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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 Ombudsman (OMB)	<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 OMB and DPWH.</p> <p>Committee Vice Chair, Rep. Romeo Jalosjos Jr. (1st District, Zamboanga del Norte), sat as the presiding officer during the OMB's budget briefing.</p> <p>In the interest of time, the Committee dispensed with the budget presentation of the Office of the Ombudsman. Based on the 2021 National Expenditure Program (NEP), the OMB is set to receive an amount of P3.36 billion, which is 22.07% lower than its current year's budget of P4.11 billion. Likewise, the Department of Budget and Management (DBM)-approved budget of the OMB is P1.31 billion or 39.09% lower than the OMB's original budget proposal of P4.67 billion.</p> <p>Deputy Speaker Rodante Marcoleta (Party-List, SAGIP) asked the Ombudsman if he is "comfortable" with the proposed budget of the OMB under the 2021 NEP.</p> <p>Ombudsman Samuel Martires expressed dismay over the decrease in the budget of the OMB. He requested the reinstatement of the OMB's original budget proposal or at least its proposed budget for personnel services (PS), which amounts to P3.49 billion. He lamented that the decrease in the PS will affect the agency's reorganizational plan. He went on to say that part of the reorganizational plan entails the hiring of more lawyers and investigators for the OMB's field investigation offices, as well as the creation of another bureau that will be dedicated to resolving administrative cases.</p> <p>Rep. Carlos Isagani Zarate (Party-List, BAYAN MUNA) said that with the increasing reports of corrupt practices in the government, it is all the more important to increase the budget of the OMB for next year.</p> <p>Rep. Rufus Rodriguez (2nd District, Cagayan de Oro City) argued that the decrease in the budget of the OMB is contrary to Section 38 (Fiscal Autonomy) of RA 6770. He then urged the DBM to follow what is provided in the law.</p> <p>Section 38 of RA 6770 states that "the Office of the Ombudsman shall enjoy fiscal autonomy. Appropriations for the Office of the Ombudsman may not be reduced below the amount appropriated for the previous years and, after approval, shall be automatically and regularly released."</p> <p>Rep. France Castro (Party-List, ACT-TEACHERS) asked about the policy of the OMB with regard to conducting a lifestyle check on government officials and employees, as well as on the release of a copy of the Statement of Assets, Liabilities and Net Worth (SALN).</p> <p>Ombudsman Martires said that he suspended the conduct of lifestyle check because there are provisions in RA 6713, or the Code of Conduct and Ethical Standards for Public Officials and Employees that need to be amended. He opined that there is a need to redefine</p>

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- Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH)

the terms "simple living" and "living beyond your means" because these are subjective terms and may be interpreted in many ways. Martires said he will submit OMB's recommended amendments to Congress at a proper time.

With regard to the SALN, Martires admitted that he issued Memorandum Circular No. 1-2020 which lays down the grounds to grant or deny a request for a copy of SALN. But, he clarified that the circular is for the guidance of the Office of the Ombudsman only and does not apply to the other repositories of SALN.

Based on the Circular, a copy of the SALN will be furnished to the requesting party under the following conditions: if he/she is the declarant or the duly authorized representative of the declarant; if the request is upon lawful order of the court in relation to a pending case; and if the request is made by the OMB's Field Investigation Office/Bureau/Unit for the purpose of conducting fact-finding investigation. In all other instances, no SALN will be furnished to the requesting party unless he/she presents a notarized letter of authority from the declarant allowing the release of the requested SALN.

Rep. Ferdinand Gaité (Party-List, BAYAN MUNA) suggested that OMB employees under job order contracts should be given permanent positions, to which Martires agreed.

Deputy Speaker Deogracias Victor "DV" Savellano (1st District, Ilocos Sur) underscored the importance of monitoring all cases filed in all offices of the OMB so that the central office will have an idea of what is happening with the cases in the provinces.

Martires said that he will work on it and will likely adopt the case monitoring system of the Supreme Court's (SC) Office of the Court Administrator. Martires was a former Associate Justice of the SC.

Several lawmakers supported the increase in the budget of the OMB. After the Members were done asking questions, the Committee terminated the deliberations on the proposed 2021 budget of the OMB.

During the continuation of the deliberations on the FY 2021 proposed budget of the DPWH, Chair Yap reminded the Members to strictly observe the three-minute rule in their interpellation for a more orderly conduct of the proceeding. He then requested Committee Vice Chairperson, Rep. Romeo Momo Sr. (Party-List, CWS), to preside over the budget hearing in his behalf.

As presented in the previous meeting, the FY 2021 proposed budget of the DPWH under the NEP is P667.32 billion.

House Members proceeded to ask questions on matters pertaining to specific items in the proposed budget of DPWH and on the implementation of some of its programs and projects.

Rep. Edgar Mary Sarmiento (1st District, Western Samar) recommended that there should be an item in the proposed budget of the DPWH specifically for projects that will generate jobs in the countryside, considering that many Filipinos, including overseas Filipino workers (OFWs), lost their jobs because of the pandemic.

Rep. France Castro (Party-List, ACT-TEACHERS) sought an explanation on the marked increase in the DPWH's budget for convergence programs from the current year's P51 billion to P61 billion for FY 2021.

DPWH Secretary Mark Villar explained that this is because the number of DPWH convergence programs with other government

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agencies has also increased such as the construction of access roads that will connect to airports and other trade, industrial, and economic zones.

Rep. Geraldine Roman (1st District, Bataan) advised that all road construction projects for 2021 should include in their designs a drainage system to prevent flooding. DPWH Assistant Secretary for Regional Operations in Visayas, National Capital Region and Region IV-B Antonio Molano Jr. said that Secretary Villar already issued a guideline incorporating drainage systems in the designs of all road projects.

Rep. Carlos Isagani Zarate (Party-List, BAYAN MUNA) inquired on the total amount of For Later Release (FLR) items of the DPWH for FY 2020. DPWH Undersecretary for Planning and Public-Private Partnership Maria Catalina Cabral answered that FLR items for FY 2020 amount to P271 billion. She said that 50% will be released this year and the remaining 50% will be carried over to the budget for FY 2021.

The legality of including unfunded projects from the 2020 General Appropriations Act (GAA) to the 2021 proposed budget was, however, questioned by Rep. Vicente "Ching" Veloso III (3rd District, Leyte). He said this could lead to double appropriation. He also emphasized that only Congress has the power to realign funds for appropriated programs of government agencies.

DPWH Undersecretary for Legal Services Eduardo Ramos Jr. explained that the legal basis was the Bayanihan to Heal as One Act (Bayanihan I), particularly Section 4, which authorized the President to "direct the discontinuance of appropriated programs, projects or activities of any agency of the Executive Department, including government-owned and controlled corporations, in the FY 2019 and 2020 GAA whether released or unreleased, the allotments for which remain unobligated, and utilize the savings generated therefrom to address the COVID-19 emergency. The discontinued program, activity or project may be revived at any time after the national emergency has ceased and may be revived and proposed for funding within the next two fiscal years."

However, Rep. Paul Ruiz Daza (1st District, Northern Samar) countered that the Bayanihan I cannot be quoted as basis as the law expired in June and the NEP was submitted in August by the DBM.

Rep. Allan Ty (Party-List, LPGMA) asked the DPWH on the current balance of the Motor Vehicle User's Charge (MVUC) fund and how it is being utilized. Undersecretary Cabral said that the current balance of the MVUC fund is P15.1 billion which is being used by the DPWH to maintain and upgrade roads and bridges, among others, as prescribed under RA 11239 or the law abolishing the Road Board and providing for the disposition of the MVUC collections, amending RA 8794.

The MVUC, also known as road user tax, is being collected by the Land Transportation Office from owners of vehicles upon vehicle registration.

Rep. Ty made a motion requiring the DPWH to revalidate and resubmit its utilization of the MVUC fund for FY 2021 to ensure a more equitable distribution of the fund among the 186 engineering district offices of the DPWH around the country. The Committee approved the motion of Rep. Ty.

Rep. Rodriguez asked the DPWH if the 2020 FLR funds can be released within one month. Secretary Villar said he will request the DBM Secretary for the immediate release of these funds.

Continuation... Appropriations		<p>Deputy Speaker Ferdinand Hernandez (2nd District, South Cotabato) commended the efforts of Secretary Villar in ensuring the effective implementation of government infrastructure projects as he proposed an increase in the budget of the DPWH. Likewise, Rep. Ma. Lourdes Arroyo (5th District, Negros Occidental), who is the Chairperson of the House's Special Committee on Persons with Disabilities (PWDs), expressed her gratitude to the DPWH for allocating a budget for the establishment or improvement of public structures that will benefit PWDs.</p> <p>Several Members asked about the status of implementation of infrastructure projects in their respective districts. Villar said that he will provide each one of them an update of the ongoing infrastructure projects in their respective districts. He also committed to fast-track those projects that are still pending implementation.</p> <p>The Committee agreed to terminate the deliberation on the proposed 2021 budget of the DPWH.</p>
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COMMITTEE MEETING ON HOUSE MEASURES				
COMMITTEE	MEASURES		SUBJECT MATTER	ACTION TAKEN/DISCUSSION
	NO.	PRINCIPAL AUTHOR		
Veterans Affairs and Welfare	Substitute Bill to HB 2603	Rep. Acop	Declaring the Board of Trustees of the Veterans of World War II (BTVWWII) as a public office and the funds entrusted to it as public funds, amending for the purpose RA 3518	The Committee, chaired by Rep. Geraldine Roman (1 st District, Bataan), approved the Substitute Bill to HB 2603 and the corresponding Committee Report.
	HR 1157	Rep. Robes	Commending Quartermaster 2 nd Class (QM2) Raymond Joseph Olley for his heroic acts for the Philippines during World War II	<p>The Committee adopted HR 1157.</p> <p>San Jose del Monte City Rep. Florida "Rida" Robes, author of HR 1157, said that her resolution seeks to commend the late QM2 Raymond Joseph Olley, an American soldier, for his exceptional gallantry and heroism in fighting for freedom alongside General Douglas MacArthur in the Battle of Leyte. She praised Olley for the love and affection he exhibited towards the Filipinos during and even long after the war, as exemplified by the numerous humanitarian and fund-raising efforts he made for the parishioners of San Ramon in Leyte.</p> <p>Rep. Robes said that her resolution will serve as a reminder to Filipinos of the strong ties and significant history they share with the Americans during World War II.</p> <p>Cathy Olley Stevens, the daughter of Olley, and Dr. Jojo Sayson, his Filipino best friend, expressed their gratitude and appreciation for the commendation on Olley. Both Stevens and Sayson confirmed Olley's genuine love for the Filipinos and his incessant desire to return to the Philippines and reconnect with its people.</p>
	Substitute Bill to HBs 702, 1921 & 5841	Reps. Biazon, Sy-Alvarado, and Cabochan	Mandating the use of proceeds from the development, lease, or use of certain government properties for veterans' affairs and welfare	<p>The Committee will deliberate further on the Substitute Bill to HBs 702, 1921 and 5841.</p> <p>Rep. Leonardo Babasa Jr. (2nd District, Zamboanga del Sur), chair of the technical</p>

<p>Continuation... Veterans Affairs and Welfare</p>				<p>working group (TWG) that drafted the Substitute Bill, presented the salient features of the measure including the provision identifying the government properties that will be covered by the proposed law.</p> <p>Rep. Babasa said that under the bill, the heritage properties declared for veterans use and those given by the Japanese government under the Reparation Agreement shall not be subject to sale. However, they can be developed, leased or used for veterans' affairs and welfare. The Philippine properties in Japan mentioned in the bill are located in Roponggi, Nampeidai, Noniwacho, and Obanoyama.</p> <p>He also said that the use of the Veterans Welfare and Development Trust Fund to defray the payment of salaries and allowances is prohibited, and all expenditures from the trust fund shall be subject to existing government accounting rules and regulations.</p> <p>Rep. Manuel Cabochan III (Party-List, MAGDALO), author of HB 5841, informed the Committee that there is still need to discuss Section 2 (Coverage). Likewise, the percentage sharing in the proceeds from the development, lease, and use of the Japan properties under Section 4 (The Veterans Welfare and Development Trust Fund) still need to be determined, Rep. Cabochan added.</p> <p>Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) Undersecretary for Administration J. Eduardo Malaya stressed that the DFA not only is against the sale of the Philippine properties in Japan but also their redevelopment because some of them are already subject to "superficies" and restrictions under the Reparation Agreement. With regard to the Nampeidai property, Malaya said the Philippine Embassy in Japan would like to redevelop it for its office because there is no more space for the embassy in Roponggi.</p> <p>Thus, Malaya proposed that the properties in Nampeidai and Roponggi be excluded from Section 2 of the bill. Rep. Cabochan objected to this proposal.</p> <p>Malaya earlier explained that in Japan, there is a unique legal concept called "superficies" wherein the use of the land is sold separate and distinct from the sale of the land itself. In fact, he said that is what happened to the Philippine properties in Kobe, Japan, where the lands are owned and registered under the name of the Philippines, but the use, possession and benefits derived from the buildings erected on the land belong to Japanese entities. He added that the superficies can be transferred, conveyed and sold by the holder even without the knowledge</p>
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<p>Continuation... Veterans Affairs and Welfare</p>				<p>or consent of the landowner. Malaya informed the body that superficieses usually last from 20 to 50 years.</p> <p>Rep. Roman asked whether Malaya agrees with the idea of allocating a reasonable portion of the income that would be generated from the properties in the future to benefit the war veterans. Malaya said that to talk about it this early would be speculative since the Philippine government will only have full possession of the properties after many years from now when the superficies agreements have ended.</p> <p>Meanwhile, Philippine Veterans Affairs Office (PVAO) Administrator Ernesto Carolina expressed the sentiments of Filipino veterans that war reparations are inextricably linked to them, such that they should have a share in whatever revenues that may be derived from these properties. He proposed that the DFA, the PVAO and the Department of National Defense (DND) discuss and resolve among themselves the issues pertaining to the properties in Japan.</p> <p>Muntinlupa City Rep. Rozzano Rufino Biazon, author of HB 702, commented that the Committee will make the ultimate decision as to what will be included in the bill.</p> <p>The Committee agreed to convene a multi-lateral meeting among the DFA, PVAO, DND, as well as Members of the Committee to thresh out the contentious issues of the proposed law.</p>
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AGENCY BRIEFINGS		
COMMITTEE	SUBJECT MATTER	DISCUSSIONS
<p>Agriculture and Food</p>	<p>Briefing by the Department of Agriculture (DA) on its plans, programs and projects for implementation in 2021, including the target beneficiaries</p>	<p>The Committee, chaired by Rep. Wilfrido Mark Enverga (1st District, Quezon), listened to the briefing conducted by the DA on its plans, programs, and projects for implementation in 2021.</p> <p>Rep. Enverga said that the Committee wants to know how the DA's programs and projects for 2021 will be affected after the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) only approved P86.3 billion of its proposed budget of P284 billion.</p> <p>Agriculture Secretary William Dar explained that the DA's proposed budget is earmarked to address the challenges brought about by the current global pandemic to the food and agriculture sector which is already burdened with high poverty incidence, food insecurity, environmental degradation, and climate change.</p> <p>Despite these challenges, Dar reported that the agriculture sector managed to grow by 1.6% during the second quarter of this year. Dar said that the DA hopes to sustain the momentum of modernizing the agriculture and fisheries sectors by continuing to provide assistance and support to farmers and fisherfolk.</p> <p>The Agriculture Secretary took the opportunity to seek the support of the Members for the approval of the DA's 2021 budget and plans and programs.</p>

<p>Continuation... Agriculture and Food</p>		<p>Several Members expressed reservation on Administrative Order (AO) No. 16 issued by the DA, particularly Section 5.2-c, arguing that the said provision may lead to restricted implementation, inequities, and politicizing of farm-to-market road (FMRs) projects.</p> <p>AO No. 16, series of 2020, provides the Revised General Guidelines on the Implementation of the DA Farm-to-Market Roads Development Program. Section 5.2-c of this AO provides that one of the requirements for validation of proposed FMR projects is the submission of a “municipal/city local government unit (LGU) resolution manifesting a counterpart of not less than 10% of the project cost subject to their internal revenue allotment (IRA) either in cash and/or in kind.”</p> <p>DA Undersecretary Cheryl Marie Natividad-Caballero and Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) Assistant Secretary Antonio Molano explained that the 10% share of the LGU in the project cost will be for the maintenance and sustainability of FMRs.</p> <p>Reps. Antonio "Tonypet" Albano (1st District, Isabela) and Manuel Sagarbarria (2nd District, Negros Oriental) underscored the need to study the legality of AO No. 16 adding that the required 10% share may not be affordable to some LGUs.</p> <p>Rep. Angelina "Helen" Tan, M.D. (4th District, Quezon) proposed that the DA initiate a convergence project with the DPWH to properly implement AO No. 16, to which Dar acceded.</p> <p>On the query raised by Rep. Argel Joseph Cabatbat (Party-List, MAGSASAKA) with regard to complaints of some legitimate farmer-beneficiaries that they are not receiving any assistance from the DA particularly in the form of farm machineries, Dar enjoins farmer-beneficiaries to join the DA's "integrity circles." By being part of the integrity circles, Dar explained that these farmer-beneficiaries can raise their complaints or provide feedback to ensure that government funds are efficiently and effectively utilized.</p> <p>The DA's integrity circles, called "Agriculture Dialogue and Information Network Groups" or ADING, is a systematic and institutional system that will enable the DA to monitor and evaluate if agri-fishery policies, programs, and projects are effectively and cost-efficiently implemented. ADING is composed of representatives from farmers and fishers' cooperatives and associations (FCAs), rural youth and women, civil society, local government units, agribusiness industry, the academe, religious groups, and DA officials. (<i>Source: da.gov.ph</i>)</p> <p>The DA was requested to submit to the Committee the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Updated list of proposed FMR projects for 2021; • Report on the status of programs for 2020 in different localities to be submitted by the regional directors to the respective district Representatives; • List of farm machineries distributed by the Philippine Center for Postharvest Development and Mechanization (PhilMech) and its beneficiaries from 2016 to 2020; • List of programs and projects that have been presented and rejected by the DBM; and • Copy of the World Bank Report on transforming the Philippine agriculture during COVID and beyond.
<p>Mindanao Affairs</p>	<p>Briefing by concerned government agencies on the National Greening Program (NGP), protected areas under the National Integrated Protected Areas System (NIPAS) Act of 1992, large scale mining operations, and land administration in the Mindanao region</p>	<p>The Committee, chaired by Rep. Mohamad Khalid Dimaporo (1st District, Lanao del Norte), listened to the briefing by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) and its bureaus on the status of implementation of the NGP and NIPAS, the state of large-scale mining operations, and the system of land administration in the Mindanao region.</p>

<p>Continuation... Mindanao Affairs</p>		<p>that there is already a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) for the transfer of the funds for the protection and conservation of the lake from the DENR Region X to the Ministry of Environment, Natural Resources and Energy of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM). The MOA was already submitted to the DENR Central Office for its review and approval.</p> <p>Rep. Shirlyn Bañas-Nogralles (1st District, South Cotabato) asked for an update on the cases of fake land titles in Region XII. DENR Region XII Executive Director Felix Alicer said that it would take some time to resolve the issue as the innocent buyers of the questioned lands are already occupying the area. However, he said that the matter was already referred to the DENR Central office and talks with the local government units (LGUs) are ongoing to address the issue on fake land titles. He added that upon proper investigation, the lands that were subject of the fake land titles will be reverted to timberland or forestlands.</p> <p>Rep. Dimaporo requested the LMB to submit the details of the fake land titling cases in Region XII so he could file a resolution calling for a congressional inquiry on the matter.</p> <p>On the issue of poaching of the agarwood tree in Davao Oriental and some areas in Mindanao because of the high value of resin produced from the tree, Calderon said that the agarwood is covered by RA 9147 or the Wildlife Resources Conservation and Protection Act of 2001. He said that the BMB has already come up with a policy on the protection and propagation of the agarwood and is already being reviewed by the DENR central office.</p> <p>The resource persons were requested to submit the reports and presentations that they presented during the meeting.</p>
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