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COMMITTEE MEETING ON HOUSE MEASURES

COMMITTEE	MEASURES		SUBJECT MATTER	ACTION TAKEN/DISCUSSION
	NO.	PRINCIPAL AUTHOR		
Banks and Financial Intermediaries	HB 7454	Rep. Delos Santos	Providing for a special exchange rate exclusively for remittances made by overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) for their families in the Philippines	<p>The Committee, chaired by Quirino Rep. Junie Cua, will deliberate further on HB 7454 in its next meeting.</p> <p>Bankers Association of the Philippines (BAP) Executive Director Benjamin Castillo objected to the bill and said that having a separate exchange rate for OFWs will be difficult to implement on the ground.</p> <p>The Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) has yet to submit its position paper on HB 7454 to the Committee.</p>
	HB 7580	Rep. Olivarez	Allowing the use of credit cards or debit cards for the payment of taxes in the Philippines	<p>The Committee will deliberate further on HB 7580 in its next meeting.</p> <p>Department of Finance (DOF) Undersecretary Antonette Tionko reported that credit cards are already being accepted for payment of taxes and that the trend is increasing. Thus, she said that there may be no need for the passage of a law on the matter.</p> <p>Credit Card Association of the Philippines (CCAP) Executive Director Alex Ilagan expressed his support for the bill and promised to submit additional comments and recommendations.</p>
	HB 7705	Rep. Tambunting	Enabling banks to expand service delivery channels through cash agents and providing guidelines therefor	<p>The Committee terminated its deliberation on HB 7705.</p> <p>A similar bill, HB 6924, was already approved on Third Reading by the House of Representatives on August 11 in substitution of HB 1297, which was principally authored by Rep. Luis Raymund "LRay" Villafuerte Jr. (2nd District, Camarines Sur).</p> <p>The Committee will inform Rep. Joy Myra Tambunting (2nd District, Parañaque City), author of HB 7705, of this development and the possibility of co-authorship once HB 6924 and the Senate counterpart bill are discussed in a bicameral Conference Committee meeting.</p>
	HB 6899	Rep. Tiangco	Regulating the scope of a loan moratorium on credit facilities granted to local government units (LGUs)	<p>The Committee agreed to schedule another meeting on HB 6899 to hear the views of resource persons from the Land Bank of the Philippines (LBP), Development Bank of the Philippines (DBP), Government Service Insurance System (GSIS), Social Security System (SSS), and Small Business Corporation (SB Corp).</p>

Continuation... Banks and Financial Intermediaries				The BAP was requested to submit its position paper on HB 6899.
	HR 801	Rep. Sakaluran	Urging the appropriate government and private financial institutions to grant and extend available credits to small business owners, self-employed individuals, and farmers to reduce the effect of the restricted movement of people and goods due to COVID-19 outbreak with the Presidential Proclamation 992, s. 2020, declaring a state of public health emergency all over the Philippines and the passage of RA 11469, otherwise known as the Bayanihan to Heal As One Act	The Committee will continue its deliberation on the four measures in its next meeting. At the outset, Rep. Cua mentioned the need to ease financial burdens on most businesses during this pandemic. He said that the proposed measures call for the lowering of interest rates by pawnshops, suspension of loan payments falling due during the quarantine period, and the suspension of online banking transfer fees and other e-payment transaction fees and charges until the end of the public health emergency.
	HR 1149	Rep. Lacson	Investigation into the possibility of urging government financial institutions not to impose interest and penalties, and suspend payment for loans that fall due during the quarantine period	Rep. Precious Hipolito Castelo (2 nd District, Quezon City), author of HR 1271, urged the banking sector and other financial institutions to extend the suspension of online bank transfer fees and e-payment charges in line with Presidential Proclamation No. 1021 s. 2020 which extended the period of the state of calamity throughout the Philippines until September 12, 2021.
	HR 1212	Rep. Rodriguez	Urging the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) to mandate pawnshops to charge lower interest rates during this COVID-19 pandemic	She explained that while bank transfers and e-payment fees are currently waived by certain banks or payment facilities such as InstaPay, others are still charging fees on a per transaction basis. BSP Directors Dindo Santos and Raymond Estioko commented that fees and charges for electronic bank transactions differ from bank to bank. They said that the BSP needs to study the proposed measures further in order to provide an appropriate recommendation to the Committee. On the part of the BAP, Castillo said that the banks have actually waived bank transaction fees since the beginning of the pandemic. At present, however, some BAP members have resumed charging fees, while some have managed to provide such services free of charge. It must be noted that such bank transactions entail costs on the part of the banks, he said. Philippine Payments Management, Inc. (PPMI) President Abraham Co informed the body that his group has been discussing the possibility of keeping e-payment transactions free on a rolling basis as long as competition and bank resources can keep it that way. However, both PPMI and BAP agreed that it would be difficult on their part to keep such transactions free until September 2021. Chamber of Pawnbrokers of the Philippines, Inc. (CPPI) President and also Cebuana Lhuillier President and CEO Jean Henri Lhuillier manifested that pawnshops are also reeling from the effects of the pandemic and

Continuation... Banks and Financial Intermediaries				<p>have tried hard to maintain current interest rates. Hence, he appealed to the Committee that their sector be spared from a mandated reduction of interest rates as this would cause smaller members to shut down.</p> <p>The resource persons were requested to submit their position papers on the four House Resolutions.</p>
	HR 1147	Rep. Castelo	Urging banks and other financial institutions to relax conditions for debt repayment and to exempt borrowers from getting a bad credit rating for restructured loans during the COVID-19 pandemic	The Committee deferred consideration of HR 1147 upon the request of the author.

TECHNICAL WORKING GROUP MEETING ON HOUSE MEASURES				
COMMITTEE	MEASURES		SUBJECT MATTER	ACTION TAKEN/ DISCUSSION
	NO.	PRINCIPAL AUTHOR		
Information and Communications Technology (Technical Working Group)	Substitute Bill to HBs 38, 312, 4132 & 4367	Reps. Biazon, Salceda, Lacson, and Deputy Speaker Santos-Recto	Mandating the National Telecommunications Commission (NTC) to require internet service providers to deliver a minimum standard of 10 megabits per second (10 mbps) for internet connection speed	<p>The technical working group (TWG), chaired by Muntinlupa City Rep. Rozzano Rufino Biazon, terminated its deliberation on the substitute bill.</p> <p>The Secretariat will draft the final version of the substitute bill incorporating therein the pertinent suggestions raised during the meeting.</p> <p>Rep. Biazon underscored the importance of passing the proposed law, especially now that the COVID-19 pandemic has ushered in a "new normal" where reliance on internet connectivity is much more emphasized.</p> <p>Manifesting agreement to the substitute bill were resource persons from the NTC, Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT), Department of Trade and Industry-Consumer Protection Group (DTI-CPG), Philippine Competition Commission (PCC), Internet Society Philippines Chapter (ISOC.PH), Smart Communications, Inc., Sky Cable Corporation, and Philippine Cable and Telecommunications Association, Inc. (PCTA).</p> <p>Globe Telecom, Inc. Policy Division Head Ariel Tubayan suggested that the period given for telecommunications companies (telcos) to comply with the internet connectivity threshold set under the proposed law should be at least three years, which is consistent with the Senate version of the bill. Under the substitute bill, the telcos are given two years to make the necessary changes in their ICT infrastructure to comply with the threshold.</p> <p>PLDT, Inc. First Vice President Aileen Regio recommended the inclusion in the bill of a provision that will identify justifiable reasons wherein telcos may not be compelled to install</p>

Continuation... Information and Communications Technology (Technical Working Group)				<p>ICT infrastructure in certain areas. She explained that there are instances wherein telcos could not install ICT infrastructure in certain barangays or residential areas because of lack of consent from the barangay officials or the residents themselves.</p> <p>Likewise, Regio suggested that the end-users should be informed of the reason for the unavailability of internet service in their area, to which Rep. Biazon agreed.</p>
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DISCUSSION WITH AGENCIES/ENTITIES		
COMMITTEE	SUBJECT MATTER	DISCUSSIONS
<p>North Luzon Growth Quadrangle (Special Committee)</p>	<p>Consultative meeting with concerned agencies on the status of implementation of programs under the Bayanihan to Heal as One Act (Bayanihan 1), Bayanihan to Recover as One Act (Bayanihan 2), and Tulong Panghanapbuhay sa Ating Disadvantaged/Displaced Workers (TUPAD) for Regions I & II and the Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) 	<p>The Committee, chaired by Rep. Ramon Guico III (5th District, Pangasinan), discussed with DOLE and DSWD the status of implementation of programs under the Bayanihan 1 and Bayanihan 2 and the TUPAD Program for Regions I, II and CAR.</p> <p>Rep. Guico said that the implementation of programs under the Bayanihan 1 and 2 needs to be monitored closely in order to identify and address issues and concerns that may arise in the course of implementation, thus ensuring that the objectives of these laws are fully met.</p> <p>DOLE Region I Assistant Director Honorina Baga apprised the body of the key programs - the TUPAD and the Tabang OFW (overseas Filipino workers) - being implemented by the Department in Region I in response to the pandemic.</p> <p>According to Baga, the eligible beneficiaries of TUPAD are workers from the informal sector particularly the unpaid family workers, self-employed individuals whose earnings were affected by the pandemic, and senior citizens not beyond 75 years of age, who are fit to work and are not receiving pensions except the Social Pension for Indigent Senior Citizen of the DSWD.</p> <p>Under this Program, the beneficiaries will be paid a daily wage of P340 for 16 days and will work for four hours per day. The work includes: repair/maintenance and improvement/rehabilitation of common public facilities and infrastructure; reforestation or community gardening, tree planting and seedling preparation; disinfection or sanitation of community/public facilities; and packing of relief goods and delivery of food and non-food items as assigned by local government units (LGUs), among others. They are also entitled to insurance covered under the Government Service Insurance System (GSIS).</p> <p>On the other hand, the Tabang OFW is a tertiary education subsidy program designed to support the educational needs of college-level dependents of COVID-affected OFWs. A one-time grant of P30,000 will be given to the beneficiaries provided that they meet the admission and retention requirements of government and private colleges and universities. (The word "tabang" means "help" in Visayan and Bicol dialects.)</p> <p>DOLE Region I Director Nathaniel Lacambra informed the body of the number of beneficiaries that the Department was able to serve under the following programs funded under the Bayanihan 1:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COVID-19 Adjustment Measures Program (CAMP) - 1,534 establishments and 19,074 workers; • TUPAD - 13,191 workers; and

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North Luzon Growth
Quadrangle
(Special Committee)

- Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD)

- Abot Kamay ang Pagtulong (AKAP) Program - 6,507 OFWs.

DOLE Region II Director Evelyn Ramos also reported that a total of P459.79 million was released to 99,617 beneficiaries in Region II under the TUPAD, CAMP, and Social Amelioration Program (SAP).

Similarly, DOLE CAR Director Exequiel Ronie Guzman presented the number of beneficiaries in the region that the Department was able to serve under the following programs funded under the Bayanihan 1:

- TUPAD - 22,456 workers;
- CAMP - 24,312 beneficiaries; and
- AKAP - 3,200 OFWs.

The regional directors of Regions I, II and CAR said that they are still waiting for the funds for the Bayanihan 2 programs to be fully released to their offices.

The DOLE's Bureau of Local Employment reported that a Joint Memorandum Circular (JMC) was issued by the DOLE and the Department of Tourism (DOT) in response to the concerns of the tourism workers who have been adversely affected by the lockdowns and travel restrictions due to the pandemic. The Bureau's Employment Service Program Management Division Chief Ana Liza Ragos said that the JMC, which was signed on October 30, provides specific guidelines for the cash assistance and cash-for-work program benefitting the 600,000 displaced tourism workers. The funding will be sourced from the P3 billion allocation for tourism workers under Section 4 of Bayanihan 2.

DSWD Assistant Secretary for Policy and Plans Joseline Niwane presented the number of beneficiaries in Regions I, II, and CAR of the following DSWD programs under the Bayanihan 1:

- SAP 1st Tranche - 1,957,212
- SAP 2nd Tranche - 738,800
- Assistance to Individuals in Crisis Situation - 112,068
- Food and Non-Food Items - 307,167
- Social Pension for Indigent Senior Citizen - 448,170
- Supplementary Feeding Program - 209,102; and
- Livelihood Assistance Grants - 6,467.

For the implementation of programs under the Bayanihan 2, Niwane said that the DSWD received P6 billion from the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) just this October 29 to continue the SAP implementation for affected low-income families in areas under "granular" lockdown and those who are qualified but were not granted subsidy under the Bayanihan 1. She said that the initial target beneficiaries for Regions I, II and CAR is 12,673. (Granular lockdown means that the restriction is limited to smaller or specific areas such as several houses, a compound or a street where residents were exposed to an individual with COVID-19.)

After the presentations of the DOLE and the DSWD, several House Members sought clarifications regarding some of the programs of the two departments.

On the query of Baguio City Rep. Mark Go if new applicants can be accommodated for CAMP, the regional directors of DOLE Regions I, II and CAR affirmed that based on their guidelines, unserved beneficiaries shall be given priority. However, new applicants will be accepted if there are still funds available and with preference to micro and small enterprises.

Batanes Rep. Ciriaco Gato Jr. said that there are senior citizens beyond the age of 75 who are still physically fit to work, thus he

<p><i>Continuation...</i> North Luzon Growth Quadrangle (Special Committee)</p>		<p>requested that these senior citizens should also be accepted as beneficiaries of the TUPAD, provided that they present a medical certificate attesting to their wellness.</p> <p>Rep. Sandra Eriguel (2nd District, La Union) asked about the insurance coverage that will be provided by the GSIS for TUPAD beneficiaries. DOLE Bureau of Workers with Special Concerns (BWSC) Director Karina Perida-Trayvilla answered that the policy includes a one-year insurance coverage of up to P65,000 in case of death or injury suffered by the TUPAD beneficiary due to accident while performing his/her work.</p> <p>Rep. Ron Salo (Party-List, KABAYAN) inquired if unobligated funds for Bayanihan 1 and 2 may still be utilized beyond the validity period.</p> <p>DSWD Assistant Secretary for Statutory Programs Glenda Relova said that funds allotted for Bayanihan 1 and 2 that are still unobligated after December 19, shall revert to the Bureau of the Treasury (BTr).</p> <p>Several Members expressed their gratitude to the DOLE and the DSWD for their efforts in providing assistance to their constituents in North Luzon during this time of pandemic.</p>
<p>Public Accounts jt. w/ Good Government and Public Accountability</p>	<p>Briefing on the state of telecommunications and internet services in the Philippines</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Telecommunications Commission (NTC) 	<p>The Joint Committee, presided by Rep. Michael Defensor (Party-List, ANAKALUSUGAN), Chair of the Committee on Public Accounts, and Rep. "Kuya" Jose Antonio Sy-Alvarado (1st District, Bulacan), Chair of the Committee on Good Government and Public Accountability, discussed with concerned government agencies and private telecommunications companies (telcos) the state of telecommunications and internet services in the country.</p> <p>Rep. Defensor said that 25 years since the passage of RA 7925, or the Public Telecommunications Policy Act of the Philippines, the country's broadband internet connection speed is still the second slowest in the world according to the Telecommunications Summit in 2017. And yet, he said, telcos charge high fees from their subscribers which are not commensurate with the kind of services they provide. Pursuant to the marching orders of President Rodrigo Duterte that internet services in the country should be fully improved by December 2020, Rep. Defensor said that the Joint Committee will look into the rollout plans of the telcos, cell tower sharing arrangements, processing of permits to construct a cell tower, and the charges collected by the telcos, among others.</p> <p>Likewise, Rep. Sy-Alvarado urged the telcos to resolve the issue on why subscribers have to pay high data charges for a very low internet speed. He cited the importance of digital communications and technologies in this time of pandemic as people transition to the new normal.</p> <p>NTC Commissioner Gamaliel Cordoba said that the Philippine government, like other countries, should take the lead in transforming the economy into a digital one especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.</p> <p>To facilitate the accelerated rollout of telecommunications infrastructure in the country, Cordoba said that the NTC has issued memorandum orders extending the deadlines for renewals and payments of NTC issued permits, certificates, and licenses. The NTC also sent letters to building administrators, homeowners associations, and local government units (LGUs) to allow the entry of telco personnel inside their premises or jurisdictions to perform critical maintenance works on cell sites as well as install internet connections.</p> <p>Likewise, Cordoba reported that the NTC, together with the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG), the</p>

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Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH), and other agencies, issued Joint Memorandum Circular No. 1, series of 2020 to streamline the requirements and reduce procedural delays in the processing of permits and licenses for the construction of shared passive telecommunications tower infrastructures. The NTC also sent a letter to the DPWH Secretary proposing the amendment of the latter's Department Order 73 which prohibits posts and towers of telephone and mobile service providers along national highways and requires telcos to secure their own right-of way.

Cordoba informed the Committee that for the past four years, Globe Telecom, Inc. as well as PLDT and its wireless subsidiary Smart Communications, Inc. invested heavily in telecom service and infrastructure. As a result, Cordoba said, based on the Ookla Speedtest Global Index, since 2016, the fixed broadband and mobile broadband in the country improved significantly by 229.7% and 127.06%, respectively. (Ookla is a private international company which measures internet performance and network diagnostics worldwide.)

Moving forward, Cordoba sought the help of Congress for the passage of the Open Access Bill, which aims to promote competition in data transmission and telecommunications services by lowering the costs and minimizing the barriers to entry by service providers. He also requested Congress to allocate more funds to the government's National Broadband Program (NBP).

Rep. Stella Luz Quimbo (2nd District, Marikina City) disagreed with the statement of Cordoba that the mobile data pricing in the Philippines is among the cheapest in the world or is below the global average rate. Rep. Quimbo said that the country has in fact the most expensive internet connection among the ASEAN countries followed by Cambodia and Indonesia. She reminded Cordoba that the pricing should be based on the affordability index rather than the absolute price. The internet affordability cannot be determined properly if prices in the Philippines are compared to those in developed countries, she added. Rep. Quimbo then advised the NTC to reassess its performance metrics for telcos' internet speed and affordability.

Likewise, Deputy Speaker Rodante Marcoleta (Party-List, SAGIP) urged the NTC to vigorously fulfill its duties as the principal administrator of RA 7925, which seeks to promote and govern the development of Philippine telecommunications and the delivery of public telecommunications services.

- Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT)

DICT Assistant Secretary Emmanuel Rey Caintic said that the DICT is committed to implement the provisions of RA 10929 or the Free Internet Access in Public Places Act to provide free Wi-Fi access in public places including parks, plazas, public libraries, schools, government hospitals, train stations, airports, and seaports. As of October 27, there are already 6,327 operational free Wi-Fi sites in public places nationwide, he said.

Likewise, Caintic said that the DICT is currently pursuing the plan for a government-owned national fiber optic network through the NBP. The NBP, he said, provides strategies and initiatives to address gaps in the broadband environment particularly on accessibility, affordability, and quality of broadband services and to address existing policy and regulatory issues. He added that the NBP will accelerate the deployment of fiber optic cables and wireless technologies to improve internet speed in the country.

Caintic is also optimistic of a faster rollout of the telecommunications towers project. The local government units (LGUs), he said, have already expressed their support in reducing the requirements and procedures for the construction of cell towers.

<p>Continuation... Public Accounts jt. w/ Good Government and Public Accountability</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Telecommunications companies 	<p>Resource persons from Globe, PLDT-Smart, and DITO Telecommunity presented their plans and programs for the development of their telecommunication and broadband services nationwide.</p> <p>PLDT Senior Vice President (SVP) Mar Tamayo said that by 2021, PLDT-Smart aims to attain an average broadband speed of 30Mbps and commits to expand its 5G and LTE services. Tamayo requested the NTC to help telcos in convincing consumers to switch to fiber optic technology, which will provide faster internet connectivity. He disclosed that some consumers still prefer the DSL copper-based internet service.</p> <p>Tamayo and Globe SVP Vicente Froilan Castelo said that the following are welcome developments to the telco industry: RA 11032 or the Ease of Doing Business; RA 11494 or the Bayanihan to Recover as One Act; the creation of the Anti-Red Tape Authority (ARTA); and the creation of simpler rules and policies for the Shared Passive Telecommunications Tower Infrastructure (PTTIs), also called common towers.</p> <p>DITO Telecommunity's Chief Administrative Officer Adel Tamano said that DITO has already spent P160 billion in capital expenditures to rollout its ICT infrastructure. The commercial launch of DITO Telecommunity, the country's third major telco player, will be on March 8, 2021.</p> <p>Deputy Speaker Dan Fernandez (1st District, Laguna) encouraged the telcos to lay their cable systems underground which he said will do away with unsightly wires overhead electric poles. This will also ensure uninterrupted supply of telecommunications services during disasters. He said that the telcos must make use of the temporary suspension of requirements to secure permits and clearances for the construction of telecommunications and internet infrastructure as provided for under RA 11494 or the Bayanihan to Recover as One Act.</p> <p>Rep. Elpidio Barzaga Jr. (4th District, Cavite) requested Globe and Smart to submit the list of the LGUs from which the telcos are having difficulty in getting permits and licenses. Rep. Defensor said that the leagues of cities and municipalities will be invited in the next meeting of the Joint Committee to explain their respective requirements for the issuance of permits, licenses, and clearances to telcos.</p> <p>Rep. Bernadette Herrera-Dy (Party-List, Bagong Henerasyon) requested the DICT to submit its detailed plan on how it intends to utilize the P6 billion Spectrum User's Fee (SUF) collected by the NTC from the telcos. The amount is intended to fund the free Wi-Fi in public places program of the DICT. The NTC is an attached agency of the DICT.</p> <p>The Joint Committee instructed the Secretariat to also invite Sky Cable Corporation and Converge ICT Solutions, Inc. to attend its next meeting.</p>
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