review iyong mga policies na ito. At natutuwa ako na kahit paano ay ni-raise n'yo na rin pati pala iyong pagpasok ng mga foreign companies, lalo na iyong pag-establish ng tower sa loob ng kampo. And I think this is an ongoing concern which we should be very, very wary of considering na parang pinapasok na natin iyong lobo o iyong wolf sa loob kasama ang lambs. Maraming salamat po. Mabuhay po ang mga mamamayan at ating mga nakikibakang mga mamamayan. Maraming salamat po.

REP. BIAZON. Salamat din po, Mr. Speaker.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER (Rep. Bondoc). Majority Leader.

REP. DELOS SANTOS. Mr. Speaker, I move to recognize the Hon. Arlene Brosas of the GABRIELA Party-List.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER (Rep. Bondoc). The Hon. Arlene Brosas is recognized.

REP. BROSAS. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, can you hear me in the plenary?

THE PRESIDING OFFICER (Rep. Bondoc). Yes, Honorable Brosas, very clearly.

Please proceed.

REP. BROSAS. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, before I go on, may I request that the Sponsors speak loudly kasi po baka hindi ko marinig masyado at hindi maintindihan from my end, Mr. Speaker.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER (Rep. Bondoc). The manifestation for louder volume from the Sponsor is well noted. Honorable Brosas, please proceed.

REP. BROSAS. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor, maaari po bang magtanong sa inyo?

REP. BIAZON. Maaari po, please proceed.

REP. BROSAS. Maraming salamat, Mr. Speaker.

Ginoong Sponsor, magkano po ang hinihingi na budget ng NSC at ng NICA, total budget ng NSC at NICA, sa Kongreso?

REP. BIAZON. Ang National Security Council po ay humihiling ng kabuuang P850 million — baligtad pala, I am sorry. Ang NICA ay humihingi po ng kabuuang P850 million, habang ang National Security Council ay humihiling po ng P203 million. I am sorry, correction, please, P213 million para po sa National Security Council.

REP. BROSAS. So, P800 million sa NICA, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor, at sa NSC ay P213 million, tama po ba?

REP. BIAZON. Tama po.

REP. BROSAS. Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor, ang NSC po ay advisory arm ng Presidente sa matters ng domestic, foreign, military policies relating to national security including

territorial integrity and sovereignty, para po i-emphasize iyon pong territorial integrity and sovereignty. Tama po ba, Ginoong Sponsor?

REP. BIAZON. Pakiulit po iyong huling bahagi ng tanong, medyo naging garbled, Mr. Speaker.

REP. BROSAS. Sinabi ko na bilang emphasis, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor, ang NSC po ay advisory arm ng Presidente sa domestic, foreign, military policies including territorial integrity and sovereignty. Tama po ba?

REP. BIAZON. Tama po, Mr. Speaker.

REP. BROSAS. Salamat sa pag-confirm, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor. Ibig sabihin, masaklaw po iyong usapin na dapat tutukan ng NSC kaugnay ng pambansang seguridad. Nandiyan po iyong internal at external na banta sa ating pambansang seguridad. Ibig sabihin nito, hindi lang po usapin ng CPP-NPA-NDF at iba pang armadong grupo. Kung ang mandatong ito ang pagbabatayan, kasama rin po dapat iyong pagtukoy ng cyber security threats, pag-address sa transnational crimes, kabilang po ang drugs and human trafficking, at ang territorial claims sa West Philippine Sea, katulad po ng nabanggit kanina na kung saan hanggang ngayon, in fact, pinatunayan po ni DND Secretary Lorenzana na nagtatayo pa rin ang Tsina ng maraming military facilities at research centers, at malayang nakapagsasagawa ng poaching ang mga Chinese fishing vessels. Tama po ba, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor?

REP. BIAZON. Mayroon pong mga reports na confirmed na nagsasang-ayon doon sa nasabi po ninyo.

REP. BROSAS. So, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor, alam po ito ng NSC, pamilyar po sila dito.

REP. BIAZON. Kanina po, naitanong na ng isa nating kasamahan at ang sagot nga po ng NSC ay namo-monitor nila at sa katunayan, mayroon nga pong mga actions na ginawa ang ating pamahalaan para sagutin iyong

mga kilos na iyon doon sa West Philippine Sea tulad ng mga diplomatic protests.

REP. BROSAS. Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor, ano po iyong mga active pang ginawa ng NSC kaugnay dito bukod sa pagsasabi ng—hindi nga niya nasabi kung ilan eh iyong diplomatic protests.

REP. BIAZON. Kung aktibong pagkilos ang hinahanap po natin sa NSC, base po sa mandate, ang National Security Council ay ang mag-aabiso sa ating Pangulo at iyong Pangulo naman po ang nagdi-direct ng iba't ibang mga ahensiya tulad ng Department of Foreign Affairs na siyang nagsusulong noong mga diplomatic protests. International relations is also a part of our engagement with international allies and is also part of their mandate. So, sa bahagi pong iyan, alam naman po natin na may coordination with our other allies patungkol sa mga nangyayari diyan sa West Philippine Sea.

REP. BROSAS. Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor, gusto ko pong sabihin na kahit po sa mandate na ganito, na may mga usapin tayo na ganito, ang National Security Adviser and former AFP Chief Hermogenes Esperon who heads the NSC as its Director General has actually been so selectively active in campaigning for the implementation of Executive Order No. 70, which supposedly institutionalizes the whole-of-nation approach and creates the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict or NTF-ELCAC. Ang NSC po ang aktibong-aktibo dito.

Ito po ba ay adjunct ng Task Force? Mas malaki pa nga iyong budget ng NTF-ELCAC, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor, kasi totalling to P19 billion ang budget na hinihingi ng NTF-ELCAC na hindi agency. Mas malaki pa sa budget ng NSC para sa susunod na taon. Kasi sinabi ninyo po, ang nire-request ng NSC ay P213 million. Is the NSC being subsumed under the NTF-ELCAC? Pumapailalim po ba ang NSC sa NTF-ELCAC, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor?

REP. BIAZON. Doon sa unang pong punto muna, pagdating sa actions undertaken in

the West Philippine Sea, just to inform my distinguished colleague, Mr. Speaker, the share of the National Task Force on West Philippine Sea is the National Security Adviser and all actions that have been undertaken pertaining to the West Philippine Sea, has, of course, been with the knowledge and participation of the National Security Adviser. And with regard to Executive Order No. 70, the National Security Adviser is also the Vice Chair, that is why he has an active involvement in the implementation of the campaign to end local communist armed conflict.

REP. BROSAS. Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor, kung particular po tayo doon sa nagawa ng sinasabi ninyong National Task Force for the West Philippine Sea, ang malinaw po sa atin ngayon, nakapagtatayo ang China ng maraming military facilities, tama? Continuing po iyan. Mayroon din pong research centers na malayang nagagawa doon ngayon ang bansang Tsina. And pangatlo po, iyong poaching ng Chinese fishing vessels ay inirereklamo pa rin ng ating mga mangingisda. So ibig sabihin po, iyong sinasabi ninyo, ang translation niya sa action, nagpapatuloy ang lahat ng ito, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor.

REP. BIAZON. Tama po na may mga reports, Mr. Speaker, ng development by the Chinese on the islands that they are occupying. The only way, if we want to stop it, the only way probably or the other way to do it is to have a direct conflict with them there, but that is not what the strategy is. On the other hand, the Philippines has been beefing up its facilities in the islands that we occupy. So, that is a proactive step on our part with regard to the West Philippine Sea.

As I have mentioned in previous interpellations, what we have observed here is that as we embark on upgrading the capability of the Armed Forces to assert the Philippines' claim in the West Philippine Sea, physically we are buying time by doing the diplomatic track. As far as we are concerned, the National Task Force is pursuing this, that is why as of this moment, there are about 45 diplomatic protests filed aside from our own improvements that we are doing in Philippine-

held islands in the West Philippine Sea, Mr. Speaker.

REP. BROSAS. Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor, sabi ninyo po, iyong paraan na direct contact lang or in conflict agad ang pag-uusapan. Marami pong ways para gawin iyong mga actions kaugnay dito. Ang hindi po natin maintindihan, tinatawag na ng Department of National Defense ang South China Sea na "West Philippine Sea," at ang hindi rin natin maintindihan ay iyong nagpapatuloy na pag-claim ng mga islands ng Tsina sa ating mga lugar. At heto nga, in fact, talagang kahit na nanalo tayo sa claim, hindi pa rin natin ito, hanggang ngayon, maipatupad. Lip service lang po ito lahat, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor.

Nevertheless, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor, gusto ko pong pumunta sa susunod pong usapin na kaugnay sa E.O. No. 70, kung saan sinabi ninyo nga po na Vice Chair si Secretary Esperon. Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor, pumapailalim po ba ang NSC sa NTF-ELCAC?

REP. BIAZON. Hindi po. Ang NSC ay hindi pumapailalim dito po sa Task Force on ELCAC.

REP. BROSAS. I -clarify ninyo po iyong scope of involvement ng NSC sa operations nitong NTF-ELCAC. Ano po iyong eksaktong assistance na ibinibigay ng NSC sa NTF-ELCAC?

REP. BIAZON. Ang National Security Council, Mr. Speaker, ay nagbibigay ng advice sa Pangulo. Dito po sa Executive Order No. 70 na bumuo ng Task Force on ELCAC, iyong National Security Adviser ang Vice Chairman. Of course, kapag titingnan po natin iyong composition ng Task Force ay mayroong mga miyembro diyan na, halimbawa iyong mga Kalihim ng departamento ay miyembro rin ng National Security Council. Pero ihiwalay po natin iyong National Security Council as an advisory group or advisory body to the President and the individual roles that these members of the National Task Force on ELCAC are doing. So, hindi naman po natin masabi na ang NSC, as the Council, ay pumapailalim

dito sa Task Force on ELCAC. Mayroon hong members ng NSC na part of the Task Force and iyon po kasi ang composition.

REP. BROSAS. Okay. Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor, gusto po naming balikan iyong Executive Order No. 70 na lumikha nitong NTF-ELCAC. Malinaw po sa Section 5 nito, binabanggit iyong tinatawag na “National Peace Framework.” Binanggit din po ito sa Section 9 ng “Funding” ng NTF-ELCAC. Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor, pamilyar po ba kayo doon sa National Peace Framework?

REP. BIAZON. Well, ayon doon sa definition nito sa Executive Order No. 70, “The Framework shall contain principles, policies, plans and programs that will bring inclusive and sustainable peace, and address the root causes of insurgencies, internal disturbances and tensions as well as other armed conflicts and threats in identified areas.” Frankly speaking, Mr. Speaker, I have not read the National Peace Framework itself if it has been crafted. But based on what is provided in Executive Order No. 70, this Sponsor does have an understanding of what it contains.

REP. BROSAS. Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor, mahalaga pong malaman natin itong National Peace Framework para ma-define kung ano-ano po iyong mga programs, activities and projects ng NTF-ELCAC na dapat pondohan. Sa marami pong pagkakataon, nag-request po kami ng kopya na ito ng National Peace Framework sa napakaraming ahensiya na. In fact, kahit po basahin ko isa-isa: DILG, DSWD, TESDA, DAR, DepEd, DPWH, NEDA, DOH, DOJ, DND, PCOO, NCIP, PNP, DOF, OPAPP, DFA, DBM and lastly, NICA and NSC po. Sumulat kami para humingi ng kopya ng National Peace Framework para malaman po natin kung saan-saan, kung ano-anong mga programa ang popondohan. Now, for the nth time po, nasaan po ang kopya nitong National Peace Framework na ito na nakasaad sa Executive Order No. 70?

At this juncture, Deputy Speaker Oaminal relinquished the Chair to Rep. Josephine Veronique R. Lacson-Noel.

REP. BIAZON. Mr. Speaker, ang paliwanag po sa atin ng National Security Adviser ay ang approach po dito ay localized implementation with a national direction. Isang halimbawa po na nabanggit sa atin ay iyong sa Negros kung saan mayroon silang nabuo na National Peace Framework dahil kinikilala rin po kasi ang intricacies at individual differences ng bawat locality at binibigyan ng elbow room ang local officials and local units na bumuo noong peace framework na naaangkop sa kanilang lugar, iyong particular conditions in their localities. So, marahil iyon ay isa sa mga dahilan kung bakit kung isang dokumento ang hahanapin natin ay hindi natin makita sa isang ahensiya dahil ang approach dito ay localized, although nationally directed.

REP. BROSAS. Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor, kailangan po nating makita iyong kopya noong National Peace Framework kasi iyon po iyong sinasabi dito eh, kailangan po nating makita ito since 2018 pa in existence iyong NTF-ELCAC at iyong operation nila accessing public funds. Gusto po nating makita, ano-ano bang mga programa ang meron dito. Ngayon, noong sumulat po ako—hawak ko po iyong sulat ko for the Vice Chair, kay Secretary Hermogenes Esperon, sa NTF-ELCAC, na na-receive po ito noong December 2, 2019 by a certain Martin Espino. Sinabi ko po dito, in my capacity as a Member of the House of Representatives and author of House Resolution No. 329 that seeks to look into the implementation of E.O. No. 70, I would like to request for a certified copy of the National Peace Framework which is being used as the mechanism for local peace engagements and interventions anchored on the whole-of-nation approach. Hanggang ngayon po, wala po tayong nakikita nito. Kahit po iyong sinasabi ninyong local, wala po tayong kopya nito.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor, ...

REP. BIAZON. Yes, Ma’am. Mr. Speaker, ...

REP. BROSAS. Itabi n’yo po si Secretary sa inyong tabi para mas magkaintindihan tayo, para po makatulong din sa inyo kung ie-enumerate ko, halimbawa, at sagutin

n'yo ako ng "yes" or "no" sa ilan sa mga activities na nakapaloob dito sa National Peace Framework.

REP. BIAZON. Sige po.

REP. BROSAS. Pero may kopya po ba?

REP. BIAZON. Mr. Speaker, ang sabi lang po sa atin ng National Security Adviser, may nabuo na po na National Peace Framework na kinabibilangan ng DILG, OPAPP, DND, DepEd and various other agencies na bumuo ng isang framework na to be implemented locally but controlled nationally. Maipapamahagi po sa inyo ng ating National Security Adviser ang kopya ng nasabing plano.

At this juncture, Rep. Lacson-Noel relinquished the Chair to Rep. Juan Pablo "Rimpy" P. Bondoc.

REP. BROSAS. Nasaan po, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor? Gusto ko lang sabihin, Section 5 po ng R.A. No. 6713 o Republic Act No. 6713, otherwise known as the Code of Conduct and Ethical Standards for Public Officials and Employees, provides:

Section 5. Duties of Public Officials and Employees. – In the performance of their duties, all public officials and employees are under obligation to:

(a) Act promptly on letters and requests. – All public officials and employees shall, within fifteen (15) working days from receipt thereof, respond to letters, telegrams or other means of communications sent by the public. The reply must contain the action taken on the request.

December po, December 2, 2019, tapos iyong iba't ibang mga ahensiya, pinagpasapahan po kami. Napakarami pong ahensiya na binigyan natin ng kopya, wala pong nakapagbigay sa atin niyan. Ngayon, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor, sinasabi ninyo, mayroon na nandiyan.

REP. BIAZON. Mr. Speaker, distinguished

colleague, the National Security Adviser has said that he has not seen the said letter, although he is offering that a copy of the National Peace Framework may be provided after this session, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor.

REP. BROSAS. Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor, hindi po ako makakapaghintay ng hanggang ganoon, ano.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor, puwede pong pakisagot na lang ito, baka makatulong sa atin ito, ng "yes" or "no." Kasama po ba dito sa loob ng National Peace Framework ninyo na ginawa ang walang humpay na red-tagging, terrorist-tagging laban sa Makabayan bloc?

REP. BIAZON. The National Security Adviser said that they do not have a policy or program of red-tagging but they do have information, particularly coming from a video of Mr. Joma Sison, which named and identified certain groups acting as fronts for the communist terrorist group, but the government does not have a policy or program of red-tagging.

REP. BROSAS. Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor, palagi po iyon sinasabi sa amin at nakita ko rin iyong video na iyan. Actually, ginagawa nga iyan ng DILG, pinaparinig niya sa labas noong kaniyang tanggapan iyong video na iyon. Sa totoo lang, wala naman pagsasabi doon kung alin ang mga communist fronts. Ang sinasabi lang doon ay pag-a-identify ng mga organizations, kaya hindi ko po iyon naiintindihan. Pangalawa po, kasama ba sa loob ng National Peace Framework na ito iyong pagpapakansela ng Comelec registration ng Gabriela Women's Party?

REP. BIAZON. Maaari po bang pakiulit ulit iyong tanong, hindi ko lang masyado po...

REP. BROSAS. Kasama po ba doon sa National Peace Framework ang pagpapakansela ng Comelec registration ng Gabriela Women's Party?

REP. BIAZON. Hindi ho bahagi ng National Peace Framework iyong nasabing aksyon?

REP. BROSAS. Pero NTF-ELCAC po ang siyang nag-petition to cancel the registration of our party. Pangatlo po, kasama ba rito ang pagdidikit ng mga posters laban sa Makabayan bloc?

REP. BIAZON. Hindi rin po bahagi noong National Peace Framework iyong nabanggit po na action.

REP. BROSAS. Next po, kasama ba sa framework ang paglikha ng Facebook pages na nagpapakalat ng fake news?

REP. BIAZON. May mga activity po sila na kasama ang paglalagay ng mga Facebook pages na kumokontra sa pagkalat ng fake news, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor.

REP. BROSAS. Pero kung fake news po, iyong content, kasama sa paglikha ng Facebook pages na nagpapakalat ng fake news na hindi verifiable at wala pong basis?

REP. BIAZON. Ayon po sa ating National Security Adviser, mayroon pong mga basehan based on reports and other sources of information sa kanilang mga officially sanctioned na mga inilalabas.

REP. BROSAS. Alam ninyo po, kadududa po eh, kasi minsan iyon nga, 'di ba, ang usapin natin ay pinagsarahan ng Facebook ang napakaraming mga pages na ang content ay—in fact, ang sinabi pa ng Facebook ay maaaring military personnel and police ang involved, 'no, iyong nandito sa pagpapakalat ng mga Facebook pages na hindi bini-verify ang katotohanan. In fact, may tawag sila eh, "inauthentic behavior," Facebook pages na mga fake accounts ang ginamit at kung ano-ano pa, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor.

At this juncture, Representative Bondoc relinquished the Chair to Deputy Speaker Henry S. Oaminal.

REP. BIAZON. Well, ang nabasa ko rin po sa information kanina lamang, may statement ang PNP at ang AFP na sinasabi nilang kung may mga tauhan na kumilos o gumawa ng

mga bagay na iyan ay hindi po iyan officially sanctioned by both organizations. Pero siguro iyan po ay isang bagay na mas marapat maitanong pagka tinalakay na po ang budget ng AFP and ng PNP. But as far as the NSC is concerned, hindi naman ho sila doon bahagi, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor.

REP. BROSAS. But again, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor, I would like to ask again, kabahagi ba ang lumilikha ng Facebook pages na nagpapakalat ng fake news? Sagutin po tayo ng "yes" or "no" ng NSC.

REP. BIAZON. Mayroon hong information campaign na bahagi, 'no, ng NTF-ELCAC Task Force. Hindi lang natin masabi kung iyong partikular na binabanggit po natin na mga Facebook pages ang parehong tinutukoy ninyo. But definitely, part po ng kampanya to end local communist armed conflict is information campaign. Hindi ho maaalis iyon, part of the duty iyon, lalo na po na ang kanilang itinuturing, 'no, na kaibayo ay ang CPP-NPA-NDF.

REP. BROSAS. Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor, kasama rin ba iyong international trips ni Secretary Esperon para siraan ang Makabayan bloc at akusahan na konektado sa CPP-NPA-NDF dito sa National Peace Framework, sa mga activities ng National Peace Framework?

REP. BIAZON. Bahagi pong responsibilidad nila ay ang international engagements, lalong-lalo na ho na ang pinag-uusapan ay iyong pagpigil ng inflow of financial support, 'no, to terrorist groups. Iyan po iyong talagang tinutukoy ng international engagements dahil mayroon pong mga ibang suporta na sa ganoong pamamaraan nanggagaling, kaya necessary function iyong magkaroon ng international engagement.

REP. BROSAS. Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor, klaro po iyong tanong ko. Ang tanong ko po ay very particular. Si Secretary Esperon ba ay pumupunta sa mga international trip para siraan ang Makabayan bloc, akusahan sila at ikino-connect sa CPP-NPA-NDF? Yes or no lang po iyon, Mr. Chair, Mr. Sponsor.

REP. BIAZON. Well, ang pinagbasehan po ng ating National Security Adviser ay bahagi ang mga nasabing grupo sa International League of Peoples' Struggle.

REP. BROSAS. Ano po ang klaro doon, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor?

REP. BIAZON. International League of Peoples' Struggle, of which ang chairman daw po ay si Mr. Joma Sison.

REP. BROSAS. Pero hindi n'ya po inaakusahan ang Makabayan bloc? Iyan ba iyong sinasabi ninyo, Mr. Chair, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor?

REP. BIAZON. Well, ang batayan po ng ating National Security Adviser ay dahil meron hong mga ilang personalidad na bahagi ng International League of Peoples' Struggle na bahagi rin ng nasabing organisasyon. Iyan ay batay po sa impormasyon na nakalap.

REP. BROSAS. Can you please make it clear, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor? Kasi ang tanong ko po ay very particular naman at gusto po natin, for the record, sabihin ito.

REP. BIAZON. Ang tanong po ay kung ang pagbiyahe ni Mr. National Security Adviser Esperon ay para siraan ang organisasyon— hindi ho iyon ang layunin. Ang pagbiyahe naman po ay para tiyakin na ang mga suporta galing sa labas, patungo sa mga local communist terrorist groups ay mapigilan, iyon ho ang layunin.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal). Distinguished Sponsor, distinguished interpellator, your time has expired. Please wind up.

REP. BROSAS. Mr. Speaker, yes, magwind up na po ako.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor, napakarami ko pong tanong. For example, ang tanong ko po, mga nilalaman ng National Peace Framework. Gusto ko rin pong sabihin na mabilis itong si Secretary Esperon sa baseless, sa dangerous accusations sa amin, sa Makabayan bloc.

Mabilis pong ipagtanggol ang Chinese vessels, military construction sa West Philippine Sea. Mabilis depensahan iyong construction ng tower sa Dito Telecommunity. Marami pa hong mga issues na kailangang ayusin dito. Sinabi n'ya po na they are just towers. Pero itong hinihingi namin, simple lang po, National Peace Framework lang na hanggang ngayon ay hindi maibigay.

Mr. Speaker, I move to defer the deliberations on the budget of the NSC and NICA.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal). Majority Leader.

REP. DELOS SANTOS. Mr. Speaker, we join the Minority in moving to defer the deliberations on the proposed budgets of NICA and the NSC.

I so move, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal). It has been moved and duly seconded on a joint motion by the Majority and the Minority that the deliberations on the budget of NICA and the NSC be deferred. Are there any objections? (*Silence*) The Chair hears none; the motion is approved.

Majority Leader.

PDEA AND DANGEROUS DRUGS BOARD

REP. DELOS SANTOS. Mr. Speaker, I move to open the period of interpellation and debate on the proposed budget of PDEA and the Dangerous Drugs Board.

I so move, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal). Is there any objection? (*Silence*) The Chair hears none; the motion is approved.

To allow the officials of Dangerous Drugs Board and the PDEA to come in inside the plenary, the session is—yes, Majority Leader.

REP. DELOS SANTOS. Mr. Speaker, we would like to acknowledge the presence of the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency

family. They are Director General Wilkins Villanueva, Director Charlene Magdurulang, Atty. Aquino-Isidro, Director Wardley Getalla, Director Maharani Tosoc, Director Maria Lourdes Jacosalem. And for the Dangerous Drugs Board, we have Secretary Catalino Cuy, Usec. Earl Saavedra, Usec. Erick Atilano, Joan Marie Sison, and Kristine Bañog, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal). Okay. To the officials of the Dangerous Drugs Board and the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency, headed by Director General Wilkins Villanueva, welcome to the House and good luck to the presentation and the defense of your 2021 Budget.

Majority Leader.

REP. DELOS SANTOS. Mr. Speaker, I move to recognize the Hon. Ruffy Biazon to sponsor the said budget.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal). The distinguished, tireless, Hon. Ruffy Biazon is recognized to present and defend the budget of the Dangerous Drugs Board and the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency.

You are recognized.

REP. BIAZON. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This Representation has the distinct honor to present the budget of the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency and the Dangerous Drugs Board together, and we are ready to take questions, Your Honor.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal). Majority Leader.

REP. DELOS SANTOS. Mr. Speaker, ...

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal). The distinguished Sponsor is ready to answer any questions in relation to the budget of the two agencies.

REP. DELOS SANTOS. Mr. Speaker, I move to recognize the Hon. Kaloi Zarate of BAYAN MUNA for his interpellation.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal).

The Hon. Carlos Zarate of the BAYAN MUNA Party-List is recognized.

REP. ZARATE. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Muli, sa nth time, magandang gabi po sa ating Sponsor ng budget ng dalawang ahensiya, ang Dangerous Drugs Board and the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency.

Mga ilang katanungan po: Under Republic Act No. 9165, ano po ba ang main function ng Dangerous Drugs Board, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker, just to refresh our minds on its main function and power?

REP. BIAZON. Generally, Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, the DDB's mandate under Republic Act No. 9165, the DDB is to be the policymaking and strategy-formulating body with regard to drug prevention and control.

REP. ZARATE. With regard to?

REP. BIAZON. Drug prevention and control.

REP. ZARATE. Ah, yes, drug prevention and control. Thank you, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker. And in fact, under R.A. No. 9165, the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency is the main implementing or enforcement arm of the Dangerous Drugs Board. Is that correct, Mr. Sponsor?

REP. BIAZON. That is correct, Mr. Speaker.

REP. ZARATE. Yes. So, magkasama po ang dalawa, ano? Kung ang DILG may PNP siya, ang Dangerous Drugs Board may PDEA siya.

Tama po ba ang akin ding pagkaintindi, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to the issue of drug prevention and control, in the enforcement, it is the PDEA ang mayroong pangunahing, may poder rather than the PNP, for example, or the National Bureau of Investigation? Is that a correct appreciation of what is provided in R.A. No. 9165, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker?

REP. BIAZON. Yes, Mr. Speaker, that

was the intention of R.A. No. 9165 when it was passed, that the PDEA shall be the lead drug enforcement agency. In fact, when this Representation was the Commissioner of Customs, we had a good working relationship with the PDEA wherein we recognized their authority as the lead agency in drug enforcement.

REP. ZARATE. Thank you, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker, but I will go to that aspect in a little while.

Now, since the Dangerous Drugs Board is the primary agency, the policymaking body when it comes to drug prevention and control, it is no longer a secret, ano, it is in fact an open admission that under the present administration, ang halos pinakasentro ng program nito is about drugs. Since 2016 up to now, hindi nawawala ang usapin ng drugs sa mga policy statements ng current administration, and since 2016 up to now, the biggest issue that confronts the present administration is when it launched a bloody campaign against suspected drug offenders. Recording officially, if I am not mistaken, a little over or more or less 6,000 deaths or killings related, committed by law enforcement agencies, and in some estimates by other sources, other groups, it even reached as high as 30,000 if you include those deaths or killings classified by the police as death under investigation. Now, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker, after four years of that kind of campaign and policy, the so-called Tokhang campaign, hindi po ba naisip ng Dangerous Drugs Board, as the policymaking body under R.A. No. 9165, na mali iyong policy na iyan, mali iyong ini-implement na patakaran ng pamahalaan, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker?

REP. BIAZON. Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, the administration has a national strategy on drug abuse prevention and control, and that is the overarching policy on how we deal with drugs. We cannot remove it from the President who took it really as a main platform, to go against illegal drugs, and the orders that he has given was for particular agencies to take proactive efforts in preventing and controlling drug abuse in the

country. And it so happened that one of those agencies that was tasked by the President was the Philippine National Police, also a law enforcement agency, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor.

REP. ZARATE. So, as far as the DDB is concerned, the current strategy, current policies being implemented which resulted, as I have said earlier and even officials facts state, that it resulted in many deaths, many killings, is a sanctioned policy of the DDB, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker.

REP. BIAZON. The Dangerous Drugs Board, of course, upholds the national strategy on drug abuse prevention and control, and it is consistent in pursuing that mandate. Again, since the President has taken a personal stand or advocacy against dangerous drugs, he gave some direct orders to other law enforcement agencies, but the national strategy on drug abuse prevention still stands, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor.

REP. ZARATE. Thank you, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker.

So, despite its mandate under R.A. No. 9165 na it has to review, look at the current policies when it comes to drug control and prevention, even President Duterte admitted that up to now, malaking problema pa rin ng bansang ito iyong drugs. In fact, the good Sponsor having been once appointed as Customs Commissioner, one of the biggest issues, in fact, under this present administration, iyong droga, ay doon na dumadaan sa Customs at hanggang ngayon, if statistics will be believed, ay hindi naman talaga nahinto ang pagpasok ng droga galing sa ibang bansa at kahit na iyong mga droga na being manufactured domestically. And despite deaths as high as 30,000 or as low as 6,000, the problem of drugs in this country is still very rampant. In fact, even if the so-called big drug offenders, drug lords, are already incarcerated in the National Bilibid Prison, there have been several reports and in fact confirmed reports that they continue to operate.

So, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker, doon po ang pinagmumulan ng aking tanong. Hindi

ba naisip ng Dangerous Drugs Board that something is really wrong with the current policy and how we approach this kind of problem, this problem na instead of matapos siya in six months ay lalo siyang lumala four years after the present administration launched this campaign against drugs that resulted in many killings and deaths of our mga kababayan, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker?

REP. BIAZON. Yes, Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, the national strategy on drug abuse prevention and control looks at two approaches: one is supply reduction and the other is demand reduction, and it may be said that the efforts undertaken by the Philippine National Police centered on supply reduction. So, it is not necessarily part of the existing plan but there should be a balance, of course, of supply reduction and demand reduction. The Dangerous Drugs Board is espousing the strategy and the efforts that were undertaken by the Philippine National Police which fall into that, one of those two efforts that are part of the strategy.

REP. ZARATE. Well, at any rate, thank you for the answer, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker. But again, the fact remains that, at least to this Representation and many other observers, that policy is not at all making a dent in our problems, especially this problem on drugs. On a related issue, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor, if I may relate this to our problem now, the COVID-19 pandemic, I think last week, I just read this article, there was this Chinese herbal medicine that was cleared by the Dangerous Drugs Board to be accepted and used as medicine. Will the good Sponsor confirm that?

REP. BIAZON. This Representation came across that kind of information. The Chinese medicine is called "Lianhua Qingwen." It was classified by the DFA as traditional Chinese medicine and it contains ephedra, the raw material for making ephedrine and, therefore, it required the following PDEA licenses: license for importers, for local distributors, for retailers, and for doctors. And Board Resolution No. 8, series of 2020, this pertains as well to the referred Chinese medicine.

If I may read directly from the Board resolution, in one of the whereases, if I may quote,

WHEREAS, Section 2 of the Act provides that the government shall aim to achieve a balance in the national drug control program so that people with legitimate medical needs are not prevented from being treated with adequate amounts of appropriate medications, which include the use of dangerous drugs;

It served as a basis.

WHEREAS, the minimal *Ephedra* content, as reflected in the Certificate of Product Registration of *Lianhua Qingwen* capsules presents low or negligible risk of abuse and cannot be readily extracted in a quantity liable to present such risk, and can be made available for importation, and distribution and purchase in licensed pharmacies, provided that regulatory control requirements have been complied with.

So, indeed, the Dangerous Drugs Board issued that Board Resolution paving the way for the FDA registration or licensing of the said drug.

REP. ZARATE. So, may I inquire, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker, since the DDB already issued that Resolution, as we speak now, is this medicine, Lianhua Qingwen, is there already a license approved by the FDA, if the good Sponsor knows, Mr. Speaker?

REP. BIAZON. As to the information the Sponsor has gathered, the FDA has registered it but not as a medicine for COVID-19, but just as a supplement. So, it is in different category. It is not as a medicine.

REP. ZARATE. Thank you, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker.

And as you admitted, that registration made by the FDA is by virtue, of course, by

the Resolution issued by the DDB. I am just trying to confirm that.

REP. BIAZON. As I understand it, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, as we read the Board Resolution No. 8, it paved the way because there was no objection from the PDEA or the Dangerous Drugs Board, I am sorry.

REP. ZARATE. So now, because of that Board Resolution and because of the registration with the FDA, and it is now being considered as a supplement. Will that mean, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker, that at any time, I can just buy it anywhere as a supplement? Is that correct, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker, because it is not considered, as you mentioned, as a medicine, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker? Para pong pumunta ako sa botika at bibili ako doon ng mga available supplements, herbal supplements, parang ganoon din ang dating niya. Tama po ba iyon, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker?

REP. BIAZON. Yes, Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague.

There are four licenses here from PDEA: S-5I which means for importers—this was issued to the Philippine Archipelago Training Corporation, meaning, they have the license to import; S-4 is for local distributors; S-3 is for retailers, the drugstores and pharmacies; and S-2 for doctors using regular prescription pads in triplicate form. Those are the types of licenses and the manner in which the items could be purchased. And, of course, as we hear it, there are strong recommendations for people not to just take it, that they have to consult a physician who would give them the proper guidance on how to take the medicine, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor.

REP. ZARATE. Thank you, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker.

And that makes me wonder because, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker, if in China it is considered as a medicine at kung dito sa Pilipinas ay tinatawag lang siya na—or we are just registering it as a supplement so madali, especially now, in this time of the COVID-19 pandemic na iyong mga tao ay ang level of

anxiety ay mataas, so I will not be surprised if this will sell like hotcakes. Now, bringing me to my next point, should this kind of medicine or supplement not be fully regulated and not just be dispensed easily? Because as you mentioned earlier, this medicine contains ephedrine which is, in fact, a component or an ingredient in the manufacture, for example, of shabu, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker. May we get a reaction.

REP. BIAZON. As indicated, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, in the Resolution, it was determined that the amount contained presents low or negligible risk of abuse and that was one of the bases for the FDA to allow the registration of the said supplements as fit for distribution or sale. It cannot be dispensed or bought over the counter as the regulation is, just like Nubain, a certain medicine, it needs a prescription from a doctor who possesses the S-2 license, as we enumerated earlier.

REP. ZARATE. Thank you, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker, for that clarification, which brings me to another related point. Kung napakaluwang natin dito dahil, siyempre, pangangailangan ito ngayon, kahit sabihin mo na supplement lang iyan pero dahil nga sa ibang bansa ay ginagamit ito na gamot sa COVID-19, sabi ko nga, kung pinapayagan na iyan dito sa Pilipinas, I will not be surprised that in the coming days, maraming mag-i-import noong ganoong klaseng gamot and it will sell like hotcakes dahil parang lumuwag, basta na lang pinayagan at pinayagan siyang makapasok despite containing a controlled substance, as you mentioned, although sabi mo napakaliit lang noong percentage noong ephedrine na nasa Lianhua Qingwen medicine. So, my related point is, in February of this year, the Dangerous Drugs Board, you may confirm this or not, also allowed the use of cannabidiol or CBD for epilepsy, but this cannot—even if it is already allowed, hindi ho madali na makakuha ng CBD iyong mga mayroon pong sakit katulad ng epilepsy, napaka-stringent noong requirement. So as compared to this Chinese medicine which is now considered not as a medicine but a supplement, itong CBD oil na ginagamit

as a form of medicine to cure, for example, epilepsy, ay pinayagan pero napaka-stringent noong requirement.

May we inquire from the good Sponsor, Mr. Speaker, why there is a seeming double standard or different treatment considering that there are already a lot of studies that CBD will really help as a medicine, especially for those who are suffering, for example, from epilepsy, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker?

REP. BIAZON. Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, our distinguished colleague made mention about the CBD as having been given the green light. If I may read from this Resolution from the DDB, it says on Section 2, on Reclassification, “Drug products containing CBD with no more than 0.1 percent tetrahydrocannabinol” or CBD for short, “are hereby reclassified from Schedules I and II to Schedule IV of the Philippine Schedule.”

On Section 3: “The Physicians are authorized to prescribe drug products containing CBD. Only physicians with S-2 licenses and are members of specialty divisions or societies engaged in neurology can prescribe drug products containing CBD.”

On Section 4.: “Use of Special Prescription Form for Dangerous Drugs. Physicians shall use the Special Prescription Form for Dangerous Drugs of the Department of Health in prescribing drug products containing CBD.”

So, these are the regulations embodied in the resolution covering CBD, Mr. Speaker.

REP. ZARATE. Thank you, distinguished Sponsor, Mr. Speaker. So, what is now the distinction between the two, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker?

The other one, easily, you can get it as a supplement. So ibig sabihin, I can just buy it as a supplement because it is not considered as a medicine. But CBD, now, classified as substance under Schedule IV, is no longer a substance within Schedule I and II, but the requirement to obtain CBD oil or CBD in this country is very stringent. So, ano po ang pagkakaiba noong dalawa? Napakaliit na lang, I think you mentioned 0.1 percent, ‘no.

REP. BIAZON. Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, according to our sources here at the DDB, there are just the same requirements for CBD and Lianhua according to the Dangerous Drugs Board. But I would venture on to say that the—for example, the classification of Lianhua as a supplement, that relies on the Food and Drug Administration. The Sponsor is just not aware of what action the FDA took with regard to CBD. But as far as the Dangerous Drugs Board is concerned, they applied the same kind of consideration for both, although for Lianhua, there was an additional consideration of the urgency owing to the COVID-19 situation that we are experiencing. And there have been persons who have attested to having survived COVID-19, attributing it to Lianhua. Perhaps, that is one of the reasons why the demand became greater. But as claimed by the Dangerous Drugs Board, both have the same regulation before public use.

REP. ZARATE. Thank you, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker.

Precisely, my point, na I hope the Dangerous Drugs Board will also be proactive, ‘no, in the same manner that those who believe that CBD will help alleviate their pain by using CBD, like those with cancer, with epilepsy, ganoon din siguro iyong nararamdaman noong mga sinabi po ninyo na may COVID-19 kaya minadali at pinabilis ng Dangerous Drugs Board ang pag-classify sa kaniya, despite having a controlled substance, para makatulong na ma-alleviate iyong, syempre, nararanasan natin ngayong pandemya ng COVID. But in the same vein, ganoon din iyong matagal nang ikinakampanya noong mga advocates na luwagan din ang patakaran ng ating pamahalaan sa usapin ng CBD.

My last manifestation on that aspect, Mr. Speaker, I hope the DDB will—of course, there are now engagements between the Dangerous Drugs Board and the advocates of CBD, but I hope we will really take a second look dito sa napaka-stringent na policies natin ngayon. There are already a lot of studies how CBD helps a lot of patients, not only about regarding epilepsy, cancer, but many other conditions, Mr. Speaker.

So, iyon lang siguro ang aking punto doon

sa Dangerous Drugs Board, along this line, na pag-aralang mabuti. Although I understand that there are conventions, international conventions that we also have to consider, but if the Dangerous Drugs Board, for example, can recommend to Congress to pass a law – and there is now a pending legislative proposal here on the use of medical marijuana, for example, where CBD may be extracted from – I think that will be a welcome move from the Dangerous Drugs Board.

Now, I will now go to the – mauubos na pala iyong oras ko, Mr. Sponsor, dito sa budget ng PDEA as the law enforcement arm ng Dangerous Drugs Board. There was this report, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker, na sa panahon ng pandemya nitong nakaraang ilang buwan ay mas lalong dumami iyong mga napaslang sa kampanya laban sa droga, ikumpara mo doon sa pre-lockdown, pre-quarantine era. What can the good Sponsor say about this, Mr. Speaker?

REP. BIAZON. Mr. Speaker, with all due respect, I just do not have the – I have not come across that information about the increase in the number of ...

REP. ZARATE. Yes.

REP. BIAZON. ... deaths during the pandemic as compared to the pre-pandemic period.

REP. ZARATE. The report specifically, Mr. Speaker, states that the police killed 50 percent more people from April to July 2020 than they did in the previous four-month period, meaning from December to at least March. So, the government statistics found that 155 persons were killed in the past four months. Before the COVID-19 crisis, those killed were only 103 persons. So, kahit pala sa panahon ng pandemya at COVID, kung pagbabasihan natin ang report na ito ay walang tigil ang madugo na pagpaslang at ang madugong kampanya natin laban sa droga.

REP. BIAZON. Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, I just got handed some information from the PDEA, including drug personalities

who died during the anti-drug operations from January 1 to August 31, 2020, wherein the grand total is about 293 individuals. And if we go to the breakdown of these, about 166 came from Mindanao and it has been observed that persons in that area are more often armed themselves, so these kinds of encounters result in a shootout and eventually, casualties. So, that is the information shared with us by the PDEA, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor.

REP. ZARATE. Thank you, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal). Congressman Zarate.

REP. ZARATE. I am just winding up, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal). Yes. Thank you, please go ahead.

REP. ZARATE. I am the only one who will interpellate on the budget of the DDB and PDEA. May I just request, Mr. Speaker, that I be given just a little more time to wind up my interpellation.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal). Okay, the request is granted.

REP. ZARATE. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So, in this number of operations, may the good Sponsor inform this Body, ilan po sa mga operasyon na iyon ang kasangkot ang PDEA?

REP. BIAZON. Based on the information that I have here, the number that I mentioned earlier was about 166 in the Mindanao area, and there were seven deaths where PDEA was involved; PNP is 136; joint operations, 23.

REP. ZARATE. Thank you, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker. Well, in the past four years, iyon po ang kalimitan nating natatanggap na tugon ng mga law enforcement agency, na nanlaban kaya napatay sila. Namatay itong mga drug personalities na ito, nanlaban. Now, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker, ang PDEA ba has

measures, for example, to mitigate or address these issues related to the violation of, you know, the rights of our people in the conduct of their operations?

REP. BIAZON. One of the measures, Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, is that PDEA initiates investigations where deaths occurred during their operations and based on data from July 2016 to August 2020, a total of 5,856 personalities died during anti-drug operations; but out of these incidents, only 120 died during operations conducted by PDEA. So, the statistics would show that the data is lopsided on the part of other law enforcement agencies with regard to casualties during operations.

REP. ZARATE. Yes, thank you, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker. Doon po ba sa budget ng PDEA, wala ho akong makitang mentioned na program, for example, that will train our officers on human rights. What exists, as I look at the budget of PDEA, is there is a budget on the Operations Manual of Operatives, but there is no specifically mentioned training, for example, on human rights incorporated in these programs, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker.

REP. BIAZON. Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, it is not segregated as a separate program or item, the training for human rights, because it is already incorporated into the basic training of PDEA officers. Human rights training is composed of a three-day program already contained in the basic training of PDEA officers.

REP. ZARATE. Thank you, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker. Now, earlier you mentioned that there were investigations or cases investigated where PDEA operatives were involved and drug personalities were killed. May I inquire, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker, is there a policy or procedure in the manual of operations of PDEA that requires PDEA to conduct an inquest, to submit operatives in an inquest proceeding when death resulted during an operation, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker?

REP. BIAZON. Mr. Speaker, distinguished

colleague, as advised by the PDEA, they have a memorandum circular which incorporates the process of investigating incidents where there is a death involved in operations. Just like in the PNP, procedure calls for the Internal Affairs Service to also conduct an investigation and proceed with the prosecution, if necessary.

REP. ZARATE. Well, thank you, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker, but that is a post-incident procedure. What I am referring to, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker, in the PNP, part of their standard operating procedure, but it is not being followed at all the times, in fact, never in several instances. Now, kapag mayroon ho silang operation at mayroon pong namatay na suspetsado, iyon pong nasa manual nila, iyong pong mga operatives na involved doon ay dapat dalhin sa piskalya at mag-conduct ng inquest proceedings. It is for the prosecutor to determine whether kung totoo nga na iyong napaslang na suspetsado ay nanlaban. But that is part of their – nasa manual ng PNP iyan, pero hindi nila sinusunod, hindi nila ginagawa. So, kaya itinatanong ko po kung mayroon ding ganoon sa PDEA as part of their manual of procedures, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker. And if there is none, will PDEA incorporate such a procedure in the conduct of their operations, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker?

REP. BIAZON. Yes, Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, I have been shown a relatively new manual that they had entitled, “Unified Manual in the Investigation of Prosecution of Dangerous Drugs Cases.” This would be applied to all law enforcement agencies in terms of dangerous drugs cases and this was just adopted on September 24, 2020.

REP. ZARATE. This month?

REP. BIAZON. Yes, it is relatively new. It is the product of ...

REP. ZARATE. And what was the proviso or provision contained in that relative to the query I earlier propounded, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker?

REP. BIAZON. Mr. Speaker, distinguished

colleague, the document that was shown to me is basically a PowerPoint presentation of the manual, so it is in general terms. But the chapters here include the Guiding Principles; the Ethical Standards; the Legal Framework; chapter on Searches and Seizures; Chapter VI on Detention, Arrest and Confession, so be it. There are others, the chapters on Operation; on Inquest Proceedings and Preliminary Investigation; Preparations for Trial, Plea Bargaining, Pre-Trial, Post-Prosecution; and Miscellaneous Provisions. So later on, Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, perhaps we can ask—we will send a copy to the distinguished Gentleman this Unified Manual for Law Enforcers.

REP. ZARATE. Yes, Mr. Speaker, we will appreciate it if this Committee as well as this Representation will be provided with a copy of that newly approved manual, not just the PowerPoint presentation, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sponsor.

And on to my last point, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker, last July 27, I read in the news, there was this article whereby PDEA paid 22 informants a total amount of P4.9 million reward under the so-called “Operation Private Eye.” However, when I looked again at the budget of PDEA, there is no program under the budget, not even in the Special Provisions, about the agency relating to this “Operation Private Eye.” So, may we be informed, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker, ano po ba itong “Operation Private Eye” at saan nanggagaling ang pondo nito at bakit ang PDEA ang may hawak ng pondong ito, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker?

REP. BIAZON. Distinguished colleague, Mr. Speaker, the reward is sourced from the confidential funds of the PDEA, and the program, this is approved by the Dangerous Drugs Board and this is one of the ways wherein the PDEA is able to go after perpetrators. If I may just share an observation, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, if we look back at cases or arrests made by the PDEA, we will take note that they usually have big busts and usually the perpetrators are arrested. Kumbaga ho, may taong nahuhuli, may malaking produkto, and it is, to me, my observation really is that iyan

ang common po na nakikita natin with the work of PDEA. And I think that is one of the reasons why they are usually successful in that. The availability of information enables them to do it and the reward system, as you had pointed out, is one of those methods they use to get valuable information to catch the perpetrators.

REP. ZARATE. Thank you, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker.

Now, finally, in the Organizational Outcomes and Performance Indicators, you have indicated 10,500 high-value targets, and out of this number, roughly 25 percent has been arrested, or about 2,600. So, my last question is, what are the barriers in taking out these 10,500 more considering na mayroon pala tayong reward system for these high-value targets that were mentioned by PDEA in its Organizational Outcomes and Performance Indicators? If these 10,500 were already known to PDEA, why not make it public? Why have they not yet been arrested at this point, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker?

REP. BIAZON. Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, the question was how come—among balakid bakit hindi pa nahuhuli iyong ibang mga ...

REP. ZARATE. High-value ...

REP. BIAZON. ... high-value targets, yes. Isa ho sa mga nakikita rin ng PDEA is that the demand is still there and mayroon pa ring mga—kung baga ho, may kliyente, that is why may presence pa rin iyong mga nagbebenta sa mga ilang lugar. That is why mayroon ho silang programa to clear the barangays. Ang total barangays natin is 42,045, ang na-clear na ay 20,165, so that leaves 14,171 barangays. At ang approach nga po nila dito, to do Harm Reduction Approach para po mabawasan iyong demand. So, that is why nga po, ‘di ba, parang partner approaches iyon, with Supply Reduction and Demand Reduction. So, tama po iyong figures na nabanggit po ninyo kanina. So, iyong remaining po na high-value targets nila ay mayroon pa hong ibang approaches na ginagawa and particularly iyong nabanggit

po kanina is to try to go strong on demand reduction while going strong as well on supply reduction.

REP. ZARATE. Thank you, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker.

Wala na ho akong ibang katanungan at alam natin na itong problema ng drugs is truly a complex social menace na ang solusyon nito, sa paniniwala ng Kinatawang ito, maliban doon sa police or military solution, ay dapat mayroon ding kaakibat na ibang mga solusyon. Because this is a social problem also na even if we say that we have to address the demand and supply side, if we will not address the other issues, dahil this is a complex issue, social issue ito, ay hindi rin talaga – parang isang cycle lang ito na pabalik-balik. Thank you, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker, for allowing this Representation to clarify some issues related to the budget of the Dangerous Drugs Board, as well as that of the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency.

Considering that there are no more members from the Minority who will interpellate on the budget of the two agencies, we move to terminate the consideration of and deliberations on the budget of the Dangerous Drugs Board as well as that of the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency, Mr. Sponsor, Mr. Speaker.

I so move, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal). Majority Leader.

REP. BIAZON. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

REP. DELOS SANTOS. Mr. Speaker on the part of the Majority, we join the Minority in the motion to terminate the period of interpellation on the proposed budget of the PDEA and the Dangerous Drugs Board.

I so move, Mr. Speaker

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal). There is a motion jointly moved by the Majority and the Minority to terminate the deliberations on the budget of the DDB and the PDEA. Is there any objection? (*Silence*) The Chair hears none; the motion is approved.

But before the Chair bangs the gavel, just a point of information that the Director General of PDEA, Director Wilkins Villanueva, was once the Regional Director of PDEA in my region and when he was our Regional Director, he was responsible for making my district the first LGU declared as drug-free in Mindanao.

With that, the motion is approved.

Congratulations, Director Wilkins and Usec. Cuy of the Dangerous Drugs Board.

Majority Leader.

SUSPENSION OF SESSION

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal). The session is suspended for one minute.

It was 11:49 p.m.

RESUMPTION OF SESSION

At 11:51 p.m., the session was resumed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal). The session is resumed.

Majority Leader.

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

REP. LACSON-NOEL. Mr. Speaker, I now move that we proceed with the consideration of the proposed budget of the Department of Health and its attached agencies and corporations.

I so move, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal). There is a motion to open the deliberations on the budget of the Department of Health, including its attached agencies. Is there any objection? (*Silence*) The Chair hears none; the motion is approved.

Majority Leader.

REP. LACSON-NOEL. Mr. Speaker, I would like to acknowledge first the presence of the DOH family, headed by Secretary Francisco T. Duque III, with his team, Usec. Leopoldo J. Vega, Usec. Myrna Cabotaje, Usec. Roger Tong-an, Usec. Mario Villaverde, Usec.

Lilibeth David, Usec. Gerardo Bayugo, OIC-Usec. Maria Rosario Vergeire, Dir. Napoleon Arevalo, Dir. Leonita Gorgolon, Senior Vice Pres. Renato Limsiaco of PhilHealth, Senior Vice Pres. Francisco Soria, Ms. Almira Go Sariba, Atty. Fatima Laperal, Mr. Lindsley Jeremiah Villarante, Ms. Maria Angeli Magdaraog, Mr. Conrado Benjamin Aylon, Dr. Romeo Ong, Mr. Raemond Angelo Karagdag, Dr. Gabriel Borlongan, Mr. Jay Dulay, Ms. Helen Paano, Mr. Christian Escartin, Ms. Wafa Bilao, Ms. Robie Ainna Vargas, Ms. Joanna Marie Lim, Mr. Justine Dale Soriano, and Mr. Julius Caesar Castillo.

I so move, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal). To the official family of the Department of Health, headed by Secretary Duque, welcome to the House of Representatives.

Majority Leader.

REP. LACSON-NOEL. Mr. Speaker, I move that we recognize the Hon. Micaela S. Violago from Second District of Nueva Ecija to answer questions on the proposed budget of the DOH and its attached agencies.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal). The Hon. Micaela Violago is recognized to present and defend the budget of the Department of Health, including its attached agencies.

You are recognized, Ma'am.

SPONSORSHIP SPEECH OF REP. VIOLAGO

REP. VIOLAGO. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our beloved Speaker, my fellow Representatives of the people, coworkers in the government, guests, ladies and gentlemen, a pleasant evening to all.

The Department of Health's proposed obligation budget for 2021 is P207.695 billion. The DOH is ranked number five among the departments with the highest budget allocation for the Fiscal Year 2021. It has an obligation budget of P207.695 billion, inclusive of which, P131.20 – P228 billion is for the Office of the Secretary and P493 billion for the

National Nutrition Council, P71.353 billion for the Philippine Health Insurance Corporation, and P4.486 billion for Budgetary Support to Government Corporations Specialty Hospitals. Subsidy for the National Health Insurance Program amounting to P71.353 billion will cover the health insurance for 13.22 million indigent families identified under the National Household Targeting System and 7.3 million senior citizens pursuant to Republic Act No. 10645 or the Expanded Senior Citizens Act. Subsidies to the specialty hospitals amounting to P4.486 billion will be used for financial assistance to indigent patients.

In terms of new appropriations, the DOH budget of P203.748 billion is 15.46 percent or P27.281 billion higher than the Fiscal Year 2020 Budget of P176.468 billion. Mr. Speaker, 62.47 percent of the total proposed budget is for the OSEC, followed by 35.02 percent for the PhilHealth, and the remaining 2.51 percent for the National Nutrition Council and attached corporations. By expense class, the biggest share of the Fiscal Year 2021 Budget will go to Personnel Services (PS) with P64.141 billion or 48.03 percent, while Maintenance and Other Operating Expenses (MOOE) will get a share of P10.076 billion, or about 7.92 percent, which includes the budget for Health Facilities Enhancement Program. The substantial increase in the DOH's Personnel Services allocation considers the additional hiring of health personnel to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Operations budget will have the largest share of the DOH's new appropriations for 2021, amounting to about P117.388 billion or about 92.22 percent of the total DOH-OSEC. General Administration and Support will receive the second-highest share at 6.36 percent or P8.91 billion, followed by Support to Operations at 1.42 percent or P1.807 billion. The DOH will implement nine programs in 2021, eight under the OSEC, and one under the National Nutrition Council. The budget for all these programs will amount to P117.388 billion. The Health Facilities Operations Program gets the highest allocation at P47.7 billion, equivalent to 40.5 percent of the total Operations budget in 2021. The program includes the operation of the DOH regional

hospitals and other health facilities, and national reference laboratories under the Curative Health Care Program with a budget amounting to P46.4 billion.

The second highest allocation goes to Public Health Program at P27.726 billion or 23.4 percent of the total proposed appropriations for programs. For 2021, this program includes two new foreign-assisted projects worth P5.3 billion for the procurement of PPEs and equipment, the construction of testing facilities in strategic locations nationwide. This item also consists of the National Immunization Program, a priority program mentioned in the President's 2021 Budget Message. The program, which aims to immunize infants and children against the most vaccine-preventable diseases, will receive P7.7 billion. The amount of P17.3 billion will go to Social Health Protection Program of the OSEC for the hospitalization and assistance to indigent patients in government hospitals, including specialty and LGU hospitals, as well as the Philippine General Hospital. Another P22.568 billion will go to the deployment of health workers under the Health Systems Strengthening Program.

The 2021 proposed budget aims to address the COVID-19 pandemic, the bulk of which will go to funding for health-related programs such as establishing new facilities, the implementation of the Universal Health Care Act, purchase of the COVID-19 vaccine amounting to P2.50 billion, provision for joint expert RT-PCR machines and cartridges worth P1.03 billion, and provision of Personal Protective Equipment amounting to P2.67 billion. Among others, the budget would also sustain the regular health related programs of the DOH.

The DOH received a total of P51.6 billion total allotments from various sources. The bulk of the fund, P49.1 billion, came from Quick Relief Funds under the Bayanihan Fund, P45.7 million additional SARO, P1.9 billion and the regular budget of the DOH, P497.5 billion. The DOH also received a donation of P2.5 billion from the Philippine Amusement and Gaming Corporation. Of this amount, the DOH has obligated P43.0

billion or 83 percent of their allotment and dispersed 92 percent of the Obligated Funds. The funds went to the purchase of test kits, personal protective equipment and for activities addressing the COVID-19 health emergency. The Department also transferred a total of P6.6 billion to its regional hospitals and health facilities.

I am now ready to answer your questions of concern with regard to the budget of DOH. The whole DOH family, led by Secretary Francisco Duque III, will be more than willing to answer all your queries and consider your recommendation in order to improve their service to the Filipino people.

Thank you very much po, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal).
Majority Leader.

REP. LACSON-NOEL. Mr. Speaker, I move to recognize the honorable Rep. Janette L. Garin from the First District of Iloilo for her interpellation.

I so move, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal).
The Honorable Garin is recognized.

REP. GARIN (J.). Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleagues, honorable Sponsor.

It is now midnight and I do agree that defending the Department of Health means we should all stay healthy.

In relation to this, Mr. Speaker, distinguished Sponsor, may we know the importance of the Health Facility Enhancement Program and its role in relation to the Universal Health Care.

REP. VIOLAGO. Thank you, Senior Minority Leader Janette Garin.

Mr. Speaker, importante po ang Health Facility Enhancement Program kasi po ito po ay – may ospital tayo, pero kung wala naman pong gamit ay paano po natin mapapakinabangan ang isang ospital at paano rin po natin mapapakinabangan ang ating PhilHealth kung wala naman tayong ospital na papasukin, Mr. Speaker?

REP. GARIN (J.). Mr. Speaker, distinguished Sponsor, sa Universal Health Care Law po, malaki po ba ang rolyo ng Health Facility Enhancement Program? In the provision of Universal Health Care Law, sa provision po ng Universal Health Care Law, malaki po ba ang rolyo ng ating Health Facility Enhancement Program, both the infrastructure and the equipment that should call for PhilHealth accreditation of these facilities?

REP. VIOLAGO. Opo, Mr. Speaker.

REP. GARIN (J.). Mr. Speaker, distinguished Sponsor, masasabi po ba natin na kapag walang pondo, hindi ipinagpatuloy, nagkakaroon ng delays sa Health Facility Enhancement Program, can we say that this is a major point in the non-fulfillment of our obligations to implement the Universal Health Care Law?

REP. VIOLAGO. Mr. Speaker, talaga pong mahalaga na malagyan natin ng sapat na pondo ang atin pong mga HFEP kung iyon po ang inyong – o sa Universal Health Care natin, para po mapakinabangan talaga ng ating mga kasamahang Pilipino. Sa ngayon po ay tumataas ang budget nila para makapagbigay po ng tulong sa higit na nangangailangan., Mr. Speaker.

REP. GARIN (J.). Mr. Speaker, distinguished Sponsor, noon pong 2019, merong pondo ang Health Facility Enhancement Program at base nga po sa report na ibinigay sa atin, although medyo tumaas iyong kaniyang utilization, ang kaniyang obligation ay mababa pa rin po. Nito namang 2020, nagkaroon din ng release ng allocation ng Health Facility Enhancement Program subalit iyong kaniyang obligation ay medyo mababang-mababa pa rin po. And these were the reasons cited by the Department of Budget and Management, so much so that this paved way for the DBM to put a very minimal project on hospitals, both local, national hospitals, including primary health care facilities.

Mr. Speaker, distinguished Sponsor, is

it right, is it just, that just because there are delays in the funding of these programs in the succeeding years, the entire population, including the new implementation of the Universal Health Care Law will have to be delayed because there is almost no allocation for Health Facilities Enhancement Program? Makatarungan po ba, Mr. Speaker, distinguished Sponsor, na halos walang pondo ang Health Facility Enhancement Program dahil matagal o halos walang release ng cash obligation iyon pong Department of Budget and Management?

REP. VIOLAGO. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a consequence of the reduction of the allocation, our goal in the implementation of the COVID-19 response and the UHC will significantly affect that with delays in the functionality, licensing, and accreditation of the needed health care facilities due to lack of infrastructure and equipment.

REP. GARIN (J.). Mr. Speaker, distinguished Sponsor, will you agree with us if we say that delay in health infrastructure and health equipment aligned with PhilHealth accreditation is a health injustice to the Filipino people?

REP. VIOLAGO. Yes.

REP. GARIN (J.). Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, puntahan po natin ang puso ng kalusugan, ang Philippine Health Insurance Corporation. Nagkaroon po ng kaliwa't kanang imbestigasyon ang PhilHealth, so much so that some people lost their confidence in this basic insurance that our government provides. May we inquire, Mr. Speaker, distinguished Sponsor, mayroon po bang katotohanan doon sa mga alegasyon ng corruption, katiwalian o pagpapabaya sa Philippine Health Insurance Corporation? And what is the extent of this if ever there was negligence?

REP. VIOLAGO. Mr. Speaker, it is already under investigation at naghihintay na lang po tayo na maglabas ang Senado at ang House ng kanilang kasagutan dito.

REP. GARIN (J.). Mr. Speaker, distinguished Sponsor, narinig po natin sa balita at mismong sa Pangulo na nagkakaroon ng mga pagdududa sa PhilHealth. Kaakibat naman sa budget na ipinapasa natin ngayon is a subsidy of P71 billion for the Philippine Health Insurance Corporation for the purpose of paying for the membership of those who are indigent, those who are senior citizens, iyon pong ating mga PWDs, but there were a lot of allegations insofar as the listing and the database are concerned. Can the distinguished Sponsor attest to this?

REP. VIOLAGO. Ang P71.6 billion po na ibibigay para sa budget ng health insurance, ito po ay gagamitin lamang para sa subsidy para sa ating mga indigent patients. Kung inyo pong mamarapatin, dahil 56 percent po ang ating indirect contribution at 44 percent lamang ang direct contribution kaya kailangan po natin ng P71.6 billion para po matulungan ang mga indigent na Pilipino, Mr. Speaker.

REP. GARIN (J.). Yes. Mr. Speaker, noong nakaraang mga araw, for the past weeks and the past days, I believe the DOH was called to several meetings in relation to the budget, in relation to the PhilHealth investigation at nagkakaroon nga ng alegasyon ng duplication of membership, on members who are already more than 100 years old, dead members who are still on the list at iyong alegasyon nga ay nagkakaroon ng repeated enrollment of either existing members or dead members. Can we ask the Sponsor, Mr. Speaker, if we are already in receipt of the database of all PhilHealth members being paid and subsidized by the national government?

REP. VIOLAGO. Mr. Speaker, ongoing ang clean-up po and validation sa PhilHealth po.

REP. GARIN (J.). Walapo tayong lista, datos, pangalan kung sino-sino itong babayaran ng national government ng P71 billion?

REP. VIOLAGO. Mayroon po, Mr. Speaker.

REP. GARIN (J.). Do we have it now, Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague?

REP. VIOLAGO. Mr. Speaker, sa ngayon po ay wala pero we can submit that, Mr. Speaker.

REP. GARIN (J.). Mr. Speaker, kanina po sinabi nating under investigation ang PhilHealth. Kung mayroong katotohanan at dahil nakitaan nga ng probable cause, do we have a copy of the concrete plans of PhilHealth on how similar situations can be prevented?

REP. VIOLAGO. Mr. Speaker, mayroon po tayong mga reforms na ginagawa sa PhilHealth like core strategies, support strategies, and anti-fraud activities. Iyon po ang mga ginagawa ngayon ng PhilHealth.

REP. GARIN (J.). Mr. Speaker, distinguished Sponsor, ito po bang mga strategies na ito ay mayroon na tayong nakalaang step-by-step mechanisms para sugpuin at hindi na maulit iyong mga nangyaring kapabayaang sa PhilHealth?

REP. VIOLAGO. Mr. Speaker, mayroon naman po.

REP. GARIN (J.). Can we have a copy of that?

REP. VIOLAGO. Opo, we can submit that.

REP. GARIN (J.). Mr. Speaker, distinguished Sponsor, I would very much be willing to wait for a concrete copy of the ways to move forward and the plans, step-by-step plans of the people manning PhilHealth para hindi na ito maulit and this is the only opportunity that we will be able to oversee if, indeed, the P71.16 billion that will be given by the national government to PhilHealth will not be wasted. Dalawa po ang nakikita nating problema. If we do tackle and discuss, and deliberate on the proposed budget of

the Department of Health and its attached agencies without seeing a concrete written proposal of the step-by-step process to assure Congress that the subsidy will be spent on what it is intended for, coupled with the fact na kani-kanina lang sinabi ng ating distinguished Sponsor na ginagawa pa, nililinis pa ang database ng Philippine Health Insurance.

With this, Mr. Speaker, I find it highly unusual for us to discuss the proposed budget of the Department of Health considering the documents that we need to be able to deliberate on this huge budget are still in the pipeline. And considering, Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, that we find it unfair for the DOH family to be here answering our questions but the PhilHealth documents are not yet in place, and in this untimely hour of 12:14 in the morning— Mr. Speaker, distinguished Sponsor, with all due respect, I really feel that the discussion entails a thorough review of all documents related to the pending questions surrounding the Philippine Health Insurance Corporation and the reasons why the DBM is not helping the Department of Health insofar as funding the much-needed Health Facility Enhancement Program is concerned. , The lack of documents and lack of data, Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, will not allow Members of Congress to fully exercise its power of scrutinizing and making sure that every peso paid by the taxpayers is put to proper use. With this, Mr. Speaker, distinguished Sponsor, with a heavy heart, I have no recourse but to put forward our responsibility and my responsibility that we only discuss budgets thoroughly once documents are submitted to us.

Mr. Speaker, I therefore move, together with the Minority, that we suspend the consideration of the proposed budget of the Department of Health, together with its attached agencies.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal).
Majority Leader.

SUSPENSION OF SESSION

REP. LACSON-NOEL. I move to suspend for a few minutes, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal). There is a pending motion by the Minority. Is it also joined by the Majority?

REP. LACSON-NOEL. I move that the session be suspended for a few minutes first, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal). The session is suspended.

It was 12:16 a.m.

SUSPENSION OF SESSION

At 12:18 a.m., the session was resumed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal). The session is resumed.

REP. LACSON-NOEL. Mr. Speaker, on the part of the Majority, we join the Minority in the motion to defer the consideration of the proposed budget of the DOH and its attached agencies.

I so move, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal). There is a motion, as jointly moved by the Majority and the Minority, to suspend the consideration of the budget of the Department of Health. Is there any objection? (*Silence*) The Chair hears none; the motion is approved.

Majority Leader.

SUSPENSION OF CONSIDERATION OF H.B. NO. 7727

REP. LACSON-NOEL. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the consideration of House Bill No. 7727.

I so move, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal). There is a motion. Is there any objection?

(*Silence*) There being none; the motion is approved.

Majority Leader.

SUSPENSION OF SESSION

REP. LACSON-NOEL. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the session until tomorrow at ten o'clock in the morning.

I so move, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Oaminal). There is a motion to suspend the session until tomorrow at ten o'clock in the morning. Is there any objection? (*Silence*) There being none; the motion is approved.

The session is suspended until ten o'clock tomorrow morning.

It was 12:19 a.m.