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BUDGET BRIEFINGS

COMMITTEE	SUBJECT MATTER	DISCUSSIONS
Appropriations	<p>Briefing on the proposed FY 2021 budget, plans and programs, and major accomplishments of the following government offices:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Department of Agriculture (DA) and its attached agencies and the National Irrigation Administration (NIA) 	<p>The Committee, chaired by Rep. Eric Go Yap (Party-List, ACT-CIS), listened to the presentations on the proposed FY 2021 budget, plans and programs, and major accomplishments of the DA, NIA, DILG, DSHUD, and the Judiciary.</p> <p>Committee Vice Chairperson, Rep. Teodorico Haresco Jr. (2nd District, Aklan), sat as the presiding officer during the earlier part of the budget hearing for DA and NIA until Rep. Yap took over.</p> <p>At the outset, Agriculture Secretary William Dar expressed his gratitude to the Members of Congress for allocating funds for the DA under the Bayanihan to Recover as One Act (Bayanihan II). He said that the COVID-19 pandemic has adversely affected some of the vulnerable sectors in the agriculture industry and that the support given by Congress would help cushion these effects and enable the DA to be more aggressive in implementing its vital programs to ensure food security.</p> <p>Replying to the query of Rep. Ferdinand Gaité (Party-List, BAYAN MUNA), Secretary Dar said that the original FY 2021 budget proposal of the DA and its attached agencies was P284.43 billion but the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) only approved a budget of P86.30 billion under the 2021 National Expenditure Program (NEP).</p> <p>NIA Administrator Ricardo Ramoran Visaya also reported that the original budget proposal of the NIA for FY 2021 was P42.4 billion but the DBM only approved a budget of P32.09 billion.</p> <p>Rep. Argel Joseph Cabatbat (Party-List, MAGSASAKA) asked the NIA on the programs that will be affected by the budget cut. Visaya replied that the rehabilitation and improvement of existing irrigation systems will be affected as the DBM gave priority to the construction of new irrigation systems in the allocation of funds.</p> <p>Rep. Stella Luz Quimbo (2nd District, Marikina City) noted that only the agriculture sector had a positive growth amid the pandemic during the second quarter of the year. She asked the DA where this growth is attributed to. Secretary Dar responded that it can be attributed to the positive performance of the rice, corn, and fishery sectors.</p> <p>Meanwhile, Dinagat Island Rep. Alan 1 Ecleo expressed concern that Mindanao always gets a smaller budget for agriculture as compared to the other regions. Secretary Dar explained that the original budget proposal of the DA for CARAGA was actually P4.8 billion but the DBM only approved a budget of P1.2 billion for FY 2021.</p> <p>Deputy Speaker Henry Oaminal (2nd District, Misamis Occidental) inquired on the status of "For Later Release (FLR)" expenditure items under the FY 2020 budget of the DA. The DA Secretary said that he is already coordinating with the DBM for the release of FLR funds amounting to P5 billion.</p> <p>Rep. Abdullah Dimaporo (2nd District, Lanao del Norte) underscored the need to already use the coco levy fund for the</p>

<p>Continuation... Appropriations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) 	<p>benefit of the coconut farmers. He asked how much the fund is to date.</p> <p>Philippine Coconut Authority (PCA) Administrator Benjamin Madrigal Jr. replied that the current balance of the coco levy fund is P76 billion which is being kept in the Bureau of the Treasury (BTr). He explained that the fund cannot be utilized until the coco levy bill, authorizing its use, is passed into law. In the meantime, he said that the PCA is conducting massive information dissemination campaign through the regional Coconut Farmers Forum to prepare the coconut farmers of their role in the implementation of the coco levy bill once it becomes a law.</p> <p>Reps. Geraldine Roman (1st District, Bataan) and Vicente "Ching" Veloso III (3rd District, Leyte) asked about the DA's basis for approving farm-to-market (FMR) road projects. They said that in most cases, the list of FMR projects submitted by the Members are not being considered.</p> <p>Chair Yap suspended the hearing for several minutes to consult with the DA Secretary and other officers on the matter. Upon resumption of the budget hearing, Rep. Yap assured the Members that all issues pertaining to their FMR projects will be resolved as soon as an arrangement has been reached with the DA.</p> <p>Rep. Wilfrido Mark Enverga (1st District, Quezon) expressed dismay at the huge reduction of the 2021 budget of the DA and its attached agencies from their original proposal of P284.43 billion to only P86.30 billion, as approved by the DBM for inclusion in the NEP. Rep. Enverga, who is the Chair of the Committee on Agriculture and Food, also noted that the budget of the NIA has been declining for the past three years. He urged the Committee on Appropriations to augment the budget of the DA for FY 2021.</p> <p>Several Members also favor an increase in the 2021 budget of the DA and its attached agencies considering the growth of the agriculture sector despite the pandemic and its potential huge contribution to the gross domestic product (GDP) of the country in the years to come.</p> <p>Other Members also asked about the status of their agricultural projects in their respective districts. Secretary Dar gave his full commitment in seeing them through.</p> <p>The Committee agreed to terminate the briefing on the FY 2021 proposed budget of the DA and its attached agencies and NIA.</p> <p>Committee Vice Chairperson, Rep. "Kuya" Jose Antonio Sy-Alvarado (1st District, Bulacan), presided over the DILG's budget briefing.</p> <p>Under the FY 2021 NEP, the DILG and its attached agencies are set to receive a total budget of P244.31 billion, which is 2% higher than its current year's budget of P239.84 billion. By expense class, DILG's 2021 proposed budget will be distributed as follows: personnel services (PS), P209.87 billion; maintenance and other operating expenses (MOOE), P30.21 billion; and capital outlay (CO), P4.23 billion.</p> <p>At the outset, Rep. Sarah Jane Elago (Party-List, KABATAAN) questioned the P16.4 billion budget allocated for the Support to the Barangay Development Program (BDP), which is one of the programs to be undertaken by the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC). Elago surmised that this lump sum amount is a "pork barrel" because the projects that will be undertaken in the barangays will still need the approval</p>
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of the NTF-ELCAC. (The NTF-ELCAC, which was created pursuant to Executive Order 70, series of 2018, is tasked to ensure the efficient and effective implementation of the whole-of-government approach to end insurgencies in the country. The President himself chairs the NTF-ELCAC.)

DILG Secretary Eduardo Año explained that the budget for the BDP will be used to fund the projects that were determined by the qualified barangays themselves and later on assessed by the NTF-ELCAC. Barangays “cleared” of insurgency will be given P20-million worth of projects. The projects include farm-to-market roads; water and sanitation system; school buildings; and agricultural and livelihood projects, among others. The BDP aims to help in the government’s fight against communist rebels by solving the root cause of the insurgencies and uplifting the economic status of the infiltrated communities, Año added.

Año denied that the allocation is a “lump sum” amount because the intended projects in the barangays were specified and itemized. He committed to submit to the Committee the list of the qualified barangays and their respective projects. Likewise, Año dismissed the allegation that the BDP will be used to influence the outcome of the 2022 national elections.

Rep. Eufemia “Ka Femia” Cullamat (Party-List, BAYAN MUNA) asked how the NTF-ELCAC determines the barangay that will be qualified as beneficiary of the BDP. Año said that affected barangays should first secure a certification that they are “cleared” of insurgency based on the parameters set by the Task Force. A joint letter of the PNP and the Armed Forces of the Philippines declaring that the area is already insurgency-free is also necessary. Año disclosed that from 2016 to 2019, 822 barangays have been cleared of insurgency.

Responding to the query of Rep. Edgar Chatto (1st District, Bohol), Año said that due to the government’s priority programs to combat the COVID-19 pandemic, there is no budget allocated for 2021 for the Conditional Matching Grant to Provinces (CMGP). Nevertheless, Año requested the allocation of funds for the CMGP for the completion of provincial roads.

CMGP is a partnership program between the DILG and the DBM for provincial local government units in response to the needed infrastructure support, as well as reforms in local roads management and public financial management. (*Source: DILG website*)

Party-list Reps. France Castro (ACT-TEACHERS), Arlene Brosas (GABRIELA), and Carlos Isagani Zarate (BAYAN MUNA) brought to the attention of the Committee the red-tagging of Makabayan Bloc Members that is allegedly being perpetrated by the Philippine National Police (PNP).

PNP Chief Camilo Cascolan said that red-tagging (labelling individuals or groups as communists or terrorists) is not a policy of the PNP. He assured the lawmakers that the PNP will look into the matter and will submit a report to them. Cascolan also clarified that the budget for the NTF-ELCAC is not intended for red-tagging activities.

The officials of the DILG and its attached agencies replied to the concerns of some Members as well as the questions raised by the public through the House of Representatives’ *Usapang Kongreso*: Budget ng Bayan 101 Facebook page.

<p>Continuation... Appropriations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Human Settlements and Urban Development (DHSUD) and its attached agencies 	<p>With several Members supporting the budget of the DILG, the Committee agreed to terminate the briefing on the FY 2021 proposed budget of the DILG and its attached agencies.</p> <p>Committee Vice Chairperson, Rep. Juan Miguel Arroyo (2nd District, Pampanga), sat as the presiding officer during the DHSUD budget hearing.</p> <p>The original budget proposal of the DHSUD and its attached agencies was P77.06 billion but the DBM only approved a budget of P3.68 billion under the NEP. The DBM-approved budget of P3.68 billion will be distributed to the DHSUD Proper amounting to P414 million and the attached agencies/corporations as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Housing Authority (NHA) - P2 billion; • National Home Mortgage Finance Corporation (NHMFC) - P1 billion; • Social Housing Finance Corporation (SHFC) - P369 million; and • Human Settlements Adjudication Commission (HSAC) - P199 million. <p>On the query of Rep. Macnell Lusotan (Party-List, MARINO) on the programs and projects that will be affected by the budget reduction, DHSUD Secretary Eduardo del Rosario enumerated the following programs: full operationalization of DHSUD's central office and 16 regional offices; establishment of the Housing One-Stop Shop Processing Centers; support to policy formulation and technical assistance; Human Settlements and Urban Development Program; Motor Vehicle Replacement and Acquisition Program; and COVID-19 response.</p> <p>Rep. Dimaporo inquired on the status of rehabilitation and recovery program in Marawi City. Secretary Del Rosario, who also heads the Task Force Bangon Marawi (TFBM), said that the program is on track and would finish by December 2021.</p> <p>Deputy Speaker Deogracias Victor "DV" Savellano (1st District, Ilocos Sur) asked the NHA if it is exploring other construction technologies such as the use of bamboo as construction material for its social housing projects. He said that using bamboo materials to build portions of the houses will be less costly for the government and would not even compromise the quality and durability of the houses.</p> <p>NHA General Manager Marcelino Escalada Jr. said that the NHA approves of this kind of innovation and has already accredited a foundation that offers this alternative building technology. However, he said that the NHA is still studying how to educate the people or provide better marketing for this kind of innovation, considering that there is still a misconception that bamboo-made products are of sub-standard quality.</p> <p>On the issue of the demolition of houses such as those in Tondo, Manila, Escalada assured the body that the NHA observes the President's directive that there should be no demolition without proper relocation of affected families.</p> <p>Rep. Ma. Theresa Collantes (3rd District, Batangas) expressed her concern that many victims and displaced families of the Taal Volcano eruption are still staying in evacuation centers.</p> <p>Del Rosario said that the affected municipalities have not yet submitted their respective Housing Development Plans, except for one municipality. He assured Rep. Collantes that he will instruct the DHSUD regional officials to coordinate with her and other lawmakers whose districts were affected by the Taal Volcano eruption.</p>
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- The Judiciary

Several Members called for an increase in the 2021 budget of the DHSUD and its attached agencies as they questioned their meager budget of P3.68 billion which is a huge reduction from their original budget proposal of P77.06 billion. They said that the DHSUD should be given adequate budget in order to address the housing backlog in the country and provide more decent houses for the Filipino people, especially the poor.

The Committee terminated the briefing on the FY 2021 proposed budget of DSHUD and its attached agencies.

Committee Vice Chair, Rep. Manuel Jose "Mannix" Dalipe (2nd District, Zamboanga City), sat as the presiding officer during the Judiciary's budget briefing.

Supreme Court (SC) Administrator Jose Midas Marquez said that under the FY 2021 NEP, the Judiciary is set to receive P43.54 billion, which is a P2.31-billion increase from its 2020 budget of P41.23 billion.

Despite the increase, Marquez said that the Judiciary's proposed budget under the NEP is still lower than its original budget proposal of P55.88 billion. Instead of requesting the restoration of the P12.34 billion variance, Marquez just requested for an additional P6.58 billion. This additional budget will be allocated to the following: Supreme Court of the Philippines and the Lower Courts, P5.07 billion; Presidential Electoral Tribunal, P15.35 million; Court of Appeals, P994.5 million; Sandiganbayan, P406.4 million; and Court of Tax Appeals, P98.5 million.

Marquez likewise requested that the language of Special Provision Nos. 2 (Special Allowance of Justice and Judges) and 7 (Maintenance and Other Operating Expenses of Lower Courts) under the FY 2021 NEP be patterned after the same special provisions in the General Appropriations Act of 2020.

Rep. France Castro (Party-List, ACT-TEACHERS) manifested that the Judiciary should be given enough budget to perform its mandate amidst the pandemic. She then asked about the measures that the courts are adopting in this time of pandemic especially with regard to the arraignment of cases.

Marquez said that when the public health emergency was declared in March, the Judiciary closed all courts and immediately adopted electronic means in administering the courts' transactions, such as electronic filing of cases. Virtual hearings are also being conducted by the courts to continue hearing cases despite mobility restrictions brought about by the pandemic and the subsequent quarantines.

He added that based on their records, the courts nationwide have conducted almost 100,000 virtual hearings. This has made the courts release more than 60,000 persons deprived of liberty from March 17 to present. Marquez also informed the Committee that SC Chief Justice Diosdado Peralta himself ordered that judges should be physically present in courts to make the public "feel the presence" of the Judiciary despite the pandemic.

Replying to the query of Rep. Carlos Isagani Zarate (Party-List, BAYAN MUNA), Marquez said that the SC will review the Rule on the Writ of Amparo which was promulgated by the SC in 2007 for the protection of those who face serious threats to their lives and personal security.

The Writ of Amparo is a "remedy available to any person whose right to life, liberty, and security is violated or threatened with

Continuation... Appropriations		<p>violation by an unlawful act or omission of a public officials or employee, or of a private individual or entity.” (Source: Supreme Court website)</p> <p>Rep. Gaité asked the reason behind the large number of vacancies in courts which is at 26.3%. Marquez explained that the hiring process in the Judiciary usually takes some time. In the case of filling up the position for judges, the Judicial Bar Council (JBC) opens the position to applicants and nominates three names from which the President chooses and appoints.</p> <p>Several Members manifested their support for the additional budget requested by the Judiciary.</p> <p>The Committee terminated the briefing on the FY 2021 proposed budget of the Judiciary.</p>
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COMMITTEE MEETINGS ON HOUSE MEASURES				
COMMITTEE	MEASURES		SUBJECT MATTER	ACTION TAKEN/DISCUSSION
	NO.	PRINCIPAL AUTHOR		
Basic Education and Culture	HB 4338	Rep. Guico	Establishing a national program for the Filipino gifted children and appropriating funds therefor	<p>The Committee, chaired by Pasig City Rep. Roman Romulo, will deliberate further on HB 4338 in its next meeting.</p> <p>Deputy Speaker Evelina Escudero (1st District, Sorsogon) sponsored HB 4338 in behalf of the author, Rep. Ramon Guico III (5th District, Pangasinan).</p> <p>Under HB 4338, the Department of Education (DepEd) shall spearhead the formulation of a more inclusive curriculum program that is responsive to the unique needs of the gifted children.</p> <p>The resource persons expressed support for the intention of the bill. However, they are divided on whether or not to include in the proposed National Program for the Filipino Gifted the provisions on the “acceleration” of highly gifted children.</p> <p>As defined in the bill, “acceleration” is the “educational placement strategy that allows a student to progress through school at a faster rate than (his/her) age peers.”</p> <p>DepEd Undersecretary Tonisito Umali stated that the acceleration of highly gifted children may prove to be detrimental to their progress. Umali suggested that this matter be discussed further and be included instead in the implementing rules and regulations (IRR) of the proposed law once enacted.</p> <p>Professor Frances Magtoto, coordinator of the University of the Philippines’ College of Education Special Education Cluster, said that acceleration can be beneficial as long as there are measures in place to ensure proper assessment and management of gifted learners.</p>

Continuation... Basic Education and Culture				On the definition of “gifted learners,” the Committee agreed to adopt the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization’s definition which states that gifted learners are “those whose potential is distinctly above average in one or more of the following domains: intellectual, creative, social and physical. They need services and activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop their potential.”
	HBs 1698, 1879, 1889 & 7409	Deputy Speaker Villafuerte, Reps. Rodriguez and Vargas, and Deputy Speaker Villanueva (E.)	Amending RA 7743, or the law providing for the establishment of congressional, city, and municipal libraries and barangay reading centers throughout the Philippines (by mandating the National Library to establish public libraries and reading centers based on the latest computer and electronic library technology and to upgrade existing facilities with complete standard set of books, e-books, online research resources, and other materials)	The Committee agreed to create a technical working group (TWG) to consolidate the six bills and to come up with a substitute bill. Deputy Speaker Escudero was designated as head of the TWG. The Deputy Speaker, who is also the author of HB 7330, said that her bill seeks to address gaps in the existing law, particularly its ambivalence on where the funding for the establishment and maintenance of public libraries will be sourced.
	HB 5837	Rep. Bascug	Amending Sec. 6 of RA 7743, by making use of the established libraries situated in the municipalities, cities, provinces and congressional districts with big state universities and/or private universities as 24/7 study hubs or learning hubs for students and professionals	National Library of the Philippines Executive Director Cesar Gilbert Adriano requested that a provision mandating the accreditation of public libraries by the National Library be included in the proposed law.
	HB 7330	Deputy Speaker Escudero	Institutionalizing the establishment of a public library in all cities and municipalities and a reading center in all barangays, repealing for the purpose RA 7743	League of Cities of the Philippines Senior Policy Officer Anne Janelle Rabe suggested that the Committee look into the concept of mobile libraries which will provide teachers and learners in far flung areas access to resource materials. Department of Budget and Management Budget Specialist Fernando Dayao Jr. commented that with the increased access to electronic resources, there has been a decreasing demand for physical libraries. He suggested that the Committee consider limiting the creation of physical libraries in areas that have no internet access. Department of Information and Communications Technology’s (DICT) ICT Industry Development Bureau Director Rior Santos said that the DICT plans to build IT hubs in strategic areas to provide free internet access to learners all over the country. Resource persons were instructed to submit their position papers on the proposed law.
	HB 7055	Rep. Gatchalian	Establishing policies for education and learning in the new normal, prescribing for the purpose standards for the reopening of safe schools, creating the Safe Schools Reopening Task Force, appropriating funds therefor	The Committee agreed to consolidate HBs 7055 and 7306 with a previously approved substitute bill on blended and flexible learning.
	HB 7306	Rep. Barba	Mandating all government-owned broadcasting stations to serve as learning	

Continuation... Basic Education and Culture			delivery modality, providing penalties for violations thereof	
	HB 7380	Rep. Villa	Providing for digital education	The Committee agreed to consolidate HB 7380 with a previously approved substitute bill on digital education.
	HB 7328	Rep. Santos	Promoting the capabilities and number of special education teachers in public schools, especially in rural areas	The Committee agreed to consolidate HB 7328 with a previously approved substitute bill on instituting services for learners with disabilities.
Higher and Technical Education	HB 7194	Rep. Ouano-Dizon	Integrating the Consolacion Community College in the Municipality of Consolacion, Province of Cebu as a satellite campus of the Cebu Technological University (CTU), and appropriating funds therefor, amending for the purpose RA 9744, as amended by RA 11185	The Committee, chaired by Baguio City Rep. Mark Go, approved HB 7194 subject to style and amendment. Expressing their support for the bill were the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), CTU, Consolacion Community College, Consolacion Municipal Government, and the Philippine Association of State Universities and Colleges (PASUC).
	HBs 7342, 7354, 7437, 7472, 7505 & 7526	Reps. Yu, Nava, Cabredo, Ecleo, Panotes, and Fortuno	Establishing Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) training and assessment centers in certain parts of the country and appropriating funds therefor	The Committee approved the six bills subject to style and amendment.
	HBs 7447 & 7516	Rep. Almario and Deputy Speaker Escudero	Establishing provincial offices of the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) in the Provinces of Davao Oriental and Sorsogon, respectively, and appropriating funds therefor	The Committee approved HBs 7447 and 7516 subject to style and amendment. Expressing their support for the bills were the CHED and PASUC.
	HB 7218	Rep. Tutor	Developing and strengthening the agricultural education and training in the country through the institutionalization of manpower development for agricultural entrepreneurship in the post-secondary level	The Committee agreed to create a technical working group (TWG) to thresh out the issues and come up with a substitute bill. HB 7218 seeks to make Philippine agriculture more productive and more attractive to many Filipinos by strengthening further the agricultural education and training in the country through the institutionalization of manpower development for agricultural entrepreneurship in the post-secondary level. Among the recommendations made by the resource persons during the meeting were the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review and harmonize the bill with existing laws which have similar provisions on agricultural entrepreneurship such as RA 10618 (Rural Farm Schools Act), RA 10679 (Youth Entrepreneurship Act), and RA 8435 (Agriculture and Fisheries Modernization Act); and Review and harmonize the bill with RA 10968 (Philippine Qualifications Framework Act) on the level of learning outcomes for agricultural entrepreneurship and training that will be duly certified by TESDA. The resource persons also noted that the proposed manpower development for agri-

Continuation... Higher and Technical Education				entrepreneurship is covered by current degree programs of higher education institutions.
Trade and Industry	HBs 1278 & 2662	Deputy Speaker Villafuerte and Rep. Sy-Alvarado	Providing protection to consumers by expanding the definition of basic necessities and prime commodities, amending for the purpose RA 7581, otherwise known as the Price Act	The Committee, chaired by Rep. Wes Gatchalian (1 st District, Valenzuela City), approved the consolidation of the four bills subject to style and amendment.
	HB 5176	Rep. Noel	Imposing an automatic price control on prices of construction materials during certain situations, amending for the purpose RA 7581	With the aim of preventing price manipulation and hoarding in times of emergencies, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the bills seek to amend RA 7581 by expanding the definition of basic necessities and prime commodities to include goods such as potable water, kerosene, liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), instant noodles, medical devices, face masks, and PPE. Another bill also provides for a longer period for the price freeze of construction materials which are necessary in the reconstruction of houses in areas devastated by calamities.
	HB 6658	Deputy Speaker Villanueva	Amending RA 7581 [by declaring personal protective equipment (PPE), face masks, safety goggles, and medical devices as prime commodities which may be subject to price ceilings, particularly in times of outbreaks/epidemics, pandemics or public health emergencies; and increasing the administrative fines and criminal penalties for violations of the law]	RA 7581 provides protection to consumers by stabilizing the prices of basic necessities and prime commodities during emergency situations and similar occasions by prescribing measures against undue price increases. Department of Trade and Industry Undersecretary for Consumer Protection Group Ruth Castelo expressed her support for the bills. She said that RA 7581 is an antiquated law that needs to be amended in order to adapt to the present conditions. Castelo recommended the creation of a National Price Coordinating Council, replacing the existing Price Coordinating Council, which will set the price ceiling for basic necessities and prime commodities and implement automatic price control in a certain area during emergencies. Also expressing their support for the bills were the Philippine Retailers Association (PRA) and Laban Konyumer Inc. (LKI). PRA Chair Paul Santos recommended that the term "suggested retail price" be clearly defined in the proposed law, while LKI President Victorio Mario Dimagiba suggested that gasoline and diesel be included in the list of basic necessities.

DISCUSSION WITH AGENCIES/ENTITIES

COMMITTEE	SUBJECT MATTER	DISCUSSIONS
Higher and Technical Education	Reports on the challenges, issues, and other concerns regarding the opening of classes for Academic Year 2020-2021 using flexible learning by the following higher education institutions' associations: Coordinating Council of Private	The Committee, chaired by Baguio City Rep. Mark Go, listened to the reports of the COCOPEA, PASUC, and ALCU on the challenges they face as they open the AY 2020-2021 in the middle of the pandemic and in shifting to flexible learning.

<p><i>Continuation...</i> Higher and Technical Education</p>	<p>Educational Associations (COCOPEA), Philippine Association of State Universities and Colleges (PASUC), and Association of Local Colleges and Universities (ALCU)</p>	<p>COCOPEA Managing Director Joseph Noel Estrada said that almost 60% of private schools have already opened for AY 2020-2021 using flexible learning. However, he said that a number of students and teachers still lack the necessary electronic devices for distance learning and are unable to access a stable internet connection. He also recognizes that the economic impact of the pandemic resulted in the decrease in the number of enrollees in private schools this year as many parents lost their jobs or their businesses were adversely affected by the lockdowns. He recommended that the government provide students more scholarships and grants to increase the enrollment in private higher education institutions (PHEIs) and help decongest public schools.</p> <p>PASUC President Tirso Ronquillo said that State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) are facing several challenges in the following areas: onboarding of faculty for remote teaching and learning; preparation of course packages for the first semester of AY 2020-2021; logistics in sending course packages to students in remote areas and retrieving the output of students; and procurement of resources in support of remote teaching and learning.</p> <p>Ronquillo also said that because of the pandemic, an estimated 44,000 college students will not be able to enroll in SUCs this school year due to various reasons like fear of contamination, financial problems, and lack of gadgets.</p> <p>ALCU Auditor Rene Colocar informed the body of the difficulties in the implementation of flexible/blended learning modalities, among which are the following: regular loading of 18-24 units which are too heavy for students and faculty who are having difficulties with internet connectivity; and the delivery of course offerings that require kinesthetic intelligence and abilities like Physical Education and the National Service Training Program.</p> <p>LUCs are also experiencing problems with the transfer of about 30-50 percent of students from PHEIs to LUCs because of inadequate resources. There will be additional problems such as inadequate school facilities to accommodate the additional students when face-to-face learning resumes. Colocar added that some LUCs are also being utilized by their respective local governments as quarantine/isolation areas and that poses another problem for the LUCs.</p> <p>In their own assessment, SUCs and PHEIs are 80% ready to start the AY 2020-2021 by September or October of this year (although a few have started as early as July and August) using flexible learning while the LUCs are 70% ready (although some LUCs have already opened classes since August).</p> <p>The COCOPEA was requested to submit a matrix on the learning modalities used by PHEIs for AY 2020-2021, while the ALCU was requested to submit the total number of students and faculty members of LUCs.</p>
<p>Trade and Industry</p>	<p>Discussion on issues and concerns affecting consumers, private sector employees, and micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) amid the COVID-19 pandemic</p>	<p>The Committee, chaired by Rep. Wes Gatchalian (1st District, Valenzuela City), discussed with concerned government agencies several issues and concerns that have cropped up amidst the pandemic, among which are: the current market prices of laptops and other electronic devices; proliferation of fake and smuggled face masks and personal protective equipment (PPE); compliance with workplace health standards set by the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) and the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE); and the financial assistance program for MSMEs by the Small Business Corporation (SB Corp.).</p> <p>Rep. Gatchalian asked if imposing a “suggested retail price” or SRP on laptops and tablets is necessary at this time since these are the</p>

<p>Continuation... Trade and Industry</p>		<p>top devices that the students need for distance learning. DTI Undersecretary for Consumer Protection Group Ruth Castelo said that her office is already studying the matter. She also mentioned that the DTI is also considering declaring laptops and tablets as prime commodities so that their prices can be controlled by the DTI.</p> <p>With regard to the proliferation of fake and smuggled face masks, Castelo said that the authorities have taken action against the perpetrators which led to the confiscation of smuggled and overpriced face masks, medical devices, and alcohol amounting to almost P100 million.</p> <p>Rep. Gatchalian also inquired if private companies and establishments are required to conduct RT-PCR (reverse transcription polymerase chain reaction) tests on their employees. Castelo answered that under the Joint Memorandum Circular No. 20-04-A Series of 2020 (DTI and DOLE Supplemental Guidelines on Workplace Prevention and Control of COVID-19), only symptomatic employees are required to undergo RT-PCR test, the cost of which will be shouldered by the Philippine Health Insurance Corporation (PhilHealth).</p> <p>Rep. Sharon Garin (Party-List, AAMBIS-OWA) recommended the use of Antigen test for workers in the private sector which is cheaper than the RT-PCR test and more accurate than the Rapid Antibody test. Castelo said that she will discuss the proposal with the DTI Secretary.</p> <p>As for the status of implementation of the COVID-19 Assistance to Restart Enterprises (CARES) Program, SB Corp. Head of Planning and Advocacy Group Frank Lloyd Gonzaga reported that as of September 2, out of the 13,745 loan applications that were approved by the SB Corp, 4,963 already received the loan proceeds amounting to P327 million.</p> <p>Under the CARES Program, micro enterprises with asset size of not more than P3 million may avail themselves of loans ranging from P10,000 to P200,000 while small enterprises with an asset size of more than P3 million to P15 million may take out loans of up to a maximum of P500,000.</p>
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