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BUDGET BRIEFINGS		
COMMITTEE	SUBJECT MATTER	DISCUSSIONS
Appropriations	<p>Briefing on the proposed FY 2018 budget, plans and programs, and major accomplishments of the following government agencies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Department of Science and Technology (DOST) 	<p>The Committee, chaired by Rep. Karlo Alexei Nograles (1st District, Davao City), listened to the presentations on the proposed FY 2018 budget, plans and programs, and major accomplishments of the Department of Science and Technology (DOST), the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) and the Department of Education (DepEd) and their attached agencies.</p> <p>Committee Vice Chair Rep. Joey Salceda (2nd District, Albay) sat as the presiding officer during the DOST's budget briefing.</p> <p>Presenting the DOST's proposed budget, Secretary Fortunato de la Peña said that under the 2018 National Expenditure Program (NEP), the DOST is set to receive P21.12 billion, which is 1% higher than its current budget of P20.96 billion.</p> <p>Dela Peña said that the budget of the DOST will be used to promote science, technology, and the creative arts to enhance innovation and creative capacity; increase competitiveness; promote rural and value chain development; and invest in human capital development in line with the President's socioeconomic agenda.</p> <p>Dela Peña also apprised the Committee of the DOST's mandate, strategic plan for 2017-2022, and its 11-point agenda.</p> <p>Baguio City Rep. Mark Go asked about DOST's targets for its <i>Balik Scientist Program</i>. Dela Peña said that currently, only 40 scientists per year are targeted under the program. But, he said, the DOST plans to increase this number to an average of 100 Filipino scientists annually for the next five years, especially if a bill institutionalizing the <i>Balik Scientist Program</i> will be enacted into law.</p> <p>The <i>Balik Scientist Program</i> of the DOST encourages highly-trained overseas Filipino scientists and technologists, experts, and professionals to return to the Philippines and share their expertise for the acceleration of the scientific, agro-industrial and economic development of the country.</p> <p>Rep. Mohamad Khalid Dimaporo (1st District, Lanao del Norte) inquired on the status of the DOST's research on "green energy" or renewable energy, particularly using agricultural produce as energy source or feedstock.</p> <p>Philippine Council for Industry, Energy and Emerging Technology Research and Development (PCIEERD) Executive Director Carlos Primo David said that researches on the use of green energy is in the priority list of the DOST. David added that the Department is going to install a solar power system for its use so that it will determine firsthand how cost-efficient the system works.</p> <p>Asked by Rep. France Castro (Party-List, ACT TEACHERS) about the status of the "Diwata-2" project, Dr. Joel Marciano of the Electrical</p>

<p>Continuation... Appropriations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) 	<p>and Electronics Engineering Institute (EEEI), University of the Philippines (UP) Diliman, reported that the project is at the developmental stage but is targeted to be completed and launched by April of next year.</p> <p>The Diwata-2 is the Philippines second microsatellite being built by Filipino engineers and scientists under the PHL-Microsat Program, a collaboration between the DOST, UP-EEEI, and partner-universities in Japan. The microsatellite will be launched into space to perform several missions including the observance of cloud patterns and weather disturbances, determination of extent of damages from disasters, as well as provision of alternative means of communication in times of disasters and emergencies. (Source: <i>phl-microsat.upd.edu.ph/diwata2</i>)</p> <p>Committee Vice Chair Rep. Carlos “Charlie” Cojuangco sat as the presiding officer during the budget briefing of the DFA.</p> <p>Foreign Affairs Secretary Allan Peter Cayetano said that, under the FY 2018 NEP, the DFA and its attached agencies will get a total of P19.66 billion. The Office of the Secretary (OSEC) will get the biggest share of the DFA’s budget with P19.57 billion while its attached agencies, namely, the Foreign Service Institute (FSI), UNESCO National Commission of the Philippines (UNACOM), and Technical Cooperation Council of the Philippines (TCCP) will get P64.93 million, 19.8 million and 4.6 million, respectively.</p> <p>Cayetano highlighted the country’s top ten milestones in foreign affairs and diplomacy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through the act of Congress, extended the validity of passport to ten years from five years and formally acceded to the Paris Agreement on Climate Change; • Hosted the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Ministers meeting and its related meetings in August; • Hosted the 18th Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) Trade Negotiating Committee meeting with trade officials from ASEAN member-states; • Attended the 24th Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Summit in Peru with the President; • Through the Philippines’ chairmanship, ASEAN adopted the Brunei Darussalam-Indonesia-Malaysia-Philippines East ASEAN Growth Area (BIMP-EAGA) Vision 2025 and launched the ASEAN Roll-on Roll-off (RoRo) sea linkage route; • Undertook a Quality Management System (QMS) and obtained International Organization for Standardization (ISO) Certification - for DFA; • Through the Philippines’ chairmanship, made progress in the negotiations for a framework of the Code of Conduct in the South China Sea; • Strengthened regional cooperation in dealing with terrorism, violent extremism and other transnational crimes; • Adopted the ASEAN Convention Against Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children; and • Pursued the Philippines’ advocacy on the West Philippine Sea/South China Sea by pushing for the full and effective implementation of the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC). <p>After one year of adopting an independent foreign policy, Cayetano said the country was able to obtain numerous forms of assistance, grants and loans, and investments and forged major agreements with Russia, China, and Japan.</p>
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<p>Continuation... Appropriations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Department of Education (DepEd) 	<p>Asked by A TEACHER Party-List Rep. Julieta Cortuna on the \$24 billion worth of assistance from China, Cayetano said that the DFA will provide the Committee with the breakdown after it has coordinated with the government's economic team, specifically the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) and the Department of Finance (DOF).</p> <p>Rep. Mohamad Khalid Dimaporo (1st District, Lanao del Sur) inquired on the findings of the DFA relative to the arrest of 177 Indonesians carrying fake Philippine passports, who were trying to pass through the Philippines en route to Saudi Arabia to attend the Hajj.</p> <p>According to Cayetano, appropriate charges have already been filed against these foreign nationals. He admitted that the incident was a source of embarrassment and a cause for security concern for the country.</p> <p>On the query of BAYAN MUNA Party-List Rep. Carlos Isagani Zarate on the policy of the DFA in providing legal and financial assistance to overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) convicted of various offenses in their host countries, especially those in the death row, Cayetano promised to submit to the Committee the revised rules of the DFA in providing assistance to distressed OFWs.</p> <p>Committee Vice Chair Maria Carmen Zamora (1st District, Compostela Valley) sat as presiding officer during the DepEd's budget briefing.</p> <p>Education Secretary Leonor Briones presented the DepEd's FY 2018 proposed budget amounting to P613.05 billion, a mere 7.9% increase from this year's budget of P568.44 billion.</p> <p>The bulk of the DepEd's proposed 2018 budget will go to DepEd proper which will receive P612.12 billion; the rest will be distributed to its attached agencies, as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early Childhood Care and Development Council - P483.42 million; • National Museum - P302.85 million; • Philippine High School for the Arts - P97.63 million; • National Book Development Board - P39.31 million; and • National Council for Children's Television - P14.81 million. <p>Also present during the meeting was Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) Undersecretary Dimas Soguilon to answer queries that may be raised regarding the construction of public schools.</p> <p>Rep. Edcel Lagman (1st District, Albay) questioned DepEd's failure to rehabilitate a single classroom in the Province of Albay eight months after Typhoon "Nina" hit the province in December 2016.</p> <p>Briones explained that the Quick Response Fund (QRF) which used to be included in the Department's budget was removed in 2017 and was transferred to the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC). She requested the help of Congress to allow DepEd to have access to the QRF especially with the occurrence of more typhoons and other natural disasters.</p> <p>Several lawmakers expressed concern about DepEd's low budget utilization during the past years, as well as on its mandatory drug-testing for all DepEd officials, employees and teachers, and the random drug-testing for students in the secondary level.</p> <p>Briones and Soguilon explained that factors like the lack of buildable spaces and change in soil conditions due to climate change and natural disasters contribute to the Department's low budget utilization. Nevertheless, they expect the rate of utilization to pick up in the second semester of 2017.</p>
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Continuation... Appropriations		<p>On DepEd's drug testing, Briones assured the Committee that the testing is preventive and not punitive in nature, explaining that it is meant to determine the prevalence of drug use among DepEd employees, teachers and students. She also assured the Committee that the results of the testing will remain confidential.</p> <p>Rep. Mohamad Khalid Dimaporo (1st District, Lanao del Norte) called the attention of the DepEd to look into the curriculum being taught in Madrasah schools around the country. According to Rep. Dimaporo, these schools are promoting anti-Christian teachings, which he fears might be the reason behind reports that some of the internally displaced children in Marawi look at members of Jihadist militant group Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) as heroes.</p> <p>Briones explained that Madrasah schools are private entities making it difficult for DepEd to make changes in their curriculum. The said schools are also under the jurisdiction of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM).</p> <p>Madrasah education is a system of education which emphasizes on Arabic literacy, Islamic values and principles, and the Islamic religion.</p> <p>Asked to comment on the position of DepEd with regard to the salary increase of teachers, Briones said that she is in favor of it as long as the amount takes into consideration the effects it would have on the budget of DepEd and that of the government in general.</p> <p>Briones promised to submit legislative proposals that would allow DepEd to improve the utilization of its funds and to address other issues that concern the Department.</p>
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COMMITTEE MEETINGS				
COMMITTEE	MEASURES		SUBJECT MATTER	ACTION TAKEN/DISCUSSION
	NO.	PRINCIPAL AUTHOR		
Ecology	HR 1155	Deputy Speaker Garcia	Inquiry into the dumping of 5,000 metric tons of garbage from South Korea in Cebu in February 2017	<p>The Committee, chaired by Rep. Estrellita Suansing (1st District, Nueva Ecija), will deliberate further on the issues raised in HR 1155.</p> <p>Rep. Suansing asked the Bureau of Customs (BOC) to narrate the circumstances behind the shipment of 5,000 metric tons of garbage from South Korea.</p> <p>Cebu Customs District Collector Elvira Cruz said that the shipment of garbage on board MV Christina arrived at Pier 3 in Cebu City on January 20, a day after she assumed office in place of Atty. Rico Rey Francis Holganza, who had been designated as the deputy collector for operations. She added, the documents of the said shipment did not pass through her office.</p> <p>Cruz recalled that she learned of the said shipment only on February 6 when Mandaue City Mayor Luigi Quisumbing called her up, blaming the BOC for allowing the trash to enter Mandaue City. Afterwards, she immediately conducted an inspection of the shipment together with BOC's enforcement group.</p>

Continuation... Ecology				<p>On the ground of “intentional misdeclaration,” the BOC issued a warrant of seizure and detention against the shipment which was declared as recycled plastic resin and wood chips.</p> <p>However, only 2,500 metric tons of trash was shipped back to South Korea while the remaining trash consisting of wood chips, stored in a warehouse in Barangay Guizo, Mandaue City, was declared abandoned by the BOC Cebu.</p> <p>On the query of Deputy Speaker Gwendolyn Garcia (3rd District, Cebu), author of HR 1155, BOC Cebu Cash Division Chief Conrado Abarintos said the payment for the shipment was downloaded to BOC’s system through the bank on January 20 at 3:04 p.m. The shipment was released also on the same date.</p> <p>Romer Gastador of Alin Customs Brokerage admitted changing the harmonized system (HS) code to make it appear that the shipment contains the materials as declared.</p> <p>The Harmonized System is an international nomenclature for the classification of products. It allows participating countries to classify traded goods on a common basis for customs purposes.</p> <p>Rep. Horacio Suansing Jr. (2nd District, Sultan Kudarat), who was a former BOC deputy commissioner, said that the HS code is being changed by some customs brokers to avoid having to apply for import permit.</p> <p>Cruz, however, asserted that this practice is illegal, adding that anyone caught doing it will be penalized with a surcharge of 250% of the tariff imposed on the shipment.</p> <p>BOC Cebu examiner Dennis Adisas admitted not examining the shipment physically because he relied on the Port Load Survey Report (PLSR) from the port of origin which declared the shipment as recyclable plastic resins and wood chips.</p>
Energy	HB 2942	Rep. Castelo	Amending certain sections of PD 910, or the law creating the Energy Development Board (EDB), defining its powers and functions, providing funds therefor	<p>The Committee, chaired by Marinduque Rep. Lord Allan Jay Velasco, will deliberate further on the four bills in its next meeting.</p> <p>Occidental Mindoro Rep. Josephine Ramirez-Sato, author of HB 4604, said that the income derived from the exploration and use of energy resources in the country should be tapped to help bridge the financial gap in the effort to protect and conserve Philippine biodiversity as well as to address the energy needs of remote and isolated communities.</p> <p>BAYAN MUNA Party-List Rep. Carlos Isagani Zarate, author or HB 3877, said that the transfer of Malampaya fund, which is under a</p>
	HB 3593	Rep. Batocabe	Amending PD 910 and specifying the use of the Malampaya funds	
	HB 3877	Rep. Zarate	Amending PD 10 and mandating the transfer of Malampaya funds to the General Fund subject to congressional appropriation for the purpose of re-nationalizing the country’s power and energy industry	

Continuation... Energy	HB 4604	Rep. Ramirez-Sato	Authorizing the use of the special fund composed of the government share from the exploration, development and exploitation of energy resources for renewable energy development and biodiversity conservation activities, amending for the purpose Section 8 of PD 910, and specifying the use of the special fund for biodiversity conservation	<p>Special Fund, to the General Fund will prevent its misappropriation and remove presidential discretion over the funds. He stressed that the Malampaya fund should be spent by the government rationally and wisely for the benefit of the people.</p> <p>Shell Philippines Exploration (SPEX) Managing Director Lorelie Quiambao-Osial said that the company defers to the decision of Congress and the Department of Energy (DOE) on such a public policy as how the Malampaya funds should be utilized.</p> <p>DOE Assistant Secretary Gerardo Erguiza Jr. said that, similar to the bills' intent, the DOE also proposes that part of the Malampaya funds be used to finance electrification projects and the interconnection of the Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao power transmission lines, as well as to subsidize electricity rates.</p> <p>Representatives from the DOE, Commission on Audit (COA), and the Bureau of Treasury (BTr) gave their comments to questions by the House Members pertaining to the utilization and remaining amount of the Malampaya fund.</p> <p>According to Erguiza, based on DOE's records, the Malampaya fund has a balance of P193 billion as of June 2017. On the other hand, BTr Accounting Services OIC Director Marites Masarap said that the balance is P192.49 billion as of July 15, 2017.</p> <p>BTr's Research Service Director Robert Dominick Mariano said that P46.55 billion was already spent out of the Malampaya fund.</p> <p>On the unrecorded Special Allotment Release Order (SARO) relative to the disbursement of the Malampaya fund, COA Supervising Auditor for BTr Rosemarie Valenzuela said that there were unrecorded SAROs amounting to P20 billion.</p> <p>Masarap said that the BTr is still reconciling its records with DOE and the Department of Budget and Management (DBM), adding that the Treasury does not have the knowledge where the Malampaya fund was spent.</p> <p>The DOE was requested to submit several documents such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete and reconciled data on the Malampaya fund indicating amount of remittances, releases, and available funds; • List of all projects funded by the Malampaya fund in the last 10 years; and • Total amount released to the Philippine National Oil Company (PNOC) representing its 10% share from the Malampaya fund.
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Continuation... Energy				The BTr, DBM, and COA were also asked to submit documents and reports pertinent to the Malampaya fund to check whether there are discrepancies in the figures.
Good Government and Public Accountability	HR 767	Rep. Roque (H.)	Inquiry into the alleged corruption and irregularities in the operation and business of the Philippine Health Insurance Corporation (PhilHealth)	<p>The Committee, chaired by Rep. Johnny Ty Pimentel (2nd District, Surigao del Sur), will deliberate further on the issues raised relative to HR 767.</p> <p>At the outset, Rep. Pimentel said that the Committee will look into any act of malfeasance, misfeasance and nonfeasance in office allegedly committed by officers and employees of the Philippine Health Insurance Corporation (PhilHealth) and recommend appropriate remedial legislation to address the issues.</p> <p>KABAYAN Party-List Rep. Harry Roque Jr., author of HR 767, said that it is indispensable to determine whether reports of anomalies and fraudulent practices in PhilHealth are true given that the agency will be the implementing agency of the proposed universal health care law. He added that these alleged irregularities in PhilHealth's operations will jeopardize the success of this program.</p> <p>Recalling the Senate Blue Ribbon investigation on fraudulent practices in processing and paying PhilHealth claims, Dr. Ma. Dominga "Minguita" Padilla, former PhilHealth head executive staff, said that there were different forms of such anomalies identified, foremost of which is the "recruitment scam" in ophthalmology cases.</p> <p>Padilla disclosed that "recruiters" refer patients to ophthalmologists to get a recruitment fee of P1,000 per eye. She added that about P2 billion is being paid by PhilHealth in a year for cataract surgeries and most of these cases are concentrated in only 10 eye centers. What is worse, she claimed, is that such eye procedures were really unnecessary and were done poorly that there were stories of patients, who are mostly senior citizens, who ended up blind.</p> <p>Illegal practices are also prevalent in pneumonia and dialysis cases. According to PhilHealth OIC-Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer Ruben John Basa, PhilHealth paid about P7 billion for pneumonia cases in 2016 alone.</p> <p>When asked by Rep. Winston "Winnie" Castelo (2nd District, Quezon City) on what actions were taken against erring doctors and personalities, Padilla said that ethics cases were filed against doctors with the Philippine Medical Association (PMA) and complaints were also filed with PhilHealth but these were not given due course.</p>

Continuation... Good Government and Public Accountability				<p>Rep. Pimentel asked if there are ongoing investigations by other agencies on the alleged irregularities in PhilHealth.</p> <p>Basa replied that the Office of the Ombudsman and the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) are looking into the matter. He added that the PhilHealth Board passed a resolution authorizing the PhilHealth President and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) to submit to these offices documents pertinent to the case.</p> <p>Asked by Rep. Doy Leachon (1st District, Oriental Mindoro) about the reason for the realignment of P10.6 billion of its budget in 2015, Basa explained that it was the former PhilHealth president who requested the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) to realign the said amount to the health facilities enhancement program instead of the original intent of using it to fund the enrollment of senior citizens in PhilHealth. Basa said, however, that the said fund was not released after all by the DBM.</p> <p>Replying to a follow-up question of Rep. Arnolfo "Arnie" Teves Jr. (3rd District, Negros Oriental), Basa revealed that the request for the realignment of the P10.6 billion did not pass through the PhilHealth Board.</p> <p>Atty. Romela Devera, chief of the Legal Service of the Department of Health (DOH), informed the Committee that the Department has created a fact-finding committee to look into the reported anomalies at the PhilHealth. There is no final report yet on the matter, she said.</p> <p>Rep. Romeo Acop (2nd District, Antipolo City), commenting on the statement of Basa that it takes about 60 days before a doctor is paid by PhilHealth for medical services rendered to its members/beneficiaries, said that such lengthy process makes doctors vulnerable to fraudulent acts.</p> <p>For its next meeting, the Committee will invite the heads of the DOH, DBM and NBI, as well as former and present board members and directors of PhilHealth.</p>
Human Rights	Substitute Bill to HBs 491, 576, 3468 & 3895	Reps. Turabin-Hataman, Panganiban, Tan (S.A.), and Escudero	Prohibiting racial, ethnic and religious discrimination	<p>The Committee, chaired by Rep. Cheryl Deloso-Montalla (2nd District, Zambales), approved the Substitute Bill to the four measures subject to style and amendment.</p> <p>AMIN Party-List Rep. Sitti Djalia Turabin-Hataman, author of HB 491, discussed the output of the technical working group (TWG) which harmonized the bills.</p>
	Substitute Bill to HBs 158, 750 &	Reps. Belmonte (J.C.), Aglipay-Villar, and	Establishing the National Committee for the Prevention of Torture (NCPT), the national preventive mechanism against	The Committee approved the Substitute Bill to the three measures subject to style and amendment. The bill will be referred to the

Continuation... Human Rights	4550	Rodriguez (M.)	torture and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment in the Philippines, providing a framework for implementing obligations under the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture (OPCAT) and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment, and appropriating funds therefor	<p>Committee on Appropriations for review of its funding provisions.</p> <p>Among the points agreed upon during the meeting were the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change the name of the proposed National Committee for the Prevention of Torture (NCPT) into "National Commission for the Prevention of Torture; • Make the proposed Commission a separate and independent body from the Commission on Human Rights (CHR) with its own budget; and • Exclude the CHR from the NCPT's membership, as proposed in the bill, and replace it with a representative from the medical field. <p>Rep. Jose Christopher Belmonte (6th District, Quezon City), author of HB 158, and the representatives from the Department of Justice (DOJ) and Presidential Human Rights Committee (PHRC) expressed no objection to the proposed amendments.</p> <p>On the other hand, CHR's Policy Office Chief Eunice Sta. Maria-Manahan expressed reservation on the proposed removal of one CHR representative from the membership of the proposed Commission.</p>
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AGENCY BRIEFINGS		
COMMITTEE	SUBJECT MATTER	DISCUSSIONS
Games and Amusements jt. w/ Public Order and Safety	Briefing by the Tiger Resorts, Leisure and Entertainment, Inc. (Okada Manila) on its security and safety protocols	<p>The Joint Committee, co-presided by Rep. Gus Tambunting (2nd District, Parañaque City), Chair of the Committee on Games and Amusements, and Rep. Romeo Acop (2nd District, Antipolo City), Chair of the Committee on Public Order and Safety, listened to the briefing conducted by Okada Manila on its security and surveillance operations.</p> <p>Recalling the tragic incident that happened at the Resorts World Manila, Rep. Tambunting said it should serve as a wake-up call for all casinos to establish not just a good security and safety plan but one that is doable and implementable in case of actual threats or emergencies.</p> <p>Rep. Acop emphasized that the casino security system should focus on three functions: detection and discovery of the adversarial action or threat; delaying of the attack; and response or action taken to apprehend or stop the attacker.</p> <p>Okada Manila Vice President for Security and Surveillance Mike Waite gave assurance that Okada Manila has always taken security and surveillance very seriously in line with its vision "to become an innovative global leader in the field of resort casino security and surveillance." He presented the casino's various security and surveillance teams including their respective manpower and responsibilities, as well as the response system in case of attacks, disasters and emergencies, all aimed at keeping its guests and employees safe and secure.</p>

<p>Continuation... Games and Amusements jt. w/ Public Order and Safety</p>		<p>Deputy Speaker Romero "Miro" Quimbo (2nd District, Marikina City) and Rep. Henry Oaminal (2nd District, Misamis Occidental) inquired whether the security plan presented by Waite was the same plan submitted to the Philippine Amusement and Gaming Corporation (PAGCOR). Both Waite and PAGCOR Board Director Gabriel Claudio replied in the affirmative.</p> <p>Several House Members asked PAGCOR if it can impose sanctions against a casino for failure to comply with its security protocols. Claudio said that PAGCOR can intervene and impose penalties after proper consultations with parties concerned. On the other hand, PAGCOR Vice President Lino Calingasan said that there are in fact no specific sanctions for violating PAGCOR's security standards, explaining that these only serve as guide for casinos in establishing their own security protocols.</p> <p>In response to the query of Majority Leader Rodolfo Fariñas (1st District, Ilocos Norte), Hajime Tukoda, director of the Universal Entertainment Corporation (UEC), through his interpreter, said that Kazuo Okada is no longer connected with Okada Manila. Tukoda explained further that Tiger Resorts, Leisure and Entertainment, Inc (Okada Manila) is owned by Tiger Holdings Hong Kong under the UEC in Japan.</p> <p>On the issue that casinos are being used as conduit for money laundering activities, Claudio stated that PAGCOR is in extensive consultation with the Anti-Money Laundering Council (AMLC) to counter this illegal act.</p> <p>The Joint Committee agreed to conduct an ocular inspection of PAGCOR-operated casinos including Okada Manila to better assess their security and safety protocols.</p>
<p>North Luzon Growth Quadrangle (Special Committee)</p>	<p>Briefing by the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) on its 2018 budget, plans and programs for Regions I & II and the Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR)</p>	<p>The Committee, presided by Rep. Deogracias Victor "DV" Savellano (1st District, Ilocos Sur), listened to the briefing conducted by the DPWH on its 2018 budget, plans and programs for Regions I & II, and the Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR).</p> <p>For Region I, DPWH Region I OIC-Regional Director Ronel Tan reported that it will receive a funding allocation of P27.72 billion for 2018. Tan also presented the DPWH's ongoing high impact infrastructure projects in the region which include the construction of bypass/diversion roads, and the construction and improvement of access roads leading to airports, seaports and declared tourism destinations.</p> <p>For Region II, DPWH Region II Regional Director Melanio Briosos presented the FY 2018 Annual Infrastructure Program with a budget allocation of P19.95 billion, distributed as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • P6.12 billion for network development; • P3.52 billion for flood management program; • P2.79 billion for asset preservation program; • P2.40 billion for convergence and support program; • P1.49 billion for bridge program; • P1.33 billion for local program; • P1.18 billion for foreign-assisted projects; and • P1.12 billion for regionwide projects. <p>For CAR, DPWH CAR Regional Director Nerie Bueno reported that P18.95 billion will be allocated to the region, giving priority to the maintenance of roads and bridges and construction of new roads and flood control structures.</p> <p>As of December 2016, Bueno reported that DPWH CAR has already paved 78% of the region's national roads which is lagging behind Regions I and II, which have an accomplishment rate of 99% and</p>

<p>Continuation... North Luzon Growth Quadrangle (Special Committee)</p>		<p>94%, respectively. In terms of road interconnectivity between the three regions, Bueno said DPWH CAR needs P3 billion to fund the four road lines that are not yet totally paved. Bueno added that the construction/maintenance of 320 bridges included in the DPWH CAR's bridge management system (BMS) inventory is already funded up to 2018.</p> <p>Replying to the query of Nueva Vizcaya Rep. Luisa Lloren Cuaresma, DPWH Assistant Secretary for Regional Operations in Luzon Eugenio Pipo Jr. said that the DPWH and the Department of Energy (DOE) already signed a joint memorandum circular on July 10, 2017 providing uniform guidelines for the payment and relocation of electric cooperative (EC) posts/facilities affected by road widening projects of the DPWH.</p> <p>Deputy Speaker Eric Singson (2nd District, Ilocos Sur) urged the DPWH to give priority to the flagship projects of the Department that remained unfinished.</p>
<p>Veterans Affairs and Welfare</p>	<p>Briefing by the Philippine Veterans Affairs Office (PVAO) on its accomplishments, plans and programs, and proposed FY 2018 budget</p>	<p>The Committee, chaired by Rep. Leopoldo Bataoil (2nd District, Pangasinan), listened to the presentation on PVAO's proposed FY 2018 budget, plans and programs, and major accomplishments.</p> <p>PVAO Administrator Ernesto Carolina said that under the FY 2018 National Expenditure Program (NEP), the PVAO is set to receive P10.68 billion, which is 3.39% lower than its current budget of P11.05 billion. Carolina explained that the decrease in the budget of PVAO is due to the decrease in capital outlay allocation, particularly for the completion of the <i>Libingan ng mga Bayani</i>, and the decrease in pension fund due to the decrease in the number of World War II veterans.</p> <p>Carolina reported that PVAO is proposing an additional P2.09 billion budget to fund the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Payment of total administrative disability (TAD) arrears for surviving spouses of WWII veterans who died between April 1994 and Dec 2009, P1.65 billion; • Expanded Veterans Hospitalization and Medical Care Program, P33 million; • Establishment of veterans hospital in Mindanao, P30 million; • Development of <i>Libingan ng mga Bayani</i> - Phase 2, P360 million; and • Rehabilitation and improvement of Capas National Shrine, P25 million. <p>Carolina lamented the lack of hospitals for veterans, adding that there are only 211 hospitals accredited by PVAO. He also said that there are only 17 provincial veterans field offices nationwide.</p> <p>Rep. Francisco Datol Jr. (Party-List, Senior Citizen) pushed for an increase in the budget of PVAO and for an increase in pension and other benefits due to the veterans.</p>
<p>Visayas Development (Special Committee)</p>	<p>Briefing on the proposed Aklan Cruise Ship Port Development Project</p>	<p>The Committee, chaired by Rep. Alejandro Mirasol (5th District, Negros Occidental), listened to the briefing conducted by Aklan Governor Florencio Miraflores on the proposed Aklan Cruise Ship Port Development Project.</p> <p>Miraflores said that the proposed project aims to maximize the tourism potential of the island province, being host to more than 1.7 million tourists. He informed the Committee that the Royal Caribbean Cruise Ltd has already expressed interest in the project.</p> <p>In light of this, Miraflores calls on the concerned government agencies to make the necessary study and assessment of the project citing the huge investment it will entail.</p>

<p>Continuation... Visayas Development (Special Committee)</p>		<p>Department of Tourism (DOT) Administration and Special Concerns Assistant Secretary Reynaldo Ching and Tourism Regulation, Coordination and Resource Generation Assistant Secretary Eden David conveyed the DOT's support for the project.</p> <p>Rep. Alfredo "Albee" Benitez (3rd District, Negros Occidental) stated that the DOT should take the lead in implementing the proposed project inasmuch as it is in a better position to determine the requirements of the project, in collaboration with the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) and the Department of Transportation (DOTr).</p> <p>Asked by Rep. Benitez on the number of tourist arrivals in Visayas. DOT Region VII Chief Tourism Operations Officer Judy Gabato said that a total of 5.9 million tourists arrived in Central Visayas in 2016. Based on this figure, Rep. Benitez emphasized that more investment projects should be granted to the region since it accounts for the majority of tourist arrivals in the country.</p> <p>Tourism Promotions Board (TPB) Chief Operating Officer Cesar Montano gave his assurance that Region VII is among the priorities of the tourism sector. He admitted though that the Board cannot fully perform its mandate because of limited resources.</p> <p>On Rep. Lucy Gomez' (4th District, Leyte) questions seeking some details about the proposed project in Aklan, Ching promised to submit the DOT's Cruise Tourism Plan which contains all the information relative to the proposed project.</p> <p>Meanwhile, Reps. Wilfredo Caminero (2nd District, Cebu) and Peter John Calderon (7th District, Cebu) both lamented the fact that their province is the least priority under the DOT-DPWH Convergence Program. David explained that the convergence program entails rigorous three-level prioritization process where a set of criteria must be complied with.</p> <p>The Committee asked the DOT to submit a list of requirements for the DOT-DPWH Convergence Program. On the other hand, Miraflores promised to submit the estimated cost of the Aklan Cruise Ship Port Development Project as computed by the Royal Caribbean Cruise Ltd.</p>
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