

Committee Daily Bulletin

Vol. I No. 5

A publication of the Committee Affairs Department

August 30, 2016

BUDGET BRIEFINGS		
COMMITTEE	SUBJECT MATTER	DISCUSSIONS
Appropriations	<p>Briefing on the proposed FY 2017 budget, plans and programs, and major accomplishments of the following government agencies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) 	<p>The Committee, chaired by Rep. Karlo Alexei Nograles (1st District, Davao City), listened to the budget presentations on the proposed FY 2017 budget, plans and programs, and major accomplishments of the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH), and the Commission on Elections (COMELEC).</p> <p>Committee Vice Chair Rep. Carlos Cojuangco (1st District, Tarlac) sat as the presiding officer during the DFA's budget briefing.</p> <p>DFA Secretary Perfecto Yasay Jr. said that under the FY 2017 National Expenditure Program (NEP), the DFA and its attached agencies will get a total of P23.89 billion. The Office of the Secretary (OSEC) will get the biggest share of the DFA's budget with P16.63 billion while its attached agencies, namely, the Foreign Service Institute (FSI), Technical Cooperation Council of the Philippines (TCCP), and UNESCO National Commission of the Philippines (UNACOM) will get P63.24 million, P4.48 million, and P21.09 million, respectively.</p> <p>Yasay requested an additional budget of P7.18 billion to cover the following expense items: operations, P2.8 billion; facilities, P1.83 billion; and personnel allowances, P2.55 billion. Yasay emphasized the urgency of renovating the DFA's 47-year old main building to ensure the safety of its employees.</p> <p>For 2017, the DFA will focus on the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promoting the people's interest as the core of Philippine foreign policy; • Preserving the integrity of Philippine territory through peaceful means and rules-based international order; • Enhancing the responses to terrorism, transnational crimes and other threats to national security through bilateral and multilateral cooperation; • Intensifying efforts to secure foreign investments and trade to support local industries and job creation; • Strengthening initiatives for better delivery of consular services and assistance to nationals overseas; • Promoting Philippine culture and enhancing the image of the Philippines abroad; and • Advancing Philippine security and economic interests through the ASEAN. <p>On the question of Rep. Antonio Tinio (Party-List, ACT TEACHERS), DFA Acting Assistant Secretary Celeste Balatbat explained that the 20% decrease in the 2017 budget of the OSEC, compared to the P20.55 billion in 2016, is mainly due to the removal of the retrofitting fund and the transfer of the ASEAN hosting fund to the Office of the President (OP) from the DFA.</p> <p>Rep. Nograles mentioned that the DFA's issuance of special passports to Hajj pilgrims has caused the rampant faking of Philippine passports. He cited the arrest of 177 Indonesian nationals who were caught possessing fake Philippine passports as they were about to go on a pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia. Filipino escorts are allegedly paid \$6,000 to \$10,000 for each passport they are able to produce, according to Rep. Nograles.</p> <p>Yasay said he is inclined to stop the issuance of the Hajj passports, adding that the Philippines is the only country in the world that still issues such special passport.</p>

<p>Continuation... Appropriations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) 	<p>Asked by KABAYAN Party-List Rep. Harry Roque Jr. on the government's courses of actions after winning the arbitration case against China with regard to the West Philippine Sea, Yasay said the DFA cannot make China comply with the said decision. However, the DFA will aspire to create an environment conducive to holding bilateral negotiations, at the same time work towards coming up with a provisional agreement with China to allow Filipino fishermen to fish in the area until a permanent solution is achieved.</p> <p>On the issue raised by PBA Party-List Rep. Jericho Jonas Nograles concerning "stateless Filipinos" or those children of overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) born abroad but were not issued birth certificate in the country where they were born, Yasay assured the Committee that the DFA's legal department will look into the matter.</p> <p>DPWH Secretary Mark Villar said that under the 2017 national budget, the Department is set to receive P458.61 billion, which is 15.5% higher than its current budget of P397.11 billion. The biggest portion of the DPWH's budget or P421.51 billion goes to capital outlay (CO) to finance various infrastructure and non-infrastructure projects; while the rest will be spent for maintenance and other operating expenses (MOOE), P16.41 billion; personnel services (PS), P7.75 billion; and automatic appropriations (motor vehicle user's charge and retirement and life insurance premiums), P12.94 billion.</p> <p>Recognizing that infrastructure remains one of the drivers of economic growth, Villar said the DPWH's budget will be utilized for such strategic programs as: rural road development; traffic decongestion; and integrated and seamless transport system through inter-island linkage projects like long-span bridges.</p> <p>Villar added that the DPWH's budget will also be utilized in fostering livable and resilient communities through the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Construction of flood control structures and facilities; • Implementation of resiliency and disaster risk management and climate change adaptation programs; • Implementation of infrastructure support program for marginalized sectors; and • Expansion and improvement of bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure. <p>To ensure the efficiency and effectiveness of DPWH services, the Department installed a 24/7 hotline (165-02) that will receive complaints, queries, and suggestions on DPWH-implemented projects nationwide.</p> <p>Rep. Raul del Mar (1st District, Cebu City) suggested that the DPWH should also resolve the traffic congestion not just in Metro Manila but also in other areas in the country experiencing the same problem.</p> <p>On the query of Rep. Michael Odylon Romero, Ph.D. (Party-List, 1-PACMAN) on the basis of the DPWH's 15.5% budget increase, Villar replied that it is intended to spur economic growth through increased infrastructure spending.</p> <p>Commenting that the DPWH's strategies are not new, Rep. Harry Roque Jr. (Party-List, KABAYAN) asked how the Department will improve its low absorptive capacity. Villar said that the Department's main office constantly reminds the regional directors (RDs) to ensure the full implementation of projects in their respective areas and holds them accountable for the proper utilization of funds.</p> <p>In response to the query of Rep. Aniceto "John" Bertiz III (Party-List, ACTS-OFW) if the Department provides some form of assistance to the displaced OFWs in Saudi Arabia, Villar claimed that aside from recommending the displaced workers for hiring in private construction companies, the DPWH also coordinates with the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) for the inclusion of OFWs or their dependents in the roadside maintenance program.</p> <p>The roadside maintenance program is jointly undertaken by the DPWH and DSWD which provides jobs to beneficiaries of the DSWD's conditional cash transfer (CCT) program.</p>
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Continuation... Appropriations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commission on Elections (COMELEC) 	<p>Committee Vice Chair Rep. Doy Leachon (1st District, Oriental Mindoro) sat as the presiding officer during the budget briefing by the COMELEC.</p> <p>Before the budget briefing, COMELEC Chair Andres Bautista reported that based on the feedback from various stakeholders such as the National Citizens' Movement for Free Elections (NAMFREL) and Pulse Asia, as well as on the key performance indicators (KPIs) in determining the quality of elections, the local and national elections held last May 2016 were fair and credible. Bautista also said that voters' turnout for the 2016 elections was the highest in Philippine history at 82%.</p> <p>COMELEC Acting Budget Officer Catherine Isip presented the Commission's 2017 budget of P3.32 billion, which is almost 29% lower than its proposal of P4.66 billion. Isip requested Congress to reconsider allocating an additional P240.06 million to the Commission to fund the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training/rental/lease expenses; • Surveillance and gathering of information relative to the activities of certain groups suspected of conducting operations that might have a direct bearing on the election cases and complaints filed with the Commission; • Continuing registration of qualified voters abroad; and • Creation of the Office for Overseas Voting (OFOV). <p>ABS Party-List Rep. Eugene Michael de Vera underscored the need to amend the Omnibus Election Code, particularly the provisions on campaign financing. Bautista agreed to Rep. De Vera's suggestion saying that it is indeed time for the law to be revisited.</p> <p>Rep. Antonio Tinio (Party-List, ACT TEACHERS) inquired on the COMELEC's response to the data breach that occurred shortly before the 2016 elections wherein voters' personal information were accessed by hackers. Bautista said that COMELEC is currently working with the Department of Science and Technology (DOST) and several private entities to improve the Commission's data security system.</p> <p>Sought to comment on the possible postponement of the barangay and <i>sangguniang kabataan</i> (SK) elections to 2017, Bautista said that the COMELEC maintains a neutral position on the matter. Nevertheless, he recognizes that the postponement will give more time for the COMELEC to plan and improve on their services.</p> <p>Rep. Joey Sarte Salceda (2nd District, Albay) reminded the COMELEC that based on Joint Resolution No.1 of the Constitutional Fiscal Autonomy Group (CFAG), the COMELEC should still have around P10 billion unused funds, which is more than enough to finance its various programs and budgetary deficiencies.</p> <p>The joint resolution states that unexpended year-end balances of the approved appropriations already released to constitutional offices shall remain a valid appropriation and shall continue to be available for expenditures until fully spent.</p> <p>CFAG is the collective name of constitutional bodies that enjoy fiscal autonomy granted by the Constitution. Apart from COMELEC, its members include the Civil Service Commission (CSC), Commission on Audit (COA), Commission on Human Rights (CHR), Supreme Court, and the Office of the Ombudsman (OMB).</p>
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AGENCY BRIEFING		
COMMITTEE	SUBJECT MATTER	DISCUSSIONS
Dangerous Drugs	Briefing by the following government agencies on the Philippine drug situation:	The Committee, chaired by Rep. Robert "Ace" Barbers (2 nd District, Surigao del Norte), listened to the briefing conducted by the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA) and the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) on the current drug situation in the country and their major accomplishments in line with the anti-drug campaign of the present administration.

<p>Continuation... Dangerous Drugs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA) 	<p>PDEA Director General Isidro Lapeña reported that the Philippines is being used as transshipment and destination point for illegal drugs and chemicals to other countries either through the use of human couriers, bulk shipments, or establishment of shabu laboratories in the country. This, Lapeña said, is largely attributed to the country's weak customs and border security measures, vast unpatrolled coastlines, and limited capability to detect drugs in airport and seaports.</p> <p>Lapeña said shabu continues to dominate the illegal drug trade in the global market. He disclosed that from June 30 to August 25, 2016, PDEA was able to seize 564 kilos of shabu, and since 1997, it was able to dismantle 102 shabu laboratories. He cited the involvement of foreign nationals, such as the Chinese, Taiwanese, Africans and Mexicans, in several buy-bust operations that PDEA conducted.</p> <p>Lapeña stressed that PDEA is alarmed by the involvement in the drug trade of people from the government, as shown by the arrests of 188 law enforcers, 229 elected officials, and 325 government employees. He also noted the following: incarcerated Chinese drug personalities continue to do business inside jail facilities; there is a significant increase in the quantity of "ecstasy pills" that are being seized; and minors are being used in drug-related activities (the youngest being 6 years old).</p> <p>In pursuit of the government's campaign against the proliferation of illegal drugs in the country, Lapeña enumerated PDEA's major accomplishments from January to August 2016, as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 12,988 anti-drug operations conducted; 14,111 drug personalities, including high value targets, arrested; 13,248 drug-related cases already filed; 295 marijuana sites eradicated; and 629,139 drug users and 44,839 pushers voluntarily surrendered (July 1 to August 22, 2016). <p>Among the priority legislative agenda that PDEA plans to pursue are the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Amendment of RA 4200 (Anti-Wire Tapping Law) that will authorize drug law enforcers to conduct digital communication intercept against high value targets and transnational syndicates; Amendment of Section 87 of RA 9165 (Comprehensive Dangerous Drugs Act of 2002) that will retain 50% of the regulatory fees collected by PDEA to be used for its operational requirements; Enactment of an enabling law that will authorize the examination of bank deposits, accounts and records of pushers, manufacturers, cultivators, importers and financiers of dangerous drugs; and Amendment of Section 20 of RA 9165 that will authorize PDEA to use seized money and properties for its campaign against illegal drugs. <p>Lapeña requested an increase in the Intelligence Fund of PDEA from the proposed P73.6 million to P250 million for 2017. He explained that this increase will help enhance and improve its intelligence-gathering and drug-related enforcement activities. He likewise asked for the establishment of regional offices in Regions IV-B, 8, 10, 13, and the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) in order to allow PDEA to immediately respond to drug-related problems in those regions.</p> <p>Rep. Harry Roque Jr. (Party List, KABAYAN) asked PDEA to improve the conviction rate of 26% of drug cases it filed by upgrading the capabilities of its personnel. He said there might be a correlation between the low conviction rate and the extrajudicial killings, which are employed to counter such low rate.</p> <p>On the query of Rep. Arnolfo "Arnie" Teves Jr. (3rd District, Negros Oriental) whether PDEA is in the process of cleaning up its ranks, Lapeñas answered in the affirmative.</p>
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<p>Continuation... Dangerous Drugs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) 	<p>NBI Agent Henry Kanapi describes the problem on illegal drugs as transnational and borderless; transcends all ages, class, sex, race, education, and occupation; a billion dollar industry that is continually evolving; and that which corrupts everything.</p> <p>Kanapi said there is a need to amend RA 9165 to include in its coverage prohibited drugs and chemicals that have recently appeared in the market and can be ordered online or through the internet.</p> <p>Among the recommendations proposed by Kanapi to address the proliferation of illegal drugs in the country are the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National database and information management; • Integrated strategic policy formulation; • Coordinated institutional interventions; and • Capability-building among drug law enforcement agencies <p>On the query of Rep. Barbers, Kanapi confirmed the rampant selling of “designer drugs” like ecstasy and green apple in colleges and universities. Rep. Barbers recommended that the NBI should conduct a more intense drug operation to prevent the proliferation of these designer drugs in schools.</p> <p>Rep. Barbers likewise suggested that information concerning illegal drugs be made part of the curriculum in schools to educate students of the ill-effects of these drugs.</p> <p>The Committee agreed to set a meeting with the Chair of the Committee on Appropriations to discuss the possible realignment of a portion of the 2017 national budget to the NBI and PDEA in support of the anti-drug campaign of the present administration.</p>
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