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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">Office of the President (OP)	<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 OP, OVP, and DOH.</p> <p>At the outset, Rep. Yap said that today's budget hearing will focus only on the proposed budget of the OP Proper and that a separate budget hearing will be held for its attached agencies.</p> <p>OP Executive Secretary Salvador Medialdea presented the proposed FY 2021 budget of the OP Proper under the National Expenditure Program (NEP) amounting to P8.23 billion.</p> <p>House Members proceeded to ask questions on matters pertaining to specific items of the proposed budget and about certain powers and functions of the OP.</p> <p>Rep. Ferdinand Gaité (Party-List, BAYAN MUNA) asked why certain Chinese companies have not been banned from dealing with the government when these companies have already been blacklisted by the World Bank (WB), International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the US for fraudulent activities. He said that the budget allocation for OP's confidential and intelligence funds (CIF) should be used to detect and prevent the entry of foreign investors or companies engaged in illegal activities.</p> <p>Medialdea explained that due process should be accorded to these companies and that the concerned government agencies should be allowed to conduct their own verification or investigation. However, he assured Rep. Gaité that he will look into the background of these Chinese companies that were allegedly blacklisted by the international financial institutions and the US.</p> <p>Rep. Sarah Jane Elago (Party-List, KABATAAN) questioned the P4.5 billion budget being allocated to CIF under the OP's FY 2021 proposed budget. She said that this could be used instead to buy personal protective equipment and other items to fight the COVID-19 pandemic. She asked the OP how much of its 2019 and 2020 budget has been released including the budget released for CIF for FY 2019.</p> <p>OP Deputy Executive Secretary for Finance and Administration Rizalina Justol said that P5.37 billion was released for FY 2019 and P3.31 billion for FY 2020 (as of June 30). The amount of P2.5 billion was also released for CIF for FY 2019.</p> <p>Rep. Edcel Lagman (1st District, Albay) inquired on the proposed contingent fund for FY 2021 the releases of which are subject to the approval of the President. He also asked how it will be utilized and how much of the 2020 contingent fund was spent for COVID-19 response.</p> <p>Justol replied that the proposed contingent fund for FY 2021 is the same as that of the current year which is P13 billion. She said that for FY 2020, a total of P2.9 billion has been spent so far with a balance of P10.1 billion. She explained that the contingent fund</p>

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was not used for COVID-19 response since the funding for it was sourced from the allocations under the Bayanihan to Heal as One Act.

OP Senior Deputy Executive Secretary Michael Ong further explained that the recommendations of the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) are duly considered prior to any release from the contingent fund. He said that the fund is used mostly to augment the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management (NDRRM) Fund. However, he said that it could also be utilized for COVID-19 response upon the recommendation of the DBM.

Rep. Arlene Brosas (Party-List, GABRIELA) criticized the absolute pardon that was granted by the President to US Marine Lance Corporal Joseph Scott Pemberton, who was convicted of killing a Filipino transgender woman. Rep. Brosas also asked about the status of the termination of the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA).

Medialdea maintained that the granting of absolute pardon is within the authority of the President. As for the VFA, he said that the OP is still studying carefully on whether to proceed or not with the termination.

Rep. Carlos Isagani Zarate (Party-List, BAYAN MUNA) asked if the Anti-Terrorism Council (ATC) has already convened and has already proscribed certain terrorist individuals or organizations. Medialdea said the ATC has convened twice but has not yet proscribed any terrorist individuals or organizations since the ATC is still drafting the implementing rules and regulations (IRR) of RA 11479 (Anti-Terrorism Act of 2020). He assured the body that the ATC, the implementing agency of RA 11479, will operate within the bounds of the law.

The Committee terminated its deliberation on the proposed FY 2021 budget of the OP.

- Office of the Vice President (OVP)

Committee Vice Chairperson, Rep. Jocelyn Sy-Limkaichong (1st District, Negros Oriental), sat as the presiding officer during the OVP's budget hearing.

Vice President Maria Leonor Gerona Robredo herself presented the proposed budget of the OVP. She said that the original budget proposal of the OVP for FY 2021 is P723.39 million but the DBM only approved a budget of P679 million.

She informed the body that the OVP is doing its best to fulfill its mandate, despite the reductions in its budget, by collaborating with various private partners in order to continue to uplift the lives of the Filipino people especially the marginalized sector. She said that the goal is to transform the OVP from a ceremonial agency into an advocacy-heavy agency that implements programs that will empower communities in the fight against poverty. She mentioned the OVP's flagship program, Angat Buhay, which has served more than 500,000 families thus far. At present, the OVP has shifted its focus to COVID-19 response and has extended various support to the health workers and frontliners, among others.

Angat Buhay is the flagship anti-poverty program of the OVP bringing together the private and public sectors to address the needs of families and communities in the farthest and the poorest areas in the country. (Source: OVP website)

Several Members lauded the efforts of the OVP and expressed their support to augment its proposed FY 2021 budget in order to serve more Filipino people and provide livelihood programs and relief efforts especially at this time of the pandemic.

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- Department of Health (DOH)

The Committee terminated its deliberation on the proposed FY 2021 budget of the OVP.

Committee Vice Chair, Rep. Micaela Violago (2nd District, Nueva Ecija), presided over the DOH's budget briefing.

DOH Secretary Francisco Duque III said that with the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, the country's recovery as a nation heavily depends on a resilient health system. Thus, Duque said that the DOH's priority for 2021 is to create a truly responsive health care system characterized by "primary care, health promotion, integrated care through hospital referral network, and predictable and precise fees." Duque added that with the help of Congress, the attainment of universal health care for all will not remain as a mere aspiration but shall be the new normal for every Filipino.

Based on the 2021 NEP, the DOH and its attached agencies is set to receive P204 billion for 2021, which is 27% higher than its current budget of P176 billion. The DOH-Office of the Secretary, with a budget of P127 billion, will get the biggest portion or 62% of the DOH's proposed budget, followed by the Philippine Health Insurance Corporation (PhilHealth), with a budget of P67.35 billion (35%).

Deputy Speaker Henry Oaminal (2nd District, Misamis Occidental) and Rep. France Castro (Party-List, ACT-TEACHERS) called on the DOH to implement the Supreme Court ruling upholding the validity of Section 32 of RA 9173 or the Philippine Nursing Act of 2002. Section 32 mandates a minimum base pay of not lower than salary grade-15 for nurses working in public health institutions.

DOH Undersecretary for Administration and Financial Management Team Roger Tong-an said that the DOH is already coordinating with the DBM regarding the matter.

Rep. Castro further suggested that medical health workers who are on job order or contract of service arrangements should be regularized or placed in plantilla positions especially now that they are very much needed in the government's fight against COVID-19. The Health Secretary was amenable to the suggestion.

Deputy Speaker Dan Fernandez (1st District, Laguna) inquired about the status of the Department's distribution of medicines. DOH Undersecretary Ma. Carolina Vidal-Taiño said that as of December 2019, out of the P18.4 billion allocation for the procurement of medicines, P13.99 billion worth of medicines have already been distributed. However, due to the pandemic, the distribution of the remaining P4 billion worth of medicines has been affected.

Rep. Janet Garin (1st District, Iloilo) questioned the alleged overpriced pneumonia vaccine for children, particularly the pneumococcal conjugate vaccine or PCV 13, purchased by the DOH. She said that in the previous years the DOH procured the PCV 13 at only P770 per vaccine dose but went up to P830 this year. She argued that this defies the principle of economies of scale because the price increased even if the quantity to be procured by the DOH, which is 5.9 million doses, is far more than the quantity procured in the previous years.

DOH Undersecretary for Public Health Services Team Myrna Cabotaje said that the Department has reviewed the specifications of the vaccine and assured the Committee that the price of the vaccine will significantly decrease.

When asked about the loan agreements that the government entered into to fund its COVID-19 response, DOH Undersecretary

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