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RESUMPTION OF SESSION

At 3:00 p.m., the session was resumed with Deputy Speaker Conrado M. Estrella III presiding.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Estrella). The session is resumed.

The Majority Leader is recognized.

PRIVILEGE HOUR

Continuation

REP. PALMA. Mr. Speaker, as promised yesterday, I move that we continue with our Privilege Hour and with that, I move that we extend the Privilege Hour.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Estrella). Is there any objection to the motion? (*Silence*) The Chair hears none; the motion is hereby approved.

The Privilege Hour is hereby extended.

The Majority Leader is recognized.

REP. PALMA. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, first to avail of the Privilege Hour, I move that we recognize Hon. Rosanna “Ria” V. Vergara of the Third District of Nueva Ecija to deliver her Privilege Speech.

I so move, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Estrella). The distinguished Lady from Nueva Ecija is hereby recognized.

PRIVILEGE SPEECH OF REP. VERGARA

REP. VERGARA. Thank you for this rare privilege to bring to light equally pressing matters during these most challenging times. In our peace and order cluster report, Cong. Manuel T. Sagarbarria could not have put it any better when he quoted the 17th century English proverb, “A hungry man is an angry man.”

Cognizant of this reality in our current plight, the Philippine government through primarily the DSWD has undertaken the Social Amelioration Program, the

SAP, which forms part of the Bayanihan to Heal as One Act in assisting 18 million Filipino families. If we consider a multiplier effect of five per family, it results in targeting a system of 90 million Filipinos.

Indeed, this is no easy task. While its implementation has undeniably had its share of loss and loopholes, the DSWD should nevertheless be also recognized for its continued dedication in spearheading this program. In particular and on behalf of my constituents, I would first like to thank them, for the tireless efforts of the DSWD personnel assigned to my district. Like many of their colleagues all over the country, they are often on the receiving end of the frustration, fatigue and sometimes even anger of the program’s stakeholders, yet they manage to serve in spite of the constraints and challenges.

When I went around my district and monitored the process, I noted that it took around 20 minutes from the first validation until a photo was taken of the beneficiaries’ receipt of the cash assistance. Admittedly, some deletions in the list were also done, considering that there were times when both mother and father from the same family availed of the program. Such and other adjustments were necessarily made in order to assist as many families as the DSWD can. We are all trying to navigate through an uncharted territory and so, I am sincerely appealing that we all strive to keep the spirit of bayanihan alive para sa ikabubuti, hindi lamang ng sariling pamilya, kundi pati na ng ating mga kapwa Filipino. Kung ang isang pamilya ay nakatanggap na ng tulong, hayaan naman din nating makatanggap sana ang iba pang nangangailangan nito. Kadalasan ay nagtuturuan at pinapairal ang walang kwentang pamumulitika kaya daw nawala ang pangalan sa listahan o hindi nailagay *una vez*. Nakakalungkot, kapag may mga paratang na ganito dahil sa panahon ng krisis, hindi ito nakakatulong. Tigilan na dapat ang siraan. Kailangan nating magtulongan, magkaisa. Malinaw kung sino ang ating kalaban at ito ay ang COVID-19.

In these trying times, the words of a former US President should serve as a guide and a source of inspiration to us all: “Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country.” Now

is that very pivotal time that our patience, cooperation and unity are most needed.

Now, while the government's SAP, as well as the generous donations from the private sectors, significantly kept food on the table for many Filipino families during this state of calamity, we must press on and continue to ensure that our countrymen are able to maximize the value of the very limited financial resources. After all, such scarce resources have been vital in promoting the health and safety of our people during this COVID-19 pandemic.

We must then protect the purchasing power of our countrymen, particularly in the days ahead when we can finally rebuild and recover together. If we do not keep a close watch especially on the prices of rice and other essential goods, all of our initial efforts especially for the hardest-hit sectors can be rendered futile. Remarkably, our national government was quick to respond in enforcing the necessary price control mechanisms enshrined in the Price Act—Republic Act No. 7581 as amended, and further echoed in the DA, the DOH and the DTI's Joint Memorandum Circular Number 2020-01 issued on March 18, this year. Such measures have indeed contributed to cushioning the overwhelming impact of this crisis on our people.

As we now approach May 15, or the end of the 60-day period of the price freeze and price ceilings being implemented, we trust that the DA, the DOH, the DTI and other concerned agencies are now in the process of carefully developing a way forward. It is my earnest hope that adequate and reasonable price control mechanisms will be carried out even after the current 60-day period in order to allow our people to slowly get back on their feet. After implementing the automatic price control mandated by the Price Act, it may then prove strategic for our national government to further consider price ceilings in order to provide further safeguards for all Filipinos. It sends a strong signal to anyone who would dare profit from the misery of our people that our government is truly committed to protecting its people.

Significantly at this point, I would like to bring particular attention to the price control mechanisms for the sale of rice. In my province, Nueva Ecija, known as the rice granary of the Philippines, farmers are now harvesting palay. Based on our data gathering during the first week of May, the going rate of wet palay ranged from P18.75 to P19.50 per kilo. While for dry palay, it is P22 to P24 per kilo. Moreover, the price for a 50-kilo cavan of rice is P1,850 or P37 per kilo. By the end of the month, the rice farmers in Nueva Ecija will be done harvesting.

Given this, I trust that Secretary Dar and the Department of Agriculture will carefully consider these conditions in sustaining, if not strengthening, the productivity of our Filipino farmers at this most vulnerable time, while determining suitable price ceilings for this food staple. As a complementary

measure, it is also essential to underscore that the price of rice cannot be dictated upon by the supposed scarcity that rice cartels, profiteers and hoarders may claim. These unscrupulous forces must be dismantled for illegally increasing the price of rice much to the detriment of both of our farmers and consumers. I pray that the appropriate government agencies will penalize violators of the Price Act and now, JMC No. 2020-01 which have prescribed fines ranging from anywhere between P5,000 to P2 million and imprisonment of 5 to 15 years.

In our President's third weekly report to Congress last April 13, it was reported that 635 individuals have been arrested for hoarding, profiteering and/or manipulation of price of basic goods and medical supplies. I respectfully request the DTI, the Department of Agriculture, the DOH and the DOJ to update Congress on the actions taken on these allegedly erring individuals.

Today, more than any other time, hoarders, profiteers, and rice cartels must feel the full force of the law for compromising not only the purchasing power of consumers, but also the welfare and livelihood of our Filipino farmers. Indeed, it is imperative for the government to not only ensure that there is ample supply of rice in the coming months, but also that the same is made available to all at reasonable prices. At no point can we allow a repeat of 2018 when the price of rice soared to P66 per kilo and it even appeared that hardly anyone, if at all, was prosecuted or arrested for such.

This is no longer acceptable today. Our government must truly consider the farthest that valuable savings and subsidies can go in keeping every Filipino family nourished and healthy. In times like this, when feelings of uncertainty, fear, helplessness are felt by all, the government must continue to take the lead and show the way. Together, let us all remain vigilant so that no one can take advantage especially of the most marginalized among us. In our own meaningful initiatives and coordinated action, we can truly contribute to our country's ultimate victory over the crisis at hand.

Sa tulong at gabay ng pamahalaang pambansa, mga lokal na pamahalaan, mga volunteers, mga magigiting na frontliners at sa awa ng Panginoon ay malalampasan din natin ang pagsubok na ito.

Maraming, maraming salamat po, Mr. Speaker. God bless the Filipino people.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Estrella). Thank you, distinguished Lady from Nueva Ecija.

Yes, the Majority Leader is recognized.

REP. NIETO. Mr. Speaker, I move that we refer the speech of Hon. Ria Vergara to the Committee on Rules for appropriate action.

I so move, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Estrella). Is there any objection? (*Silence*) The Chair hears none; the speech of the distinguished Lady from Nueva Ecija is hereby referred to the Committee on Rules.

The Majority Leader is recognized.

REP. NIETO. Mr. Speaker, I now move that the Gentleman from Party-List KABAYAN, Hon. Ron P. Salo, be recognized to avail of the Privilege Hour.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Estrella). The Gentleman Representative of Party-List KABAYAN is hereby recognized.

Proceed, Gentleman.

PRIVILEGE SPEECH OF REP. SALO

REP. SALO. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I speak today on a matter of personal and collective privilege to share my personal experience in relation to the increase of premiums by PhilHealth. Mr. Speaker, as one of the primary authors and original proponents of the Universal Health Care or UHC Law, I experienced last week, a day before and even on my birthday, the most vicious online bashing from OFW netizens because of the implementation by PhilHealth of the increase in premiums from 2.75 percent to three percent of OFWs' monthly salaries.

I was reviled and was called "gago, tanga, buwisit, hayop, walang utak, kurakot." The words were hurtful and deeply wounding, especially when all that you have always wanted to do was to uplift the welfare of our people. However, I choose to cope with such blows by telling myself that such comments were the outcome of emotions by our OFWs which I deem valid, that the outbursts were against the policy itself and nothing personal. As policymakers, we bear the brunt of our peoples' rage, when one's predicament has to be blamed on accountable authority.

Mr. Speaker, I am fully aware that by speaking today and owning responsibility for my participation in the passage of the UHC Law, I risk earning the ire again of many OFWs and their families which may even sound the death knell of my political career. Nonetheless, I can never disown my participation on the passage of the UHC Law because it was one of the core advocacies of KABAYAN Party-List.

Since the 2010 elections when we first attempted to run for a seat here in this august Chamber, KABAYAN Party-List anchored its platform of governance on the urgent need for a UHC Law. It was an advocacy that we thought of well, spent much in consultation not only with government and nongovernment experts in the subject but most importantly, with our people. Thus, I cannot just sit idly and allow misconceptions and misplaced allegations to proliferate and consume the

minds of our people, leave rational discussions on the fringes of sanity, and tolerate hate, anger and distrust to dominate the exchanges. I cannot allow misinformation that the UHC Law as a policy is flawed, ill-conceived and an abysmal blunder simply because of the increase in PhilHealth premiums.

The truth is, the UHC Law may be among the best, if not the best, enduring legacies of the Duterte administration. The UHC Law may also be President Duterte's most important gift to all Filipino families as it ushers the realization of making appropriate, accessible and quality health care to all our people regardless of financial capacity. It is a landmark legislation that aims to completely transform the medical landscape on how our people are able to access better health. Above all, the UHC is a clear manifestation of the Philippine government's promotion, protection and fulfillment of every Filipino's right to health and to quality health care. The UHC Law aims to unify and harmonize our fragmented system by addressing the gaps in the delivery of health services from the national government to local government units and optimizes government resources by enabling PhilHealth to be the country's single purchaser of health, goods and services. It strengthens primary health by including checkups, screenings, vaccinations and other outpatient services in the PhilHealth coverage.

Health experts from both the government and the private sector as well as from international organizations such as the World Health Organization provided their technical assistance in crafting the UHC Law. In December 2018, I was even invited to Lebanon by the WHO Western Pacific Region to share our experience in crafting this law to the member countries of the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region because it was touted then and now, as a model legislation on achieving SDG goals on health.

The UHC Law is both a social protection and a universal health insurance program of the government which aims to ensure that no Filipino family will fall into financial catastrophe when a family member gets sick. As its name implies, all Filipinos are covered by PhilHealth benefits regardless of whether they are directly or indirectly contributing premiums. Under the UHC Law, entitlement to PhilHealth benefits is not anymore based on membership or payment, but on citizenship. One automatically becomes entitled to PhilHealth benefits and services by virtue of being a Filipino.

Mr. Speaker, hindi kaila sa atin ang maraming namamatay na mahihirap nating kababayan na hindi man lang nakakita ng doktor dahil wala silang pambayad sa ospital, at kung makapagpadoktor man ay kailangang ibenta o isangla ang mga ari-arian at karaniwang nababaon sila sa utang. Ito ang mga pangunahing suliranin na nais bigyang solusyon ng UHC. Bago ang batas na ito, marami sa mga mahihirap nating kababayan ay walang PhilHealth coverage.

Sila ang kadalasang kumakatok sa ating pintuan para humingi ng medical assistance. Kasama na rito madalas ang mga kamag-anak o mahal sa buhay ng mga OFWs sapagkat kadalasan, wala silang pormal na pinagkakakitaan maliban sa inaasahan nilang padala ng kanilang kaanak na OFW. Subalit dahil sa UHC Law, lahat ng mga Pilipino ay covered na ng PhilHealth.

Totoo, marami pa rin ang nakapila sa ating mga tanggapan upang humingi ng medical assistance. Isang katotohanan ito sapagkat hindi pa tuluyang naipapatupad ang UHC Law. Gayundin, kakailanganin din natin ang malaking pondo para tuluyang maipapatupad at magkaroon ng kaganapan ang mga layunin ng batas na ito. Tatandaan din natin na hindi lang simpleng PhilHealth coverage ang adhikain ng UHC Law, kundi ang siguraduhing dekalidad ang ibibigay na serbisyong medikal sa ating mga mamamayan at magkaroon ng maayos na pasilidad at kagamitan ang ating mga ospital.

Mr. Speaker, under the UHC Law, there are just two types of covered Filipinos: contributory or non-contributory. As mentioned, all Filipinos are medically covered under the UHC Law and yet, not all Filipinos are required to directly contribute to its funds. Only those who are able to pay or have the capacity to pay since they have employment or other sources of income are required to contribute. As such, those who are able or have the capacity to contribute will partly subsidize those who are unable to do so. Thus, one who is employed or has a source of income is not exempt from contributing to PhilHealth even when he already has another health insurance coverage.

Nonetheless, it is worthy to note that the UHC Law provides that those who are directly contributing premiums will be given better health coverage. Most of our OFWs claim that their PhilHealth membership is redundant since they are already covered by their foreign employer's health insurance, which may be said to be superior than the benefits extended by the PhilHealth. They also claim that they are only in the Philippines for a few days or weeks in a year and some only for every two years, such that they may not need their PhilHealth membership and would have no need to contribute to the funding requirement of UHC.

Mr. Speaker, almost all of our OFWs do not need PhilHealth coverage as of the moment. Their family members in the Philippines i.e. their spouses, children, extended families who are unemployed, are also covered by PhilHealth and certainly need its insurance benefits. Thus, with the UHC Law, our OFWs' worry that they may not have sufficient savings when any of their family members get sick is lessened. As such, while abroad, our OFWs shall have peace of mind, which is priceless.

We also note that the contracts of most of our OFWs are for two years for land-based and 10 months

for sea-based. As reported, their contracts get renewed three to four times on the average. When they finally choose to stay in the Philippines, they often end up unemployed. By that time, their own health insurance coverage has already lapsed and yet, they will remain to be covered by PhilHealth since those who are able or have the capacity to contribute by then, will partly subsidize them as well.

There were concerns among the row of OFWs that PhilHealth is treating them as milking cows so as to implement the UHC Law. That is far from the truth because premium contributions from direct contributors, including that from the OFWs, are just one of the several funding sources specified by the UHC to ensure its full and effective implementation. The other sources are the sin tax collections, the national government's share from Pagcor and PCSO, DOH annual appropriations, national government's subsidy to PhilHealth and other appropriations from Congress. In fact, PhilHealth President Ricardo Morales said that in 2009, PhilHealth collected P1.02 billion worth of premium payments from OFWs but paid out to OFWs and their dependents almost twice that amount which reached P1.7 billion.

Mr. Speaker, perhaps the PhilHealth implementation of the premium increase is untimely. It may even be said to be callous as it was implemented at a time when everyone is affected by the pandemic caused by COVID-19; when our people have no source of income and are reliant on the government's relief; when many of our OFWs have been sent home, and those who remain abroad are unable to work or are in limbo as to whether they still have work to return to just like many of those who are in the Philippines. Further, PhilHealth might have been overzealous in its collection by charging the entire three percent premiums from the OFWs and did not accord them equal treatment with our local workers who are only charged 50 percent of the premiums, as the other 50 percent is paid by their employers. In the OFWs case, the 50 percent, the premiums should have been paid by their foreign employers, such that our OFWs should only pay 1.5 percent and not the entire three percent. As such, our OFWs have been placed at a much disadvantaged position than local workers.

Finally, while there may be a need to review the funding source for the full and effective implementation of the UHC Law and to amend its implementing rules and regulations or the PhilHealth circulars related to its implementation, I cannot renege on my duty to inform everyone, including OFWs, that this law is what we need to ensure our progressive realization of better health for all Filipinos.

At this juncture, however, any discussion on premium payments of our OFWs appears to be superfluous as the President himself has already decided to make it voluntary, not mandatory. May I note though, that there are numerous OFWs, particularly

from the sea-based sector, who fully support the UHC Law including the increase of PhilHealth premiums as they fully understand the need for its immediate implementation.

Mr. Speaker, sa aking pagtatapos, nais kong ulitin na maaaring mali ang timing na ginawa ng PhilHealth sa pagtaas ng premiums mula 2.75 percent to three percent sa buwanang sahod ng OFWs, at mali ang ginawang pagsingil sa kanila ng buong three percent sapagkat ang kalahati sa kanilang employer dapat siningil. Subalit kailanman, hindi maaaring sabihin na ang UHC Law ay isang pahirap sa ating mamamayan, lalo na sa ating mga OFWs sapagkat ang batas na ito ay para sa kaginhawahan, kapanatagan at kalusugan ng bawat pamilyang Pilipino.

Maraming salamat, Mr. Speaker.

REP. ABANTE. Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Estrella). Thank you, Gentleman from KABAYAN Party-List.

The Majority Leader is recognized.

REP. NIETO. Mr. Speaker, I move that we recognize the Gentleman from the Sixth District of Manila, the Minority Leader, Rep. Bienvenido M. Abante Jr., for his interpellation.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Estrella). The distinguished Minority Leader is hereby recognized.

REP. ABANTE. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, would the KABAYAN Party-List Congressman allow me to ask clarificatory questions?

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Estrella). If he so wishes, then please proceed.

REP. ABANTE. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Congressman Salo, sino po iyong bina-bash? Kayo po ba mismo ang bina-bash ng mga OFW? Hindi ko kasi masyadong marinig e..

REP. SALO. Yes, dahil inaakusa nila iyong Kongreso na mali ang ipinasang batas. That is the reason for this personal and collective privilege because it also affects everyone, even Members of the House of Representatives in that bashing.

REP. ABANTE. Kailan po ba naipasa ang Universal Health Care Law?

REP. SALO. In late 2018, Mr. Speaker.

REP. ABANTE. 2018.

REP. SALO. December 2018, Mr. Speaker.

REP. ABANTE. Bakit po kayo mismo personally ang bina-bash ng mga OFW samantalang hindi naman kayo ang party-list Representative ng OFWs, hindi po ba?

REP. SALO. Yes, Mr. Speaker. Bina-bash po ako dahil po nabanggit ko nga kanina, ako ay ininterbyu tungkol dito sa premium increase. So, doon sa interview na pong iyon, pinost ko po sa social media at doon lumabas iyong mga bashing.

REP. ABANTE. Okay. Wala po naman siguro akong nakikitang masyadong diperensiya sa Universal Health Care Law except iyong contributions po ng mga OFW. Kayo po ba ang naging pasimuno noong probisyon na iyon, Mr. Speaker?

REP. SALO. With your indulgence, Mr. Speaker, hindi po. Hindi po ako ang pasimuno doon sa increase na iyon sapagkat napag-usapan po ito sa bicameral conference committee at that time when I was also a part of that bicameral conference meeting.

REP. ABANTE. Well, Mr. Speaker, what was actually the tenor of the provision on the OFWs' participation in paying the premiums to PhilHealth?

REP. SALO. Basically, doon sa batas po, Mr. Speaker, malinaw po doon, binabanggit na tataas po iyong premium contributions ng mga members, pero hindi po na-identify exactly po doon kung sino po iyong mga member na magko-contribute po doon. Lumabas po ito pagdating po doon sa IRR ng batas po ng Universal Health Care Law kung saan na-identify po nila doon iyong percentages at specific ang sino iyong mga required na magbayad, na kasama po doon na-identify ay iyong mga OFWs, Mr. Speaker.

REP. ABANTE. Nakalagay po ba doon, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, ang percentage ng ibabayad ng OFWs ayon sa ating batas?

REP. SALO. Wala po, Mr. Speaker. Kagaya po nang binanggit ko po kanina, wala po ito doon sa batas, lumabas po ito doon sa IRR.

REP. ABANTE. Therefore...

REP. SALO. At the same time, siyempre doon sa IRR, Mr. Speaker, noong na-implement na rin po through PhilHealth circular, doon po lumabas po iyong percentages, at the same time kung ilan, magkano iyong babayaran ng OFWs.

REP. ABANTE. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, hindi puwede pong sisihin ng mga OFW ang Congress o ang sinumang Congressman na naging author po ng UHC Law, sapagkat wala namang nakalagay doon kung ilang porsiyento ang dapat ibayad ng mga OFW. Hindi po ba?

REP. SALO. Tama po kayo. Iyon po iyong sinasabi ko po, na iyong percentages po na iyon, iyong participation po natin bilang mga Kongresista, nandoon po tayo sa pagpasa po ng batas. Pagdating po doon sa percentages na babayaran po ng mga OFWs, wala po doon, hindi po naka-identify po sa batas po. Lumabas po iyon doon sa IRR na ang nag-release po at gumawa po ng IRR is the Executive, at the same time doon sa PhilHealth circular na ang nag-issue rin po nito iyong PhilHealth.

REP. ABANTE. Sino po ang gumawa ng IRR, Mr. Speaker?

REP. SALO. Ang nabigyan ng—Mr. Speaker, ang nanguna po sa pagpasa ng IRR ng Universal Health Care Law is the Department of Health, of course, in consultation also with PhilHealth and other relevant agencies.

REP. ABANTE. Was Congress even consulted in the drafting of the IRR, Mr. Speaker?

REP. SALO. There were invitations that were sent but, of course, when they were drafting or preparing or crafting the IRR, that was election time last year.

REP. ABANTE. I believe that whenever there is any IRR that would be drafted or provided for because of a law, I believe, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, that Congress must be consulted. What do you think of that, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor?

REP. SALO. Mr. Speaker, I understand that we were invited, as I mentioned a while ago. A lot of us, Members of Congress, were also invited by the Department of Health but as I mentioned a while ago, that happened when it was election season. I actually attended around two or three consultation meetings but basically on another topic, because what the Department of Health did at that time was to divide various portions of the Universal Health Care Law. So, hindi po ako naimbita doon sa portion po na ito, kung hindi naimbita po ako doon sa ibang probisyon po ng Universal Health Care, noong sa implementation—pag-craft po noong implementing rules and regulations.

REP. ABANTE. Mr. Speaker, obviously, because if the Congressmen were consulted on the drafting of the

IRR, I believe that well-meaning Congressmen would have opposed the napakalaking interest na sinisingil po sa OFW. Would you think that, Congressman Salo?

REP. SALO. Definitely, Mr. Speaker. That is why I said in my speech, hindi dapat siningil sa kanila iyong kabuuan na three percent, kung hindi kalahati lang, sapagkat kung pareho po sila, they should be treated the same, exactly as the local workers. Our local workers, yes, three percent ang sisingilin sa kanila pero hati po sila ng kanilang employers. So 1.5 percent iyong employee's share, 1.5 percent, Mr. Speaker, iyong share po ng employer. Ngayon, pagdating po sa OFWs, ang ginawa po ng PhilHealth, iyong kabuuan po na three percent ang sinisingil sa kanila. That is the reason why lalabas talaga na sobrang laki ng babayaran po nila.

Kung ako po talaga naimbitahan po doon sa pagdinig po na iyon, sasabihin po talaga natin na dapat hindi nila sinisingil iyong kabuuan na iyon, kung hindi kalahati lang ang sinisingil dapat sa mga OFWs natin.

REP. ABANTE. Mr. Speaker, you mentioned that dapat iyong kalahati would be shouldered by the employer. Parang ito po iyong SSS, the half should be shouldered by the employer, pero we know for a fact that most of the employers of OFWs are not actually businesses that are in our country. Ito po ay mga foreign business, foreign recruitment agencies. For example, like iyong mga direct hire, we do not have any hold on those foreign recruitment agencies and because of that, they will not, in any way, give one half of or shoulder half of what the OFW would pay. Tama po ba ako, Mr. Speaker?

REP. SALO. Tama po kayo doon, Mr. Speaker. So, basically, ang sinasabi po natin dito, Mr. Speaker, may mga mekanismo naman na puwedeng gawin ang ating PhilHealth, in coordination with POEA, para doon sa mga employers na kaya nilang singilin—doon sa mga meron po sila dito na mga recruitment agencies. Pero para doon sa mga wala, iyong binabanggit po ninyo, whether or not, ang dapat na obligasyon lang ng OFW po doon is to pay 1.5 percent. So, iyon po iyon. Iyong pagsingil po doon sa additional other 1.5 percent, wala po doon sa rule, wala po doon sa burden noong OFWs. Ang burden lang niya dapat ay bayaran kung ano iyong kaniyang share.

REP. ABANTE. Well, actually, Mr. Speaker, although I am a district Congressman, yet bilang pong isang bishop, at ako po ay may maraming mga members, hundreds of them, in the Middle East, ano po, and other countries. Now, they are not the ones that are actually complaining, but they have forwarded to me some videos na talagang hindi naman kayo, Congressman Salo, ang tinitira. Ang talagang binibira dito is the PhilHealth, ano po. Now, the thing is, I think that the

IRR has made a sweeping, general statement covering all OFWs who should be paying three percent, ano po, Mr. Speaker?

REP. SALO. Tama po kayo doon, Mr. Speaker. That is precisely my point, Mr. Speaker. Kailangan po natin siguro o kailangan po nilang baguhin sigurado iyong IRR, but let us say at the same time, iyong PhilHealth circular na na-issue po dahil doon sa IRR na iyon. Ang sinasabi po natin dito, Mr. Speaker, wala pong problema iyong batas; ang problema ay pagdating po doon sa implementation. So, it is lost in translation, iyong kaso pong ito, at hindi po tayo na mga mambabatas, Mr. Speaker, ang dapat sisihin dahil wala po tayong partisipasyon pagdating po doon sa pagsingil ng premiums na iyon.

REP. ABANTE. Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, I do not know if we have any rule that before any IRR would be allowed to be implemented, that it must first go to Congress, that it should be reviewed and perhaps amended. Mayroon po ba tayong rule na ganoon, Congressman Salo?

REP. SALO. I do not know, Mr. Speaker, pero siguro, dahil iniisip ko na pagdating po sa implementation po kasi, that is the role exactly of the Executive. So, nangyayari po na separation of powers, Mr. Speaker. Pagdating po doon sa batas, tayo po iyon, pero pagdating doon sa implementing rules, iniimbata po tayo but pero sila po, the Executive, ang may primyadong poder po sa pag-craft po ng implementing rules and regulations.

REP. ABANTE. But that does not...

REP. SALO. But at the same time, tama rin po kayo doon dahil tayo naman po ang nagpasa po noon, ng batas na iyon, then they should ask for or our opinion should be given greater weight sapagkat tayo naman po ang, in the first place, nag-author po kung ano po iyong batas po na lalabas na iyon.

REP. ABANTE. Well, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, with the oversight function of Congress, I believe that the IRR for example, we feel that it is quite erroneous and a burden to the people who will be paying, and should be reviewed by Congress. That should be in the oversight function, Mr. Speaker.

REP. SALO. Yes.

REP. ABANTE. Do you think so?

REP. SALO. Yes, definitely, Mr. Speaker. May poder po tayo pagdating sa oversight, na busisihin kung

ano iyong implementing rules and regulations na ipinasa ng Executive Department.

REP. ABANTE. Well, Mr. Speaker, there would be a violation of PhilHealth on this. Kamakailan lamang ay ating nakita na tinanggal ng ating Pangulo iyong mismong presidente at pinalitan because of alleged corruption. Nakita po natin sa pag-iimbestiga po natin ng PhilHealth—until now, it is under investigation, that there are Mafia-like people there in PhilHealth who are involved in the massive corruption issue of PhilHealth. Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, are you aware of that?

REP. SALO. Yes, nabalitaan po natin iyon, Mr. Speaker. That is the reason why I suppose iyon din po iyong sentimyento po ng marami na nag-comment doon po sa akin. Sinasabi po nila na milyun-milyon, bilyun-bilyong piso ang nakukulimbat ng mga officials po ng PhilHealth and yet, iyong mga OFWs po natin, sila ang pahihirapan. So, I suppose, nakakabit po ito doon sa binabanggit po ninyo, Mr. Speaker. Kaya sinasabi po natin na dapat iyong PhilHealth din ay siguraduhin na ipakita po sa atin kung ano po iyong mga aksyon na kanilang mga ginawa para siguraduhin na iyong concerns din ng pangkalahatan, particular dito sa corruption issue, at siguraduhin na nagagastos nang mas maayos iyong pera na kinokolekta nila mula sa mga miyembro po nila—kasama po tayo doon, kasama po ang mga OFWs po natin.

REP. ABANTE. Mr. Speaker, nagpapasalamat tayo sa ating Pangulo na sinuspinde niya ang pagsingil at ginawa po niyang voluntary. Hindi po ba nakalagay sa batas na mandatory ang dapat ibayad ng OFW?

REP. SALO. Kagaya po ng binanggit ko po kanina, Mr. Speaker, malinaw po doon sa batas na mandatory ang payment sa members pero hindi po na-identify exactly po doon kung sino po iyong tinutukoy po na members po doon. Lumabas po iyon doon sa IRR and at the same time, doon sa PhilHealth circular.

REP. ABANTE. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, napakaganda po ng ginawa ng ating Pangulo although siguro may kaunti lang paglabag sa batas, sapagkat ginawa ng Pangulo, voluntary, samantalang nakalagay sa batas ay mandatory.

So, ang akin pong request, Mr. Speaker, ay ganito: I hope that the Oversight Committee of Congress should review whatever IRR that will be drafted before it be finalized by any agency of the government so that we will not be accused of trying to overburden our people samantalang ang tawag po natin sa mga OFW ay modern heroes of our times because they are remitting so much dollars in our country that help our economy, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor. What do you think of that?

REP. SALO. I completely agree with you, Mr. Speaker, na kailangan nating—mas maganda po talaga na iyong mga IRR na inisyu po ng Executive ay nare-review rin po ng mga oversight committee po natin. At the same time, specifically para dito sa IRR ng Universal Health Care, ma-review rin po, base sa oversight function po natin, ng Committee on Health natin.

REP. ABANTE. Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, in view of the fact that our President has suspended payment of all PhilHealth contributions of the OFWs, in view of the fact that even the President himself has made it voluntary, I believe that we ought to review the Universal Health Care Law and to amend some provisions there that make them mandatory, Mr. Speaker. I, for one, would support the amendment that we should not anymore overburden our OFWs in the payment of the PhilHealth contributions. For all you know, they are not even benefiting from it, you know, even if the PhilHealth would say—I have heard that the PhilHealth has said na puwede naman nilang i-refund iyong nagastos po. No foreign hospitals will ever do that, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor. Wala pa po akong nakita na foreign hospital na nagpapa-refund po, any Filipino OFW na naospital po sa ibang bansa ay ipapa-refund po niya sa OFW kahit po nandiyan ang resibo, kahit nandiyan po ang lahat ng mga documents. Nakikita ko po na only when a foreign hospital recognizes the insurance of another country, that is the only time that they will be able to refund whatever the patient has paid. What I know is this—when any foreign hospital does not recognize any insurance from our own country, whether it be government insurance, they will not, in any way, refund whatever it is that our people spent in that hospital. Is that correct, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor?

REP. SALO. Mr. Speaker, lilinawin ko po iyong stand po natin dito. Sinasabi po natin na walang problema po iyong batas na UHC. Ang problema po dito ay iyong implementing rules and regulations na na-adopt po ng Executive at the same time, iyong PhilHealth circulars. At maaaring sinasabi po ninyo na wala pong pakinabang na personal iyong OFW, Mr. Speaker, pero sinasabi rin po natin dito na bagamat personally maaaring hindi nila ma-claim po ngayon iyong sinasabi po nila pero iyong pamilya po nila na nandito, lahat po sila covered under the Universal Health Care Law, na kadalasan iyong family members po nila na nandito sa Pilipinas, kadalasan po iyan, hindi rin po nagko-contribute po iyan dahil kadalasan wala po silang hanapbuhay po dito sa Pilipinas. And yet, lahat po sila, iyong kanilang family members, iyong kanilang mga kapatid, iyong kanilang mga anak, iyong kanilang magulang, lahat po sila covered na po under the Universal Health Care Law. At the same time, ang sinasabi rin po natin, Mr. Speaker, yes, it is true na sa ngayon maaaring wala po

silang personal na pakinabang, but sooner when their contract ends, pag-uwi po nila dito sa Pilipinas at wala na po silang insurance coverage na binabanggit po nila, covered pa rin po sila ng PhilHealth because of this Universal Health Care Law.

REP. ABANTE. Mr. Speaker, Your Honor, I do understand that but I believe that Filipinos, wherever they might be, ought to be fairly and equally charged any contribution. Sila man ay nasa ibang bansa o sa atin, I believe that when the law says that there ought to be equality for all, it must be implemented, Mr. Speaker, Your Honor.

Maraming, maraming salamat po, Congressman Salo. Maraming, maraming salamat, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much.

REP. SALO. Maraming salamat din po sa pagkakataon, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Estrella). Thank you, Gentleman from Manila and Gentleman from KABAYAN Party-List.

The Majority Leader is recognized.

REP. NIETO. Mr. Speaker, I move that we recognize the Lady from the Fourth District of Quezon, Hon. Angelina “Helen” D.L. Tan, MD for her interpellation.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Estrella). The distinguished Chairperson of the Committee on Health and from Quezon is hereby recognized.

Please proceed.

REP. TAN (A.D.L.). Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the honorable Representative of KABAYAN Party-List allow me to ask a few questions?

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Estrella). Will the Gentleman from KABAYAN Party-List yield to some questions from the Lady from Quezon?

REP. SALO. I think that the Lady from Quezon is actually the Chairperson of the Committee on Health kung saan po naipasa po ang batas na ito. Kasama rin po natin ang ating Chairperson sa pagpasa po ng batas na ito at isa sa mga nanguna para siguraduhin na maipasa ito.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Estrella). Please proceed.

REP. TAN (A.D.L.). Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, nagpapasalamat po tayo sa ating kaibigan, Cong. Ron Salo, sa kaniyang pagtayo at pagpapahayag na ang Universal Health Care Law ay isang napakalaking

achievement ng ating administration, ang pagbibigay ng magandang serbisyong pangkalusugan para sa ating mga kababayan.

Katulad niya, Mr. Speaker, ako din ay nakaranas ng hindi naman pamba-bash but politically ay ginagamit sa distrito ko, nagpapakalat na ako ay naghangad ng hindi maganda para sa ating mga OFW. Katulad ng ating kasama na may-akda rin at nakiisa sa bicameral meeting ay napakaganda noong kaniyang mga sinabi kanina na paglilinaw, ano, iyong mabuti na magagawa ng ating Universal Health Care Law.

Gusto ko lang matanong po ang ating mga kaibigan, Mr. Speaker, ano po ba ang pagkakaiba ng ating Universal Health Care Law doon sa dating PhilHealth Law pagdating po doon sa membership?

REP. SALO. Pagdating sa membership, Mr. Speaker, malinaw po na lahat po dito sa Universal Health Care Law, lahat na po tayo members, lahat po ng mga Pilipino. Binanggit ko nga po kanina sa aking speech, it is not anymore by virtue of payment of membership but by virtue of being a Filipino that we become members of the PhilHealth. Ang pinagkaiba lang po, ngayon pina-emphasize whether contributory po tayo o non-contributory po tayo, direct contributor or indirect contributor po tayo ng PhilHealth. Based sa batas ngayon na ang difference lang, mag-iiba rin po, hopefully, iba iyong package na ibibigay po doon sa mga direct contributors, ibig sabihin nito, tayong mga nagbabayad ng monthly na premium payments. Pero doon sa mga hindi nagbabayad, hindi sinisingil, they are considered indirect contributors dahil, of course, may funding din galing sa gobyerno particular sa sin taxes, DOH allocation, PhilHealth appropriations and other appropriations from Congress.

REP. TAN (A.D.L.). Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Doon po sa ating category ng ating membership sa Universal Health Care, tama po ang ating kaibigan na ginugrupo na lang sila sa dalawa—ang direct at saka ang indirect. At sinasabi po sa Section 4, letter (f), nakalagay po doon na ang direct contributors are “those who have the capacity to pay premiums, are gainfully employed and are bound by an employer-employee relationship, or are self-earning, professional practitioners, migrant workers, including their qualified dependents, and lifetime members.” Iyong indirect contributors, tama po iyong sinabi niya na ito po iyong sina-subsidize ng ating gobyerno, iyong walang kakayanang makabayad. Pero doon sa sinabi niya kanina, ang kagandahan sa Universal Health Care Law ay automatic po by virtue of citizenship ay member po tayo ng National Health Insurance Program. Ibig sabihin, hindi tayo made-deprive of the health services, whether ang isang Pilipino ay hindi nakabayad on time or nakalimutang makabayad or may dahilan bakit hindi nakabayad,

palagian ay maa-avail niya ang services. But, again, Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask ang ating kasamahan, ano po ba ang magiging pagbabago kung ang ating mga OFWs ay hindi natin gawin na mandatory ang contribution nila? Ano po ang magiging impact nito, Mr. Speaker, doon po sa ating category ng direct at indirect?

REP. SALO. Dalawa iyong magiging impact po nito, Mr. Speaker. Una, impact doon sa funding requirement po natin dahil sinasabi po natin na kailangan din po natin lahat ng may kakayanan na magbayad ay mag-contribute para mas ma-implement po ito natin fully and mas malawak po, mas mabilis iyong Universal Health Care.

Number two, ang impact din po nito doon mismo sa mga OFW natin, kasi binabanggit po natin dito, iba po iyong health package dapat na ibigay po sa kanila ng PhilHealth, iyong mga direct contributors sa indirect contributors. So, may epekto doon sa implementation ng kabuuan and at the same time doon sa indibidwal.

REP. TAN (A.D.L.). Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If I may share lang, ang atin pong Sponsor ay kasama natin sa bicameral meeting and iyong nangyari doon sa bakit ba mayroong three percent, may 3.5 percent in the coming years doon sa contribution, nasasaad po sa Section 10. Actually, kung natatandaan po ng ating kaibigan, Mr. Speaker, ito iyong matagal na pinag-usapan, I think, doon sa bicameral meeting. Papaano ba ide-determine ang rates ng pagbabayad ng ating mga contributors, ano? At doon po sa Section 10, nasasaad po, Mr. Speaker, gusto ko lang pong linawin na ito po ay actually nasa probisyon ng batas na sa premium contribution ay inilagay mismo iyong table, ano.

So, iyon lang po iyong gusto kong itama, Mr. Speaker, na mismong isinaad po sa batas iyong contribution from 2019 to 2025 until ma-achieve iyong five percent which is actually the ceiling dati pa ng PhilHealth Law, iyong five percent. But this one, ang pagkakaiba po ay predetermined na, nilagay, isinaad sa batas iyong atin pong table ng increment.

So, siguro po, iyon lang po iyong gusto nating ipaalam. It is not only in the IRR but it is actually in the law. But as I have said before, Mr. Speaker, ang oversight committee ng UHC, nag-reach out po ang inyong lingkod sa counterpart natin, kay Senator Bong Go, and anytime naghihintay po tayo ng schedule para i-tackle pagdating po doon sa complaint ng ating mga OFWs regarding po doon sa mandatory payment, ano. Gusto po natin na pakinggan ang ating mga experts at mga kasama din doon sa pag-deliberate nito—also the Sponsors, ano, of this UHC para malaman natin kung ano talaga ang magiging solusyon natin doon sa problema na kinakaharap ng ating mga kasama.

So, I would like to congratulate my friend, Cong. Ron Salo. Kasama ko po iyan na nagtrabaho from day one, sa House pa po dini-deliberate, at alam ko at naniniwala ako na none of us ay naghangad ng pabigat sa ating mga kababayan. Ang hinangad po naming lahat ay iyong pangarap na ang ating mahihirap na kababayan sa panahon ng pangangailangan sa serbisyong pangkalusugan ay maibibigay ang de kalidad na serbisyo at the time of need.

So, again, Mr. Speaker, our honorable Sponsor, thank you for defending the Universal Health Care, at sana kasama pa rin po natin kayo sa ating pagpapaliwanag pa sa ating mga kababayan para lubos na maintindihan ang benepisyo ng Universal Health Care Law.

Maraming salamat, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Estrella). Thank you, Mme. Chairperson and distinguished Gentleman from KABAYAN Party-List.

REP. SALO. Maraming salamat din po, Mme. Chairman, sa inyong pagsuporta po sa aking pagtayo tungkol dito sa issue po ng Universal Health Care. At the same time, tama rin po kayo na nakasaad po doon subalit ang sa akin, pinaninindigan ko pa rin na dapat ang sisingilin po para doon sa mga OFWs ay hindi iyong kabuuang three percent kundi iyong kalahati lang, sapagkat sa Pilipinas, ang sinisingil naman po natin para sa local employees po natin ay 1.5 percent, kalahati lang dahil iyong kalahati ay binabayaran po ng mga employers po nila. Ngayon, kung hindi natin masisingil mula doon sa foreign employer, huwag nating ibigay na burden doon sa OFW himself na bayaran po iyong portion na iyon na dapat bayaran po ng kaniyang foreign employer.

Nonetheless, salamat po sapagkat tunay nga na magkakasama tayo, noon pa hanggang ngayon, tungo sa pagsulong po ng higit na ikabubuti, higit na ikagaganda, para sa higit na mas magandang kalusugan ng bawat Pilipino sa pamamagitan po ng batas na ito, Universal Health Care.

Maraming salamat po, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Estrella). The Majority Leader is recognized.

REP. NIETO. Mr. Speaker, I move that we recognize the Lady from GABRIELA, Hon. Arlene D. Brosas, for her interpellation.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Estrella). The distinguished Lady is hereby recognized.

REP. BROSAS. Yes, thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Estrella). Please proceed.

REP. BROSAS. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can you hear me po?

REP. SALO. Yes.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Estrella). Yes, we can hear you clearly.

Please proceed.

REP. BROSAS. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will our distinguished colleague from KABAYAN Party-List, Cong. Ron Salo, yield to a few clarificatory questions, Mr. Speaker?

REP. SALO. Willingly, Mr. Speaker.

REP. BROSAS. Thank you. Distinguished colleague, Mr. Speaker, very clear po iyong panawagan ng mga migrante at OFW natin. In fact, na-cite talaga nila na on April 2, 2020, iyong PhilHealth ang nag-issue ng Circular No. 2020-0014 mandating the overseas Filipinos with income amounting from P10,000 to P20,000 will be required to pay three percent of their annual salaries. Ngayon po, ito po iyong inaangal nila, ang sabi nga kanina, naka-table kasi, hindi ba? Naka-table na siya agad at may increase every year.

Now, ang very clear po, these are extraordinary times kaya umangal ang mga OFWs natin partikular na magbayad talaga ng three percent. Now, in the absence of a law, this will still be enforced. Halimbawa, sinabi po ng Presidente na magiging voluntary siya pero kung walang communication to General Morales of the PhilHealth, ano pong mangyayari, Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague? Will this still be enforced, iyong three percent po?

REP. SALO. Mr. Speaker, of course, malinaw po na ang PhilHealth ay under din po ng kapangyarihan ng ating Pangulo. So, I suppose dahil nagsalita po ang ating Pangulo, susundin po nila kung ano iyong sinabi ni Pangulong Duterte na hindi po nila ie-enforce iyong mandatory provision na iyan kundi voluntary iyong pagsisingil po nila.

REP. BROSAS. So, Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, klaro po na natanggap na ng PhilHealth na kailangan voluntary. There is a written message from the President na kailangan voluntary. So, therefore, hindi na po ba magwo-worry ang mga OFWs at migrante natin na magbabayad sila ng three percent increase sa premium sa ngayon?

REP. SALO. Mr. Speaker, wala po akong personal knowledge doon sa order po ng Presidente, kung mayroon bang something in writing na natanggap po ang PhilHealth. I do not have personal knowledge of

that but nonetheless, kahit wala po sigurong written communication, narinig naman po natin sa opisyal na pahayag po ng Palasyo. So, I suppose, unless magbago po iyong official statement po na iyon, then susundin na po na iyon, iyong magiging status quo.

REP. BROSAS. Yes, kasi kaya po natin nililinaw, distinguished colleague, Mr. Speaker, dahil alam naman natin na dahil nakabatas ito, in short, ay ii-enforce talaga ito as is, di ba? So, dapat maintindihan po o malinaw sa mga OFWs at sa migrante natin kung ano ang implication kung walang written or kung hindi ito ipapatupad ng PhilHealth. We should really have something concrete from PhilHealth kaugnay dito, Mr. Speaker, my distinguished colleague.

REP. SALO. Yes, Mr. Speaker. Naniniwala po ako doon na dapat maglabas po ang Philhealth noong kanilang amendatory circular na mag-a-amend po noong nauna po nilang inilabas.

REP. BROSAS. Yes. Now, my second question, Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague, is about the circular that mandates that members who failed to pay the premium on time shall be required to pay all his contributions with a monthly compound interest. Iyan po iyong basic, actually iyan iyong inaangal talaga ng mga migrante at mga OFWs natin. Bukod sa three percent, mayroon silang hinaharap na kailangan magbayad sila o nire-require silang magbayad ng mga missed contributions with one big compound interest.

Now, kapag hindi sila nakapagbayad noon, nakalagay din doon na hindi sila mabibigyan ng OEC or Overseas Employment Certificate. Now, iyan po iyong gusto nating iklaro, my distinguished colleague and Mr. Speaker. Iyong requirement for the mandatory Overseas Employment Certificate, na kailangan makapagbayad muna siguro sila para sila ay magkaroon nito, Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague.

REP. SALO. Mr. Speaker, isang paglilinaw po siguro, Mr. Speaker, na iyong binabanggit po nila na compound interest, iyong penalties, nandoon po sa batas po iyon, pero iyong pagbabayad o kailangan nilang bayaran iyon bago mag-issue ng OEC, wala po iyon doon sa batas. Lumabas na lang po iyan, base sa mga nabasa ko, doon sa arrangement ng PhilHealth with the POEA.

Isa rin nga sa mga ipinanawagan ko nga iyan, bakit nga ba kailangan silang singilin? Lalo na during these times na wala rin silang trabaho, kasi iyan din po iyong concern po ng ilan na sinisingil po sila noong kabuuan kahit nang umuwi po sila sa Pilipinas. Even sa panahon na nandito po sila sa Pilipinas at wala po silang trabaho at nag-aantay po sila na magkaroon po sila ng bagong kontrata, sinisingil pa rin po sila ng PhilHealth. So, ito

iyong mga bagay na dapat na ayusin, dapat na itama ng PhilHealth.

REP. BROSAS. Yes, yes, Mr. Speaker. Iyan po iyong tanong natin, ano. Kaya pinapa-review din natin talaga itong batas na Universal Health Care, particularly the National Health Insurance Program, tapos iyong contributions. Ito po iyong mga gusto nating malinawan kasi lumalabas, halimbawa, sa panahon ngayon, panahon ng pandemya, tapos magsisingil at magtataas ng premium o rate hike. Hindi naman po iyon makatao at saka hindi naman po iyon makatarungan sa kasalukuyan dahil hindi naman kakayanin ng ating mga overseas Filipino workers ngayon na inaalala pa nila iyong kanilang kalusugan, inaalala din nila iyong kalusugan ng kanilang mga kaanak dito sa Pilipinas.

Plus, in fact, isa din sa mga tanong nila ay covered naman sila ng health insurance sa labas e. So, doble ang ginagawa na pagsingil sa kanila dahil kailangan din nilang magbigay ng health insurance dito sa bansa natin samantalang hindi naman nila iyon magagamit dahil hindi naman covered ng PhilHealth iyong mga iba pang mga health benefits or packages sa ibang bansa, Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleague.

REP. SALO. Mr. Speaker, uulitin po natin. Paulit-ulit nating binabanggit po ito, na mas maganda po talaga kung maiintindihan ninyo ng mas malalim kung ano iyong pakahulugan po ng Universal Health Care. Uunahin ko pong sagutin iyong concern po ninyo na kailangan repasuhin iyong batas. I stand by my position that wala pong problema iyong batas. Ang may problema, doon sa IRR at pagdating po doon sa implementation na ginagawa ng PhilHealth.

Kasi kayo mismo ang nagsasabi na, yes, ngayon may pandemya po tayo, may moratorium tayo actually, under the Bayanihan To Heal As One Act, para doon sa pag-increase, para doon sa pagbayad. Bakit kailangan mong isabay po ito eh increase po ito? Hindi ba kasama iyon in the first place doon sa moratorium na nakasaad doon sa Bayanihan Act na ipinasa po natin? Kasama po iyon. So, supposedly, hindi po sila dapat mag-increase. Kaya sinasabi ko, it may actually be untimely. Number two, it may actually be even callous. Sa panahon na naghihirap iyong mga tao, doon tayo makikipagsabayan ng pagsingil ng mas malaki mula doon sa mga tao. Pero ang problema po doon, hindi po iyong batas, kung hindi iyong proseso na ginagawa po noong mga nakaupo po doon na nag-implement po noong batas. Iyon ang sinasabi po natin.

Doon naman po sa concern ninyo, Mr. Speaker, na, yes, hindi nila personal na mapapakinabangan iyong kanilang binabanggit, iyong pagbayad po nila, pero intindihin po natin kung ano po iyong konsepto, kung ano iyong pilosopiya dito na nakapaloob sa Universal Health Care—lahat ng Pilipino, kasama po iyong mga kamag-anak po nila na nandito, nanay, tatay po nila sa

Pilipinas, kadalasan wala po silang ibinabayad din sa PhilHealth pero covered po sila. So, ang konsepto po dito kasi sa Universal Health Care po natin, lahat po ng may kakayanan mag-contribute kasi, at the end of the day, matatapos din po iyong kontrata po nila doon sa abroad. So, yes, hindi po nila napakikinabangan ngayon iyong PhilHealth personally pero pagkatapos po ng kanilang kontrata po doon, na kadalasan tumatagal lang po naman po, on the average, ng three to four times iyong kanilang contract, pagbalik po nila dito, unemployed po sila and yet, they will still be covered by PhilHealth. Bakit? Kasi iyong mga tao na may kakayanan na magbayad at that particular point in time, sila naman po ang magso-shoulder po sa kanila.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Estrella). With the indulgence ...

REP. BROSAS. Yes, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Estrella). With the indulgence of the Lady and also of the Gentleman from KABAYAN, the Chair believes that the time of the distinguished Gentleman from KABAYAN has expired already.

The Majority Leader is recognized.

REP. BROSAS. Mr. Speaker, just to wind.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Estrella). Yes, proceed please.

REP. BROSAS. Just to wind up, I would like to finally say that we beg to disagree with the author, with our distinguished colleague, because we, especially in the Makabayan bloc, believe that there are sections in the law that need to be reviewed. Section 4, for example, mentions the “migrant workers, including their qualified dependents.” We should put qualified dependents with PhilHealth, Philippine health packages, and we should also put the employer’s share. We believe that there should be an employer’s share. We should put that in the law.

Lastly, Section 10, Premium Contributions, we would like to have a technical working group, for example, so that we can also be lenient kapag mayroon pong mga ganitong pandemya. So, mayroon pong ganoong mga leeway.

So, if you were saying na itong Universal Health Care Law, kung sinasabi po ng ating distinguished colleague na exact ito o tamang-tama ito, sa tingin po namin hindi dahil nga hindi nga siya umangkop sa panahon ngayon, and there are points na kailangan po nating pag-usapan at i-review.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much, distinguished colleague.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Estrella). Thank you.

REP. SALO. Mr. Speaker, puwede ba akong mag-wind up para sagutin lang po iyong mga concerns na binanggit po kanina?

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Estrella). The distinguished ...

REP. SALO. Mr. Speaker, ...

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Estrella). ... Gentleman from KABAYAN, ...

REP. SALO. ... tama po iyong binabanggit po natin, Mr. Speaker, lahat po ...

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Estrella). The distinguished ...

REP. SALO. ... ng mga concerns po nila, kaya pong ayusin po iyon doon sa IRR. Hindi po kailangang baguhin iyong batas.

REP. PALMA. Mr. Speaker, with the indulgence...

REP. SALO. For example, iyon pong share ng employers, kahit sa local employment, wala naman po iyan sa batas. It is just in the circulars po ng PhilHealth, and yet ini-implement po iyan na 50-50 share. So, hindi po natin kakailanganin na baguhin pa iyong batas para i-address lang po iyong concerns po nila. Pagdating po sa pandemic, may mga general principles of law po tayo na mag-a-apply without necessarily changing o amending po iyong batas ng UHC.

Muli, maraming salamat, Mr. Speaker, sa pagkakataon na ibinigay po ninyo at uulitin po natin: Universal Health Care, ito po iyong sagot po sa pangangailangan po ng bawat Pilipino upang magkaroon po tayo ng mas maayos na kaisipan sa ating concerns sa ating kalusugan, para sa lahat po, sa bawat Pilipino.

Maraming salamat po, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Estrella). Maraming salamat din po sa inyo, Gentleman from the KABAYAN Party-List.

The Majority Leader is recognized.

REP. PALMA. Mr. Speaker, we beg the indulgence of our colleagues, we are about to make a motion to extend the Privilege Hour. So, with that, anyway, Mr. Speaker, I move that we extend the Privilege Hour for another one hour.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Estrella). Is there any objection to the motion? (*Silence*) The Chair hears none; the Privilege Hour is hereby extended by ...

REP. PALMA. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Estrella). ... 30 minutes...

REP. PALMA. One hour.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Estrella). ...to one hour.

REP. PALMA. Yes, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, I move that we recognize Hon. Alberto “Bobby” D. Pacquiao of the OFW FAMILY Party-List, to make a simple manifestation with regard to the speech of Hon. Ron Salo.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Estrella). Honorable Pacquiao is recognized for his manifestation.

MANIFESTATION OF REP. PACQUIAO (A.)

REP. PACQUIAO (A.). Mr. Speaker, magandang hapon po sa ating lahat, lalong-lalo na sa aking mga kasamahan diyang sa Kongreso.

Mr. Speaker, gusto ko lang po i-put on record that the OFW FAMILY Party-List filed, on May 4, 2020, House Resolution No. 00817. Nais ng resolusyon na ito na agarang ma-review ang Republic Act No. 11223 or the Universal Health Care Act—RA No. 11223—particularly ang probisyon na nag-oobliga sa ating mga OFWs na magbayad ng premium contribution sa PhilHealth, Mr. Speaker.

Tutol po tayo sa malaking premium contribution na nadagdag na pasanin ng ating mga OFWs. Ito po ang kasalukuyan nakasalang sa Committee on Rules, Mr. Speaker. Sa ating lahat na nakikinig, kami po ay gumagawa po ng paraan para ma-resolve itong health care, sa PhilHealth care po na ito.

Mr. Speaker, magandang hapon po and salamat po. God bless.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Estrella). Maraming salamat din po sa inyo.

The Majority Leader is recognized.

REP. NIETO. Mr. Speaker, I move that we refer the speech of Hon. Ron Salo, including the interpellations and manifestation, to the Committee on Rules for its appropriate action.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Estrella). Is there any objection to the motion? (*Silence*) The Chair hears none; the motion is hereby approved.

The speech of the distinguished Gentleman from the KABAYAN Party-List, including all the interpellations and other remarks, are hereby referred to the Committee on Rules.

The Majority Leader is recognized.

REP. ZUBIRI. Mr. Speaker, I now move that the Gentleman from BAYAN MUNA, Rep. Carlos Isagani T. Zarate, be recognized to avail of the Privilege Hour, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Estrella). The distinguished Gentleman from the BAYAN MUNA Party-List is hereby recognized. Please proceed.

REP. PALMA. Your Honor, the mic of Honorable Zarate is on mute. Mr. Speaker, may we advise Hon. Caloy Zarate that his microphone is still on mute.

REP. ZARATE. Walang sound. Okay. Naririnig ninyo na po ba ako ngayon?

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Estrella). You may proceed now.

PRIVILEGE SPEECH OF REP. ZARATE

REP. ZARATE. Maraming salamat, G. Ispiker.

Noong Linggo po, kahit na nasa gitna ng patuloy pa rin na pananalasa ng pandemyang COVID-19 sa buong mundo, inalala pa rin natin, ng marami sa atin, ang ating mga mahal na ina at ang naging mahalagang papel na ginampanan nila sa ating buhay, ang papel na kanilang ginampanan para kung paanong ngayong araw na ito ay nandito tayo bilang mga Kinatawan ng ating mamamayan. Dahil malilimutan nga ba natin ang ating mga ina, G. Ispiker, kung sa kanilang mga sinapupunan tayo nagmula at sila rin ang nagluwal sa atin sa mundong ito? Marahil nga ay hindi natin sila malilimutan.

Kaya noong Linggo, kahit pa man may mga limitasyon, marami pa rin sa atin ang kasama mismo ang ating mga ina para ipagdiwang ang araw na iyon. Subalit noong Linggo rin, G. Ispiker, marami sa atin ang hindi na rin nakasama ang ating mga mahal na ina dahil marahil sila ay nasa ibang lugar at nalimitahan ng lockdown, at para rin sa marami, dahil namayapa na ang kanilang mga ina.

Isa sa hindi na nakasama noong Linggo, G. Ispiker, ang kanilang mahal na ina ay ang pamilyang Macusang ng Montevista, Davao de Oro. Noong ika-4 ng Mayo, si Adelaida “Nanay Ede” Macusang, 62 taong gulang, ay pumanaw dahil sa malubhang sakit habang siya ay nasa piitan. Siya ay isang person deprived of liberty or PDL at isa rin siyang political prisoner. Tulad nang

sinapit ng maraming bilanggo sa Pilipinas, G. Ispiker, si Nanay Ede, bagamat may malalang sakit sa puso at sa bato, ay hindi nakatanggap ng karampatang atensyong medikal. Kung sabagay, sa laya nga ay kulang ang pagamutan, ano pa kaya sa ating mga bilangguan na labis ang siksikan, walang sapat na doktor at nurse, at wala ring sapat na gamit?

Ngunit, G. Ispiker, mga kapwa ko Mambabatas, ang trahedyang pagkamatay ni Nanay Ede ay higit pang pinabigat ng mga sirkumstansya kung bakit ba siya nasa loob ng kulungan, kung bakit ba siya ibinilanggo. Si Nanay Ede, G. Ispiker, ay miyembro ng Montevista Farmers Association at isa sa mga namumunong organisador ng mga kapwa niya magsasaka sa Davao de Oro o ang dating nakilala nating Compostela Valley. Isa sa pinakaaping sektor ng ating lipunan ang mga magsasaka, na sa kabila ng kanilang napakalaking halaga sa buhay ng bawat isang Pilipino, lalung-lalo na sa panahong ito ng krisis, na kumain ng mga punla, ng mga bunga ng kanilang pagod at pawis.

Noong 2018 ay hinuli at inaresto si Nanay Ede ng mga elemento ng militar sa kaniyang tahanan. Kinasuhan si Nanay Ede ng illegal possession of firearms and explosives, ang padron ng kaso ng katulad niyang organisador na magsasaka at iba pang sinampahan ng gawa-gawang kaso upang patigilin siya sa kaniyang minahal ng gawain na organisahin ang mga magsasaka upang ipaglaban ang kanilang mga karapatan sa lupa. Naging mahalaga ang papel ni Nanay Ede sa pangunguna sa mga kumpanya para sa libreng pamamahagi ng lupa at iba pang laban sa mga neo-liberal na atake sa agrikultura. Isa si Nanay Ede sa higit 600 na bilangong pulitikal sa kasalukuyan sa iba't ibang kulungan sa ating bansa, G. Ispiker, at siya ang pinakaunang political prisoner na pumanaw sa loob ng nasa panahon tayo ng pandemya ng COVID-19.

G. Ispiker, mga kapwa ko mambabatas, ang usapin ng pagkalat ng nakamamatay na sakit na ito ay umaabot na sa pagpapalaya sa mga bilanggo sa iba't ibang panig ng daigdig. Maging ang United Nations ay nananawagan sa pagpapalaya ng mga bilanggo, lalung-lalo na ang mga tinatawag na vulnerable, ang mga nakakatanda, ang mga buntis, ang mga bata, at iba pang mga bulnerableng populasyon ng ating mga piitan. Ang pagpapaluwag sa ating mga kulungan ay napakahalaga sa kalagayan na ang Pilipinas ay ang may pinakamataas na congestion rate sa buong mundo, nasa 605 percent. Ang siksikang mga kulungan, kasama na ang labis na kakulangan ng gamit pangkalusugan, kabilang na ang kakulangan din sa pagkain, malinis na tubig at maging sabon, ay nagtala ng mas mataas na death rate o tantos ng pagkamatay sa mga bilanggo sa ating kulungan. Liban pa rito, 75.1 percent ng mga inmate na nasa loob ng kulungan ngayon ay ang mga tinatawag na "pre-trial detainees." Ibig sabihin, hindi pa sila konbiktado sa mga sala o sa mga krimen na

isinampa sa kanila ngunit sa kasamaang palad, sila ay nakasadlak na sa hindi makataong kalagayan ng ating mga kulungan.

G. Ispiker, ayon na mismo sa Bureau of Jail Management and Penology o BJMP, ang namamatay sa loob ng mga selda ay nasa 300 hanggang 800 sa isang taon. Ibig sabihin, isa hanggang dalawa ang namamatay sa kulungan. Imposible ang physical distancing, isolation at iba pang paraan upang mapigil ang pagkalat ng coronavirus sa mga bilangguan sa ating bansa. Halimbawa, G. Ispiker, ang kapasidad ng Cebu City Jail ay nasa 523 lamang pero ang nakakulong ngayon sa Cebu City Jail ay umaabot na sa 6,604 inmates na nagsisiksikan dito. Tumataginting na 1,262 percent ang occupancy level ng Cebu City Jail. Noong katapusan nga ng Abril, April 30, ay 332 inmates na ang naitalang may impeksiyon ng coronavirus na nagdulot ng sakit na COVID-19. Samu't saring apela, sulat at panawagan na nakarating na rin sa Korte Suprema at iba pang mga ahensiya sa pamahalaan, G. Ispiker, upang payagan ang pagpapalaya ng mga bilanggo sa ngalan ng karapatang pantao at kompasyon. Ito naman ay dininig na ng Kamara de Representante at ng Korte Suprema na kalaunan ay nagpalabas ng mga regulasyon na tinataya daw na makapagpapalaya ng halos 10,000 persons deprived of liberty o mga nakakulong. Gayunpaman, batay sa mabilis na pagkalat ng virus, G. Ispiker, at sa malubhang kalagayan ng ating mga bilangguan, ang proseso ng pagpapalaya sa mga bilanggo ay nananatili pa ring mabagal hanggang sa kasalukuyan.

Sa ulat na ibinigay sa Kongreso, sinabi ni Pangulong Duterte na nasa proseso na ang Bureau of Pardons and Parole at ang Bureau of Corrections ng pagsasaayos ng prison records. Nasa 200 pa lamang na persons deprived of liberty o mga bilanggo ang nasasailalim ng review at 100 PDL pa lamang ang matatalakay kada linggo. Liban pa rito, G. Ispiker, sa inilabas na kautusan para pababain ang mga bail sa halagang P20,000, ito ay hindi pa rin sapat dahil ang P20,000 ay mataas pa rin, lalo na sa mga mahihirap na mga bilanggo, at karamihan dito ay malaking bahagi ng ating populasyon, na ang ating mga bilanggo ay mahihirap. Mananatili pa rin sila sa bilangguan dahil sa kawalan ng salapi na pambayad ng piyansa dahil dito.

Gayundin, G. Ispiker, hindi pa rin makakasali ang katulad ni Nanay Ede sa mga palalayain kung siya ay nabubuhay pa. Tulad ng mga kagaya niyang bilangong pulitikal, bagamat may edad na at may mga malubhang sakit, ay mabibigat na non-bailable na mga krimen o kaso ang ipinataw sa kanila. Sa kaso ni Nanay Ede, ang ipinataw o ang ipinatong na kaso sa kaniya ay illegal possession of explosives na isang non-bailable offense. Kaya naman ang panawagan natin sa Kamara de Representante, sa Kapulungang ito, luwagan pa ang mga tarangkahan para sa pagpapalaya ng mga bilanggo. Ito ay sa ngalan ng ating pinagsaluhang pagkatao, sa

kolektibong paglaban sa COVID-19 at sa ngalan ng hustisya.

G. Ispiker, sa mga institusyon ng ating lipunan, sa ehekutibo, lehislatura at maging sa hudikatura, ang ating panawagan sa panahong ito ng malubhang krisis na dala ng pandemya ng COVID-19, nananawagan tayo na bigyan ng mas mabigat na pagkiling, ng mga mas makataong mga konsiderasyon, upang maisalba at mailigtas natin sa kapahamakan ang ating mga kababayan, o kung sila man ay nasa loob ng mga piitan o kulungan, o kung sila man ay nasa labas subalit nakipagbuno naman sa kundisyong mala-piitan dahil sa nangyayaring lockdown or community quarantine at nakikipagbuno lalo't higit sa kahirapan ng buhay.

Kaya, G. Ispiker, kung totoo man na “We Heal As One,” hindi lingid dito ang mga Pilipinong nakapiit at sa mga kawani na nakaatas sa kanila—sila rin ay hindi dapat dapuan ng sakit. Wala dapat sintensiyang COVID-19 ang dapat sapitin kahit ninuman, G. Ispiker. Kaya muli, G. Ispiker, bilang panghuli, ang ating panawagan: Palayain ang mga bulnerableng populasyon sa loob ng ating mga bilangguan! Palayain ang mga bilanggong pulitikal!

Maraming salamat po, G. Ispiker, at magandang hapon po sa ating lahat.

REP. ZUBIRI. Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Estrella). Maraming salamat din po sa inyo.

The Majority Leader is recognized.

REP. ZUBIRI. Mr. Speaker, I move that we refer the speech of Hon. Carlos Isagani T. Zarate to the Committee on Rules for its appropriate action.

I so move, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Estrella). Is there any objection? (*Silence*) The Chair hears none; the speech of the distinguished Gentleman from BAYAN MUNA Party-List is hereby referred to the Committee on Rules.

Yes, the Majority Leader is recognized.

REP. ZUBIRI, Mr. Speaker, I now move that the Gentleman from Baguio City, Hon. Mark O. Go, be recognized to avail of the Privilege Hour.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Estrella). The Gentleman from Baguio City is hereby recognized. Please proceed.

PRIVILEGE SPEECH OF REP. GO (M.)

REP. GO (M.). Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I stand on a matter of personal and collective

privilege to bring forward the state and aftermath of Philippine tertiary education in this time of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mr. Speaker, Majority Leader, my esteemed colleagues in the House of Representatives, I wish you all a good and productive afternoon as most of us are kept safe within the walls of our homes during this unusual time brought about by the crisis. Needless to say, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have changed the world in the past few months, disrupting the way we live and greatly challenging our perception of normal. It has truly been a trying period not just for our nation but for the rest of the world as systems, governments, businesses and people struggle to adapt to the difficulties of the situation and the uncertainties that lie ahead of us. No one could have truly expected the onslaught of the pandemic and how it would interfere with families, homes and communities.

As the health experts say, the crisis, the scale and the extent of how it has challenged our society as well as our health care system, is unprecedented. Nevertheless, the situation is not hopeless. While this public health crisis may be a bleak period in our lives, the valiant efforts of different sectors in our community who work together provide us hope from our health care workers at the frontlines of the pandemic.

The general public which had mobilized for donations of PPEs, food, bikes and other necessities as well as our tertiary education sector that lent their facilities to be converted into the much-needed quarantine areas, and donated their skills and resources to aid in the battle against the virus by producing additional face masks and shields, alcohol and disinfecting booths—this ties in with another realization brought about by this pandemic: one consequence causes a ripple effect and spreads to others, for better or for worse.

As legislators, we have been relentlessly navigating through uncharted territory as we work towards providing real and significant solutions that will guide the nation in this crisis. Understandably, much of the government’s efforts have been geared toward augmenting the resources of our health care system, its facilities and personnel whose needs are becoming more imminent by the hour as they deal with the deluge of cases in hospitals whose capacities are way overbooked, all the while taking precautionary measures for their own safety and welfare. However, there is no escaping the reality that this public health threat has crippled not just our health care system but other sectors such as education.

Mr. Speaker, since the quarantine has been implemented, schools, colleges and universities nationwide had suddenly grounded to a halt as classes were suspended and students were sent home, while faculty and personnel struggled with the necessary

adjustments that were needed. The impending risk of mass transmission, a prolonged quarantine period and mandatory physical distancing meant an entire interruption of our educational system and an impending paradigm shift in methods of instruction, among other pertinent matters. Educators across the nation brought forth some very valid concerns: Do we have to end the semester now? When will we reopen for classes? How do we sustain faculty members, administration personnel and workers in our employ while classes are suspended in the midst of the lockdown?

Even while confined within the corners of my home, as Chair of the House Committee on Higher and Technical Education, I have constantly kept in touch with other committee members, stakeholders, and our allied agencies such as CHED and TESDA, as consultations were made regarding the issues and challenges they face as institutions, and possible concerns and measures we can undertake in order to address these concerns. I was also present during the UP Board of Regents meeting via Zoom last April 16, as we deliberated on the proposal of the UP President's Advisory Council to end the academic semester. I also called for and presided over a special committee meeting last April 30 where we were able to hear some valuable insights from our stakeholders and valued resource persons as we discussed the current situation surrounding our higher educational institutions and tech-voc institutions in the midst of this crisis.

As these institutions have shared with us some of the most imminent challenges our institutions face, notably our state universities and colleges, and local universities and colleges, they include the lack of technological infrastructure and dedicated ICT funding and facilities in order to carry out online learning, especially for disadvantaged students who live in rural areas and lack access to regular connectivity. There is also the issue of the lack of training among faculty members to facilitate distance learning, as well as the more pressing issue of faculty members and students stranded on campus and abroad in their internships in the midst of the lockdown with very limited resources. This is also notwithstanding university employees and students who have contracted the virus.

Moreover, the financial impact the pandemic has inflicted may also likely see a bigger number of dropouts. Figures show that almost 60,000 students are projected to drop out of school even in our public colleges and universities across the country, as parents' financial incapacities to support their children's education may force the students to look for employment in order to help their families. Meanwhile, our private institutions have expressed their intent and readiness to start distance learning as they grapple with the cessation of their cash flow while the opening of the new academic year remains uncertain, as there is already significant

revenue loss from even moving the opening of the calendar year from June to August or September, as 74 percent of these private schools still use the old academic calendar.

Many of our private schools risk closure as a result of the pandemic, potentially leaving hundreds of thousands of faculty and non-faculty employees jobless and even more students displaced as a result of these closures. Those employed by private schools on a "no-work, no-pay" basis are even more heavily impacted, as well as contractual, part-time, and job order workers of higher education institutions who are not covered by the Social Amelioration Program. Even our technical-vocational institutions or the TVIs have taken a hit with all 4,044 private TVIs across the nation expressing that they have been affected by the quarantine period, along with 16,863 trainers, 3,329 private competency assessors and 1,954 private assessment centers.

According to TESDA, although they have seen a rise in online enrollment during this period, almost 120,000 scholarship slots have been affected as a result of the P2.1 billion pesos worth of scholarship funds being re-appropriated to the SAP. This being said, the CHED and TESDA have reiterated their commitment to supporting our HEIs and tech-voc institutions, with CHED assisting our HEIs in carrying out flexible learning especially in preparation for the next academic year.

Flexible learning denotes a combination of online and offline learning strategies. This would include collaborating with respective LGUs on the delivery of learning modules and other instructional materials, and training faculty to utilize these flexible learning options. CHED will also forge agreements with other government agencies such as the DICT in order to enhance interconnectivity between administrators, faculty, students and staff, as well as working with relevant agencies such as OWWA, DOLE and DFA for the safe return of our students from their internships and on-the-job trainings.

I have always said, time and again, that it has always been my belief that education is the great equalizer. A strong learning foundation that prizes competence, ingenuity and critical thinking is crucial to stronger nation-building, skills that prove even more necessary and pertinent in the face of this pandemic. However, with the current difficulties our public and private institutions face, the role of education as an equalizer is being challenged in these times, as the impediments surrounding resources and infrastructure only serve to further aggravate the already wide inequality gap and learning.

Now, the very sector is at risk of crumbling as schools risk closing, and the JO and the CO workers could be jobless, should the JO hiring ban push through. It is of paramount importance that these concerns are

heard and addressed with urgency. As higher educational institutions have roughly a month left to transition to the new normal in delivering quality higher and tertiary education, concrete action and solutions need to be taken. The impending closure of these private schools, the loss of income for employees across the board, and the massive number of potential dropouts have serious social and economic implications.

It is crucial that we are able to act swiftly and with compassion as we think about the massive number of students and workers in the education sector who may be left hanging. Given the significant findings that transpired during the special committee meeting of the Committee on Higher and Technical Education and all other meetings with the agencies and institutions concerned, and as Chair of the Committee on Higher and Technical Education, I would like to enjoin my esteemed colleagues to swiftly implement and act on recommended interventions and policies that resonate the most with our stakeholders.

It is crucial to establish a special recovery assistance program for our tertiary education sector as our various public and private institutions strive to adapt and recover from the crisis. While private schools may likely be better equipped to carry out online and web-based education, currently only about 20 percent of state universities and colleges are ready for online learning with the majority having limited ICT infrastructures. This will also address our colleges and universities' needs as they shift to flexible learning, mainly in supporting the addition of technological infrastructures especially for our public institutions. The program will seek appropriation for the upgrade or rehabilitation of digital infrastructure of public and private HEIs and our tech-voc institutions as well as administering faculty and trainers' capability building. Moreover, it is also pressing that we establish provisions for assistance and aid for faculty and employees of higher educational institutions and TVIs affected by ECQ whether or not they are covered by the Social Amelioration Program, including part-time and contractual employees. This will also cover employees of private institutions, providing reimbursements and subsidies for these colleges and universities in order to mitigate the impact of the revenue loss.

According to the CHED, P3.6 billion worth of funds for the Tertiary Education Subsidy or TES have been released to help allay students' financial difficulties for the coming school year. While this news is definitely welcome, it is not enough to cover the needs of students as we potentially face close to 60,000 dropouts.

Moreover, the shift to online platforms, even in the blended learning environment, may alienate students from the low-income households who may have limited connectivity. Thus, I would also like to propose the extension of a zero-interest student loan program for

financially distressed students and faculty of public and private institutions which will cover tuition and other school fees, as well as the purchase of necessary electronic devices and connectivity tools to keep themselves abreast of the new learning system.

As majority of our sectors migrate to online platforms in order to adjust to the new normal, it is also prudent for us to help create lending programs for HEIs and TVIs to address their needs and difficulties related to the crisis. Our private colleges and universities generate thousands of jobs nationwide and produce graduates that become part of our local recruitment pool each year contributing to national productivity. Thus, the educational sector is allied with the country's economic interest and it only stands to reason that this sector be integrated with an economic stimulus package that seeks to revive our economic activity by providing support to our nation's entrepreneurs.

Moreover, I would also like to urge my distinguished colleagues to ensure the release of funds already appropriated in the 2020 General Appropriations Act for the programs of the CHED and the TESDA. The road to quality and inclusive education has always been a long battle, and the worldwide pandemic has added to its complications, creating fear and anxiety over our uncertain future. However, as precarious as the situation may be, we cannot afford to be shortsighted in our plans. Our goal is not only to address immediate short-term concerns and to guide the development of policies for colleges and universities as they navigate the pandemic, but also to continue in our goal of creating lasting reforms that would uplift the state and the quality of our tertiary education so it meets the globally relevant standards of the 21st century.

For Congress, it is incumbent upon us not only to advocate for quality education, but also to ensure the welfare of all as the new normal is upon us.

Again, thank you very much at magandang hapon po sa inyong lahat.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Estrella). The Majority Leader is recognized.

REP. ZUBIRI. Mr. Speaker, I move that we recognize the Lady from KABATAAN Party-List, Hon. Sarah Jane I. Elago, for her interpellation.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Estrella). The Lady from KABATAAN Party-List is hereby recognized.

Please proceed.

REP. ELAGO. Maraming salamat, G. Ispiker. First and foremost, I would like to thank the honorable Rep. Mark O. Go, the Chairperson of the Committee on Higher and Technical Education. for standing firm with

tertiary education stakeholders against the proposed 35 percent budget cut of the DBM in the budget allocation of Republic Act No. 10931, Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education.

Kinakailangan po natin na mariin na manindigan na hindi po pagbawas sa pondo sa edukasyon na apektado rin ng krisis ng COVID-19 pandemic, kung hindi dapat pa ngang dagdagan dahil sa laki at importante ng gampanin nito sa assistance sa ating mga health care frontliners sa pamamagitan ng produksiyon ng iba't ibang tipo ng mga materyales, ng mga suplays na makakatulong po sa pagpapalakas ng ating health system. Kaya naman ho ang Representasyon na ito ay nagagalak rin na marinig na ang ating Chair ay lubos ang commitment sa pag-a-address po ng mga urgent at immediate concerns ng ating mga stakeholders.

Mayroon lang po akong ilang clarificatory questions. Will the Gentleman from Baguio City be open to this interpellation, Mr. Speaker?

REP. GO (M.). Mr. Speaker, I will be honored to answer the questions of Rep. Sarah Elago.

REP. ELAGO. Maraming salamat po. Ang isa pong katanungan ko ay nakalagay po sa inyong presentasyon. Do we have to end the semester now? At sa katunayan, G. Ispiker, maski po ang CHED ay nag-advise na magkaroon na ng pagtatapos ng mga online classes at exams by April 30, ngunit ang kalagayan po sa ating mga institutions of higher education ay ganito.

Just three days ago, Mr. Speaker, may mga nagpadala po sa atin ng liham na nag-uulat, and I quote, "May exam pa po kami online ngayong linggo, May 11-16, 2020. Mangyayari po, if failed ka, INC or incomplete o no grade ang ilalagay sa card mo. Paano naman po iyong wala talagang internet connectivity o gadget?"

Isa pa, G. Ispiker—"I am a fifth year Civil Engineering student and for me, online learning is nothing really—it is not working. It does not really teach us students anything."

"Napakahirap po sa mga taong katulad ko na hindi afford ngayon ang internet o makalabas pa dahil nga sa mga distancing measures at mga public health measures na kailangan nating sundan. Sa gitna po ng pandemya na ito, maski po pang-load ay nahihirapan ako. Ako po ay isang working student at no work, no pay ngayon. Isang rakitero at wala talagang inaasahan na mapagkukunan sa ngayon. Sa totoo lang po, ako po ay nababaon na sa utang."

Ito lamang po ay ang ilan, ano, doon sa mga pinadala po sa atin na concerns na hanggang ngayon po ay nagpapatuloy pa ang online exams sa kabila ng marami po sa mga materials, ni hindi po nila ma-download dahil iyong iba ay kailangan pang lumabas ng kanilang mga subdivision, magpunta sa mga kakilala na may internet

connectivity, mag-risk na lumabas pa ng bahay, at sa gitna ng krisis na ito, dinadala ang ganoong bigat ng pag-iisip kung ano ba ang uunahin. Iyong compliance sa kaniyang online exams ba o iyong kalusugan, ano, na nahihirapan ka na isipin, kung lalabas ka ba sa kabila ng sinabi na dapat huwag nang lumabas?

Ito po iyong mga kalituhan—iyong mga confusion na bumabagabag sa maraming mga estudyante na magpasahanggang ngayon ay humaharap pa sa online exams. Maaari po bang malaman, G. Ispiker, kung ano na po iyong mga interbensyon ng ating komite at ng ating Chairperson hinggil po sa nagpapatuloy pang mga online exams sa kabila po ng advisory na dapat po by April 30, tapos na ang online classes? What about all those students who cannot fully participate digitally and who have not attended their online lectures and classes because of lack of internet connectivity?

REP. GO (M.). Mr. Speaker, marami pong salamat, Congresswoman Elago, sa inyong pagpapaliwanag at sa mga binanggit ninyong mga karanasan na na-experience ng ating mga estudyante. Ako po ay nakikisimpatya sa kanila at sa kanilang mga concerns. Kagaya po ng aking nabanggit, noong ako po ay nag-preside ng meeting natin, na sa ganitong mga problema nila ay gagawa po tayo ng paraan para matulungan natin sila.

Batay po sa isang survey na ginawa, halimbawa sa isang pamantasan, nabanggit nila na maliit na porsiyento lang iyong walang internet connectivity. At the same time, kung wala mang connectivity, ang kanilang nagiging problema, o kung mayroon man silang connectivity, ang kanilang problema ay iyong pambayad ng kanilang data. So, ito ang mga bagay na napagalaman natin sa ating pag-uusap doon sa ating komite at ito ang gusto nating tulungan, itong mga estudyante na hindi kaya and at the same time, sila ay kulang ang kanilang imprastruktura para magampanan nila iyong kanilang tungkulin bilang estudyante dahil dito—dito nga sa ginagawa ng mga iba't ibang mga unibersidad at mga kolehiyo sa kanilang mga estudyante.

Ngayon, kailangang malaman natin, specifically, kung saan itong mga estudyanteng ito at saka tayo ay kakausap sa mga iba't ibang unibersidad, lalong-lalo na sa mga state universities and colleges, para matulungan natin sila. We need to identify these people, kasi ang nabanggit ng ating Chair ng Komisyon, kasi mayroon silang otonomiya iyong bawat unibersidad. So, ang gagawin natin dito, kung ma-identify natin iyong mga problemang iyan sa bawat university, we will call the attention of these universities and at the same time, try to see how this Committee can help these students. Dito sa ating binanggit ngayon, tayo ay mayroong isang panukalang batas na tutulungan itong mga ganitong mga estudyante na nangangailangan ng suporta financially in terms of iyong connectivity nila sa kanilang pag-aaral. So, ito iyong gagawin natin.

REP. ELAGO. Maraming salamat, G. Ispiker. Mayroon po tayong tala nitong mga estudyante na nangangailangan. Hindi lang po mga estudyante, pati din po mga faculty members. Mariin ninyo po—maliwanag ninyo rin pong naipaliwanag at ibinahagi doon sa inyong talumpati ang kalagayan ng ating mga stakeholders, hindi lang iyong mga estudyante, faculty, support personnel, kundi maging ang ating mga institutions of learning na nangangailangan talaga ng ayuda sa panahong ito.

Ngayon, G. Ispiker, ibinahagi rin po ng ating CHTE Chairperson na nag-shift na sa online ang current academic term sa mga eskuwelahan mula po nang magkaroon ng suspension ng klase. Nagbago na po ang moda ng learning. Nagkaroon ng shift sa online classes at ngayon po, hindi lahat ng mga schemes naman sa grading ay nagbago na rin.

Ang mga katanungan po ng ating mga estudyante, paano po natin masusukat ang academic performance ng mga learners sa panahon na sila po ay nasa ilalim ng mga sirkumstansiya na wala sa kanilang kontrol—iyong mabagal na internet, iyong kawalan ng gadget, iyong walang materials, at katulad po ng inyong nasabi, wala pa pong training iyong karamihan ng ating mga faculty sa distance and blended learning? Ganoon din po, hindi po lahat ng mga SUCs at mga private HEIs natin ay handa sa remote at blended na learning. Sa ganitong pamamaraan, may rekomendasyon po ba kayo hinggil sa mga pagbabago sa grading schemes?

Ang nangyayari po kasi ngayon, ipinaubaya na ng CHED sa mga universities and colleges kung paano ang kanilang grading at promotion scheme, samantalang ang panawagan po ng mga estudyante—as for KABATAAN Party-List, we are advocating for a universal promotion system and under this universal promotion system, students could receive credit for all their subjects and a “P” or “Passed” reflected in their transcripts. Ito po ay sa kadahilanan that students now, our learners, are performing and operating under tremendously difficult circumstances beyond their control. Our call is to focus on learning na hindi po doon sa mismong grading numerically and then just work on the preparation to strengthen remedial efforts, na kung paano po natin hahabulin iyong mga dapat pang habulin pagdating sa mga learning capacities and competencies ng ating mga estudyante.

Mr. Speaker, may we know the position of the honorable Chairperson with regard to the promotion or the grading scheme, and the current academic term of our higher education institutions?

REP. GO (M.). Mr. Speaker, thank you for the question, Congresswoman Sarah. You know, many schools have already ended their classes this April and some are just finishing some work. Probably, before the end of this month or middle part of this month, halos

lahat ng klase ay matatapos na iyan. Just like what I had stated earlier, ang desisyon ng ating Commission ay to leave this to the different universities and colleges. There are some colleges na probably might adopt iyong “Pass or Fail,” wala namang fail dito at wala nang numerical grading na ibibigay sa mga estudyante. But moving forward, I think it is really incumbent upon us in the Committee on Higher and Technical Education to review the most effective grading system that we should recommend to the different state universities and colleges in view of the new normal that we will have even after the lifting itong either ECQ or GCQ, so, ito iyong magiging challenge natin. I am very sure that the different state universities and colleges have started looking forward and thinking of what will be the best approach to ensure that we achieve the highest level of quality of education in the respective universities and/or colleges.

So, I am with you that there is really a need to explore your suggestion, that it should be, you know—iyong “Passed” na lang ang ibibigay natin sa kanila. I think some, just like in UP, although they have maintained the grading system for this second semester of School Year 2019 and 2020, but if a college believes that it should be “Passed” at walang numerical grade, we leave that to them as long as there is, you know, information for the Board of Regents to consider.

So, iyon ang position natin diyari. At this point in time, we need to really look deeper into this and the possible ramification of whatever change we will have in terms of the grading system.

REP. ELAGO. Mr. Speaker, given the urgency of this matter, can we ask the Chairperson if he is willing to include the review of grading and promotion schemes in our upcoming CHED meeting this Thursday, Mr. Speaker?

REP. GO (M.). Yes. Mr. Speaker, I think I would be happy to listen to, you know, to the proponent of this particular proposal and it is good if we can listen, you know, to the pros and cons of this particular proposal. Let me ask,...

REP. ELAGO. Marami pong...

REP. GO (M.). ...have you filed this—related to this one, Congresswoman Sarah?

REP. ELAGO. Yes, Mr. Speaker. We filed a bill on the call for universal promotion policy and ending the current academic term and having a framework for reopening of schools, while we are ensuring that the health, safety and well-being of all learners and educators remain the top priority of our kababayans.

But we have not, you know, filed a bill. It is a resolution calling on the House of Representatives to act on this issue.

REP. GO (M.). Yes, Mr. Speaker, we will schedule this resolution, if not in our next meeting, the week after, I mean, the week after next week or after this week.

REP. ELAGO. G. Ispiker, puwede po bang this week mapakinggan na po natin, para lang din po sa lahat ng hindi pa nagtatapos ang current academic term at lahat po ng extended pa, iyong kanilang confusion, na dahil wala pong malinaw na direksyon na kung ano na ang mangyayari sa kanilang promotion scheme?

Gaano ito ka-urgent, G. Ispiker? Iba-iba po ang hakbang ng universities and colleges na ginagawa tungkol sa promotion at grading. Ang Ateneo, they shortened their semester and they mass promoted their students. So lahat po, may “P” or “Passed” grade na, and then the focus would be on the adult classes and then there is a guarantee that students can also sit-in in subjects that they think kailangan pa po ng mas marami pang pag-aaral o pagkatuto. Ang Mindanao State University, nag-announce na rin po ng mass promotion; pati ang Pamantasan ng Lungsod ng Maynila.

Ang mahirap lang po dito, iyong mga estudyante, nagtatanong din sila paano ito makakaapekto, in the future, kapag sila ay mag-a-apply sa graduate studies, sa kanilang employment, o sa iba pang matters na may kinalaman sa paggamit ng kanilang academic performance.

Katulad po ng nasabi ng ating Chairperson, “education is a great equalizer,” ganoon din po iyong campus. Sa loob ng campus, kayo ay may iisang set ng mga facilities: library, WiFi, Internet connectivity, iisang classroom, amenities na available sa ating mga learners. Ngunit ngayon po iba-iba na iyan—iba-ibang sitwasyon sa kanilang mga bahay, iba-ibang mga nararanasan na sirkumstansya dulot ng kawalan ng trabaho ng kanilang magulang, o kaya naman kapag working student ka, wala kang source of income. So, dahil po sa iba-ibang mga circumstances na iyan ay talagang marami pong nananawagan, at ang kabataan po ay nananawagan ng isang nationally-coordinated response sa education. Hindi lang kailangan ang learning modes ang magbago. Dahil nagbago ang learning modes, kailangan rin po ng mga pagbabago pagdating sa kung paano natin tinitingnan ang pagbibigay ng grado sa ating mga estudyante.

Iyon lamang po, G. Ispiker. Hangad ko at nananawagan ako sa ating CHTE Chairperson na pakinggan ang hamon ng ating learning community na pag-usapan na ang grading at promotion schemes sa mga eskuwelahan na apektado ng kinakaharap nating krisis ng COVID-19 pandemic.

Maraming salamat, G. Ispiker, at kay CHTE Chair, Cong. Mark Go.

REP. GO (M.). Maraming salamat, Mr. Speaker, and Cong. Sarah Elago.

I would assure you that if we cannot discuss this on Thursday, we will do it next week because we have a joint committee meeting with the Committee on Basic Education this Thursday and this is not part of the agenda. But in our next week’s meeting, I would like to assure you that we will include this resolution of yours in the discussion. Thank you.

REP. ELAGO. Alright, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Kung next week na po pag-usapan iyong sa grading, puwede po ba na sa darating na Thursday, pag-usapan po natin kung ano po iyong kapalaran noong mga hindi makakapag-online exam this week? Hindi naman po natin gustong sabihin na lumabas pa sila o mag-risk pa po sila ng kanilang kalusugan dahil lang po sa hindi sila makapag-online exam, at ma-lift na po iyong confusion and iyong burden noong pagaalala at pressure sa kanila, sa ating mga kababayan na learners.

REP. GO (M.). Mr. Speaker, puwedeng isama natin iyan sa “other matters” para ma-discuss natin initially, but iyong na-suggest mong resolution, we will discuss this probably next Thursday. Definitely, your suggestion that we can initially discuss, as far as this semester in terms of the grading, puwede nating pag-usapan iyan this coming Thursday. We will include it in the “other matters.”

REP. ELAGO. Maraming salamat, Mr. Speaker. Cong. Mark Go, thank you po.

REP. GO (M.). Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Estrella). Maraming salamat din po sa inyo, binibining Representante ng KABATAAN Party-List. Also, thank you so much, Mr. Chairman, the Gentleman from Baguio City.

The Majority Leader is recognized.

REP. ZUBIRI. Mr. Speaker, I move that we recognize our Minority Leader, Hon. Bienvenido M. Abante Jr., for his interpellation.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Estrella). The Minority Leader is hereby recognized. Please proceed.

REP. ABANTE. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I would like to thank Cong. Mark Go. Siya po, Mr. Speaker, ay pinsan ko po ito e—ako “abante,” “go” siya, kaya mag-pinsan kami.

REP. GO (M.). Thank you.

REP. ABANTE. Anyway, thank you very much, Cong. Mark Go for your privilege speech, and I would like you to know that I am fully supportive of everything that you said. There is only one thing that I would like to say. During our TWG meeting with the resource speaker, Sec. Sonny Dominguez, and also, Secretary Dominguez was interviewed by Speaker Alan Peter Cayetano and he made mention that he is recommending—alam po naman natin na ang state universities, wala nang bayad ang kanilang tuition pero siyempre iyong mga estudyante, gumagastos pa rin sa mga libro and other things. Sabi ni Secretary Dominguez, he is recommending a one billion peso loan package for private schools for the Study Now and Pay Later Program, which is a welcome development

So, what do you think of that, Mr. Speaker?

REP. GO (M.). Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Minority Leader.

Alam po ninyo, mayroon akong na-file na bill at iyong package na nirerekomenda natin is more than one billion pesos.

REP. ABANTE. Okay.

REP. GO (M.). Support not only our students but also our teachers, both in the public and private universities and colleges, including those local universities and colleges.

REP. ABANTE. Okay. Siguro, Mr. Speaker, itong recommendation ni Secretary Sonny would be taken from another kind of funding. Mas maganda na po ito.

REP. GO (M.). Opo.

REP. ABANTE. I think, siguro iyong magiging bill natin diyan, karagdagan na lang for whatever Secretary Dominguez would recommend.

REP. GO (M.). Yes.

REP. ABANTE. Ang kuwestyon na lang diyan, Mr. Speaker, ay kung kailan ito ma-i-implement. Siguro, with the kind indulgence of the Chairperson of the Committee on Higher Education, sana po if you could be able to reach out to Secretary Dominguez to find out when this will be implemented because I am sure that all our students in private schools and even in the state universities would need this.

Maraming salamat po, Mr. Speaker.

REP. GO (M.). Yes.

REP. ABANTE. Thank you, distinguished colleague.

REP. GO (M.). Thank you very much po. I think we will work with Secretary Dominguez to ensure na itong sinabi niyang one billion pesos can be utilized asap.

Marami pong salamat.

REP. ABANTE. Opo.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Estrella). Thank you, Minority Leader.

The Majority Leader is recognized.

REP. ZUBIRI. Mr. Speaker, I move that we refer the speech of Hon. Mark Go to the Committee on Rules for its appropriate action.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Estrella). Is there any objection? (*Silence*) The Chair hears none; the motion is hereby approved.

The speech of the distinguished Chairman of the Committee on Higher Education, including all its interpellations and comments, is now hereby referred to the Committee on Rules.

The Majority Leader is recognized.

REP. ZUBIRI. Mr. Speaker, I move that the Gentleman from the Lone District of Sarangani, Hon. Rogelio “Ruel” D. Pacquiao, be recognized to avail of the Privilege Hour.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Estrella). Yes, the distinguished Gentleman from the Lone District of Sarangani, Hon. Rogelio “Ruel” D. Pacquiao, is hereby recognized. Please proceed.

REP. PALMA. Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Estrella). The Majority Leader is recognized.

REP. PALMA. Before we allow the Gentleman from Sarangani to continue, may I move that we extend the Privilege Hour for another 30 minutes?

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Estrella). Is there any objection to the motion? (*Silence*) The Chair hears none; the motion is hereby approved.

The Privilege Hour is extended for another 30 long minutes.

The Gentleman from Sarangani may now proceed.

PRIVILEGE SPEECH OF REP. PACQUIAO (R.)

REP. PACQUIAO (R.). Mr. Speaker, my fellow Representatives, ladies and gentlemen, magandang hapon po sa ating lahat. Bago ang lahat, nais ko

pong batiin ang aking mga kasamahan sa Mababang Kapulungan sa atin pong patuloy na pagganap sa ating tungkulin sa kabila ng COVID-19 pandemic, since many of my colleagues, heeding the call of duty, whether through physical or online participation, is truly encouraging.

Mr. Speaker, this is the challenge of our lifetime. Just a few months ago, we are living our normal lives and the economy was at its strongest. Now, as if the damage done is not yet enough, this pandemic threatens to kill thousands more of our countrymen and wipe out the gains we had achieved all these years. All of us, regardless of our station in life are anxious that the COVID-19 disease might strike our families sooner or later, yet, amidst that prevailing anxiety, our people have shown extraordinary courage.

Our medical frontliners deserve the highest admiration for tirelessly and selflessly putting their lives on the line to ensure that the sick are given the best care possible. Our uniformed personnel have been rendering countless hours of service to enforce social distancing and maintain peace and order. Barangay officials, barangay health workers and our workers in essential industries are working round the clock to make sure our supplies are continuously replenished.

I must also mention the great efforts of the private sector, the generosity of which continues to fill the gaps the government inevitably commits. Napakarami po ng ating mga kababayan ang naaabot ng kanilang patuloy na ayuda. Maraming salamat po sa pribadong sektor at sa mabubuting indibidwal na huwaran sa diwa ng bayanihan.

Of course, Mr. Speaker, the private sector can only do so much, the primary responsibility still rests on the government. The State is expected to provide clear directions as to how we can prevent COVID-19 from spreading further, as well as how we can gradually revive our economy that is now in induced coma. Unfortunately, the fact remains that we have no clear handle as to the current transmission rate of the disease. Everyday updates on the number of new cases, deaths and recoveries are confusing, given the delays in testing and results. May mga araw po na kaunti lamang ang nadadagdag, tapos, biglang bumubuhos, indikasyon na napakarami nating backlog, gayong maliit na parte pa lamang ng populasyon ang na-test.

The Department of Health must expand testing nationwide and narrow the gap between testing and release of results in order for us to have a clearer picture of what is really happening under our noses. Gaya po ng bilin ng World Health Organization, test, test, test.

At this point, Mr. Speaker, allow me to provide an account from my home province, Sarangani. Bilang malayo sa sentro, nahuhuli sa pagpapaabot ang programa ng national government, pero ibang usapan po ngayon, buhay na ang nakataya. It is true that as of

today, Sarangani has reported zero case of COVID-19, a great feat that I attribute to the natural inclination of Saranganis to follow and respect authorities. Our local government units in the province have been working so hard in order to prevent the entry of this unseen enemy in our place, while making sure that our people are not left to suffer hunger. But, Mr. Speaker, I cannot help but wonder and worry that our lack of cases might be due to the lack of available testing and not because COVID-19 is not yet in our midst.

I therefore bemoan, Mr. Speaker, the sad fact that until now, no testing center has been put in place in our province, and even in the whole Region XII. What we have in adjacent General Santos City are some hospitals with limited testing capacity, largely reserved for highly suspected cases of COVID-19, yet we are aware that many of those who contract the virus are either asymptomatic or have mild flu-like symptoms. In the absence of a dedicated massive testing center, health workers and the policymakers in our region are left in the dark as to the actual extent of community spread. Kung hindi po tayo nagbibilang, wala po talaga tayong mabibilang na mga kaso. To leave it at that is an utter disservice to our people, especially now with that plan of easing restrictions throughout the community which might give a false sense of security among our citizens.

Mr. Speaker, in this pandemic, sabi nga po ng eksperto, we are only as safe as the most vulnerable neighbor. In the context of a nation, our metropolitan centers or urban areas are only as safe as the countryside. Wala po dapat naiwan. Again, in the name of my constituents, as well as for others in far-flung and less developed provinces, I urge the Department of Health to provide us with testing centers para po hindi kami mangangapa sa dilim.

This pandemic has pointed out grave weaknesses in our local and national governance. COVID-19 has exploited our fragmented LGUs and the sub-optimal relationship between them and the national government. As a case in point, there were notable instances where adjacent LGUs implemented drastically different quarantine measures which resulted in the unnecessary shortage of supplies in some places, and the congestion of people in checkpoints and markets as the easing of restrictions loomed in some areas.

It is my hope that the Inter-Agency Task Force or IATF would be able to come up with guidelines that would be consistent and cut across jurisdiction in order to avoid another patchwork of confusing and unproductive regulations. The rollout of subsidies to the poorest Filipinos under the Social Amelioration Program or SAP is another example of miscoordination. Distribution was painfully slow in certain places. In some instances, the distribution has even resulted in huge crowds which were forced to wait for hours for payout. Mula po sa kalakhang Maynila, diyan lamang

sa labas ng Batasan, hanggang sa General Santos City, nakakatanggap po tayo ng reports ng pagdagsa ng tao sa payout ng SAP. Hindi po maaaring ang gobyerno mismo ang lumalabag sa sarili nitong utos na “stay at home” and “practice social distancing.” The DSWD must formulate a safer, more creative policy in distributing relief, perhaps by utilizing barangay workers in door-to-door distribution para wala na pong pagtitipon ng mga tao.

The miscommunication between the local government and the national government is made even more apparent with the insufficiency of SAP grants in many localities. The LGUs have endured our disgruntled citizens. Some LGUs with greater income and capacity were able to make up for differences by establishing their own amelioration programs. Yet, Mr. Speaker, the reality is that not all LGUs are capable of this. In poorer provinces like in my home province of Sarangani, the municipal and provincial governments simply do not have the means to provide sustained amelioration.

I think I can speak on behalf of many of our colleagues, Mr. Speaker, that we were all under the impression that the recently passed Bayanihan to Heal as One Act would have provided the government unprecedented level of discretion and flexibility in dealing with the crisis. So far, I think the performance of the Department of Health in terms of massive testing, as well as of the economic managers in terms of social amelioration has been far from perfect. There is a lot of room for improvement, and I can only hope that our policymakers would get better at it soon before it is too late.

Mr. Speaker, I have spoken on these things as a matter of constructive criticism in line with the mandate of Congress to exercise oversight. We in Congress are not detached from the realities of governance in the midst of the pandemic. In fact, as our continuing response to the situation, several measures like the COVID-19 Unemployment Reduction Economic Stimulus or CURES Bill of 2020 are on our agenda. This historic stimulus Bill is the precise kind of government intervention we need in order to save our economy particularly our micro, small and medium enterprises or MSMEs, many of which are now on the verge of collapse. We acknowledge that the fate of MSMEs is closely tied to the fate of our consumers and workers. So, Congress is committed to support them and other sensitive industries all the way to full recovery.

Mr. Speaker, Congress demands a greater sense of direction and responsiveness from relevant government agencies which are clearly lagging. Our people deserve better. They need to know and feel that their government is doing its best in fighting for them. As Congress continues to free up more funds and devolve more powers to these agencies, it is our fervent hope that they will be used responsibly and sensibly.

Dear colleagues, in these trying times, we have a responsibility as Representatives of the people to continue finding ways to alleviate the dire health and economic impact of the pandemic. The task is herculean and there is little room for error and delay. But I trust that with our coordinated efforts, as well as with the grace from Almighty God, we shall prevail.

Muli, ang aking pinakamataas na pagpupugay sa ating mga frontliners.

Mr. Speaker, maraming salamat at magandang hapon po sa ating lahat.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Estrella). Thank you, distinguished Gentleman from Sarangani.

The Majority Leader is recognized.

REP. ZUBIRI. Mr. Speaker, I move that we refer the speech of Hon. Ruel Pacquiao to the Committee on Rules for its appropriate action.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Estrella). Is there any objection to the motion of the Majority Leader? (*Silence*) The Chair hears none; the speech of the distinguished Gentleman from Sarangani is hereby referred to the Committee on Rules.

Mr. Majority Leader.

REP. ZUBIRI. Mr. Speaker, I now move that the Gentleman from the Second District of Agusan del Sur, Rep. Eddiebong G. Plaza, be recognized to avail of the Privilege Hour.

I so move, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Estrella). The distinguished Gentleman from the Second District of Agusan del Sur is hereby recognized. Please proceed.

PRIVILEGE SPEECH OF REP. PLAZA

REP. PLAZA. Good afternoon to all my colleagues, and most especially to my neighbor, Manoy Zubiri, good afternoon.

Mr. Speaker, as one of the many probinsiyanos in Congress, I am very much in support of the national government’s effort in the fight against COVID-19. Since this crisis has befallen us, my office has kept a close coordination with my constituents and is constantly being updated of the situation on the ground. I can say that all the actions of LGUs in my province and the two congressional offices are properly coordinated, and we are one in our fight locally against this dreaded disease, and likewise in supporting and promoting the national government’s effort to curb the current crisis.

As we speak, Mr. Speaker, the province of Agusan del Sur remains COVID-free and we intend to keep it at that. We are all very much aware of how contagious

and deadly this virus is and how much it would strain our country's health sector, the national budget and the overall economy. For a province like ours, given our limitations, we cannot afford to battle head-on with this disease. It is an understatement to say that it is going to be a destruction in our case if it does happen. So, Mr. Speaker, we are dealing with this crisis proactively by preventing this virus to set its foot in the province. From February to April, the province had issued eight executive orders and one sangguniang panlalawigan resolution to prepare against COVID-19 which was primarily directed to keep the province outside the path of contagion. A comprehensive action plan was immediately put in place. The provincial health cluster sprang into action early in March along with the establishment of the provincial emergency operations center, provincial communication facilities, and public information protocol was set up.

A multi-agency task force was established to man and strengthen border checkpoints, an information system for collecting and storing data of the province's health situation. On the ground, preventive measures were put in place for decision and policymaking purposes especially for quick responses, financial resources were secured, food security plan was put in place, provisions for relief, assistance and incentives for frontliners and volunteers were ready and were actually implemented and being implemented as we remain on alert status.

One hundred and five quarantine areas were put up for the entire province, three quarantine centers for the province and 102 are strategically distributed in the cities, municipalities and barangays. The Philippine National Police, along with individual and organization volunteers, regularly patrol our streets to enforce the quarantine protocol. There are also initiatives to ensure food and non-food security for the entire province. In short, Mr. Speaker, we have made great strides in preventive measures and so many sacrifices on our part to keep the province COVID-free as our contribution in our national effort to keep down infection cases and in preventing this disease to wreak havoc in the country, especially in places that are less prepared against it.

While we are at it, Mr. Speaker, we are well aware of the national situation and we remain concerned about other areas contiguous to our province. As we struggle to keep safe the province from contagion, we are making special efforts to make sure the needs and concerns of nearby neighboring provinces, especially those battling COVID-19, are met promptly and sufficiently. We designed and implemented border arrangement transactions to maintain unhampered flow of supplies and keep the movement of people in check, especially those coming from the outside.

While we respect and abide by the established national protocol on quarantine, we at the same time

implement stricter measures in keeping our proactive preventive stance. We understand that the national protocol that was established was heavily based on the situation in areas heavily compromised, and we are one with them, that those measures are necessary to stem the tide of contagion. However, Mr. Speaker, with the stated situation in my province, which relies on preventive measures, we cannot help but be stricter. This situation, Mr. Speaker, has placed officials of the province in a quandary as public pronouncements of national officials on national TV clarifying the quarantine protocol have made our stricter measures appear in violation of the national quarantine protocol and caused confusion and conflict between our people in the field implementing the local measures and especially those coming from outside of the province.

Despite this, Mr. Speaker, the local officials of the province have stood pat on their measures, willing to face sanctions if indeed their actions were in violation of the quarantine protocol. With this continued insistence on the local measures, Mr. Speaker, we are able to keep the province COVID-free until now and keep ourselves always on our toes to keep the status quo with regard to COVID infection cases.

Also, Mr. Speaker, with our strict measures, we are also able to apprehend and put force on who abuse their privilege under the quarantine protocol. There was this incident of an ambulance coming from outside of the province refusing to be inspected at the border checkpoint. From our end, an ambulance from the outside entering the province with respect to COVID case is not usual, but an ambulance going out of the province is. Upon inspection, we found one family as passengers therein going into the province, so, we subjected them to quarantine protocol. Another incident involved a member of a law enforcement agency who also refused to be subjected to a checkpoint inspection. But checkpoint officials of the province insisted on the process and found the vehicle was carrying women entertainers from the other province. Drivers and crew of cargo vehicles that were supposed to be just passing through were found to have made stopovers and even stayed overnight evading quarantine measures.

These, Mr. Speaker, are instances that illustrate our situation in the province. If we allow this unhampered flow, and without undergoing through our own measures to keep the province COVID-free, all our efforts and sacrifices to shield the province from contagion and protect our people from this dreaded disease will simply come to naught. These incidents may also be happening in other provincial LGUs. Lately, the Mayor of the Municipality of Sto. Domingo in Albay Province confirmed that an ambulance that evaded the checkpoint was found to be carrying two passengers who just flew in from New York. I am sure these incidents are from (*inaudible*) and do not

happen in heavily compromised areas such as Metro Manila as the people there are really confronted by this life-threatening disease, unlike in the provinces where people are more complacent and do not understand how difficult it is from the government's perspective confronting and managing such a threat.

Mr. Speaker, having said this, may I, on behalf of my constituents and the entire province of Agusan del Sur—and I am sure other provinces in the same situation can relate to this—respectfully appeal to the IATF and to the national government to issue statements to the effect of allowing less compromised provincial local government units to implement quarantine protocols that best suit their local conditions provided that the relaxation of ECQ quarantine measures below the national standard shall be subjected to IATF approval. However, a stricter measure should not be a problem as long as it does not effectively hamper the overall goal of winning the fight against COVID. Some people may interpret this as causing delays or creating inconveniences, but as we say, it is better to be on the side of caution. May I also strongly suggest, Mr. Speaker, for all the regions and provincial local government units which are less prepared in terms of manpower and resources to respond to the COVID threat and remain COVID-free in a few cases, to be subjected to capacity development by the Department of Health and other private health institutions. This way, Mr. Speaker, we can conduct a whole-of-nation approach against the dreaded disease expected to linger for long. Perhaps, the DILG can conduct an inventory of regions and provinces in order to assess their readiness and preparedness against this virus in order to establish priority in capacity development.

Ito na po, Mr. Speaker, ang panahon upang ang mga LGUs ay mag-level up o magpakitang gilad dahil sa nangyayaring pandemic na COVID-19 dito sa buong mundo at lalong-lalo na dito sa ating bansa.

Sana po, Mr. Speaker, I hope the appeal and suggestion of this humble Representation will not fall on deaf ears as we expect a long-duration battle against this COVID-19 virus, provinces like ours need encouragement, with our efforts and sacrifices being recognized. We need assurances that the gains we so far have accomplished will not be wasted, which capacity we can improve upon and use as capital to further our strength and win the battle against it as our own contribution in the national effort in winning this war.

Mr. Speaker, I, together with Hon. Caraps Paduano, have just filed a resolution to this effect, and I hope my honorable colleagues will find merit in this and generously give their support once the resolution reaches the floor.

Thank you again, Mr. Speaker, and good afternoon to all my colleagues.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Estrella). Thank you, Hon. Eddiebong Plaza.

REP. PLAZA. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Estrella). The Majority Leader is recognized.

At this juncture, Deputy Speaker Estrella relinquished the Chair to Rep. Wilter "Sharky" Wee Palma II.

REP. ZUBIRI. Mr. Speaker, I move that we refer the speech of Hon. Eddiebong Plaza to the Committee on Rules for its appropriate action.

I so move, Mr. Speaker.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER (Rep. Palma). Is there any objection? (*Silence*) The Chair hears none; the motion is approved.

The Majority Leader is recognized.

REP. ZUBIRI. Mr. Speaker, I now move that we recognize the Gentleman from BAYAN MUNA Party-List, Hon. Ferdinand R. Gaité, to avail of the Privilege Hour.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER (Rep. Palma). Honorable Gaité is now recognized. You may proceed.

PRIVILEGE SPEECH OF REP. GAITE

REP. GAITE. Maraming salamat po, Mr. Speaker, at sa ating kapita-pitagang mga colleague.

Tugunan ang pangangailangan at panawagan ng ating mga migrante.

G. Ispiker, mga kapwa ko Kinatawan, isang magandang hapon. Hayaan ninyo po akong gamitin ang oras ngayon upang ibahagi sa inyo ang naging mga laman ng aming pakikipag-usap sa ating mga kababayang migrante. Kagaya ng marami sa atin ngayon, patong-patong din ang suliranin na hinaharap ng ating mga kababayang OFW o manggagawa sa ibayong dagat. Pabigat, dagdag na pabigat ang kamakailang layunin ng PhilHealth na dagdagan ang kontribusyon ng ating mga manggagawa sa ibayong dagat. Ito ay manggagaling sa pawis at dugo ng ating mga OFWs.

Ayon sa impormasyong inulat ng mga repatriated na OFWs sa organisasyong Migrante International, hinaharap nila ang mga problema na tulad ng substandard na quarantine centers. Siksikan at hindi sinusunod ang tinakdang isang tao kada kuwarto. Hindi ginagawa ang rapid testing upang malaman sino ang infected at dapat i-quarantine o gamutin. Kaugnay nito, walang naging testing at wala ring monitoring sa kanilang kalusugan

upang maging alternatibong paraan para kagyat na masuri kung sino ang may sintomas at posibleng may sakit. Fourteen days lamang dapat ang itatagal nila sa mga siksikang quarantine center na ito ngunit dahil sa kawalan ng transportasyon, ang ilan sa kanila ay mahigit nang isang buwan na stranded sa mga lugar na ito. Dumagdag pa ang komplikasyon, sa kanilang pag-uwi sa kanilang pamilya, ang magkakaibang patakaran sa iba't ibang LGUs o mga bayan, mga patakaran na hindi kinokoordina at nililina ng pambansang pamahalaan. May mga kaso na sila ay hinarang at sa mga kasong ito ay nagturuan ang OWWA o Overseas Workers Welfare Administration at mga lokal na pamahalaan. Ang naiipit ay ang kaawa-awa at kawawa nating mga kababayang OFWs.

Tinataya ng Department of Labor and Employment na may pauwi pang 500,000—I repeat, 500,000 OFWs sa ating bansa. Sa ngayon, mayroong mahigit 21,000 sea-based OFWs at 20,000 na land-based OFWs ang naririto na. Ano po ang plano natin para sa kanila? Paano tutuparin ang planong magkakaroon ng testing at monitoring kung iyang mga naririto ay hindi pa rin nate-test? Paano tutuparin ang planong sila ay maihatid sa kanilang mga tahanan kung iyon ngang stranded na naririto ay nasa quarantine center pa rin? Repatriated at paparating na OFWs pa lamang iyan.

Nariyan pa po ang outbound na OFWs na hindi na makalipad sa kasamaang palad. Ayon sa kanilang daing, wala daw po sila sa radar ng ating mga kinauukulan. Walang serbisyo para sa kanila maliban sa ilang food assistance. Inabandona sila ng kanilang mga recruitment agencies o manning agencies. Ang mga tinutuluyan nila ay kadalasang mga siksikang dorm o convention centers kung saan restricted ang kanilang mobility dahil sila ay hindi taga roon, kung kaya hindi sila nabibigyan ng mga quarantine pass. Ubos ang pera dahil sa pagpo-proseso ng mga papeles upang makalipad ngunit ngayon ay stranded—walang kita at walang ayuda na natatanggap mula sa pamahalaan.

Bakit nga ba wala silang ayuda? Ang pangako ng Department of Labor ay may one-time financial assistance para sa ating mga kababayang OFWs na nawalan na ng trabaho. Ang allotment para sa kanila ay aabot ng P1.5 billion. Kung gayon, 150,000 sana na OFWs lamang ang makakatanggap ng ayudang ito, ngunit gaya nga po ng ating nabanggit kanina, inaasahan na aabot ng 500,000 ang OFWs na pauwi na nangangailangan ng ayuda. Wala dito ang bilang ng mga OFWs na hindi na makaalis.

Sa report ng Palasyo sa Kongreso, may backlog na 70.08 percent sa distribution ng Department of Labor and Employment-AKAP na program for OFWs. Nakailang extend na po ang ECQ pero ang pamahalaan, palyado pa rin sa pag-extend ng tulong sa ating mga kaawa-awang kababayan. Maraming ulat din po tayong natatanggap mula sa ibayong dagat hinggil sa pagtigil

ng pagpo-proseso ng mga aplikasyon at kabagalan ng pamamahagi ng kanilang dapat natanggap na ayuda. Sa Saudi, nag-mass trooping sa Philippine Overseas Labor Office sa Riyadh ang mga kababayan nating para sa food and financial assistance pero tinanggihan, sinigawan at binastos pa sila. Sa United Arab Emirates, lampas 20,000 ang nag-apply kaya't sinuspinde ng POLO doon ang pagtatanggap ng bagong aplikasyon. Sa Hong Kong, wala pa umanong ayudang naibibigay. May iba pang mga bansa na nagsuspinde ng pagtatanggap ng aplikasyon at ng processing dahil hindi kinaya ng kanilang sistema at wala umanong mga pondo.

Patong-patong rin ang reklamo ng ating mga seafarers—kulang, mabagal na pagbigay o kawalan ng ayuda, kawalan ng tulong para sa transportasyon pauwi sa kani-kanilang mga probinsiya at tahanan at kawalan ng testing para sa may mga sakit. Sa gitna po ng maraming suliranin, kakulangan at pasakit, sa halip po na maagap na tugon, tila ba nakatutok pa ang pamahalaan sa pagpapatahimik sa mga reklamo ng ating mga kababayan. Sa ulat na aming natanggap, marami po ang nagsusumbong tungkol sa pagbabawal ng pagpo-post sa social media ng mga reklamo tungkol sa mga quarantine facilities. At nitong nakaraan nga po ay umugong sa balita ang panggigipit at tangkang pagpapa-deport ni Taichung Labor Attache Fidel Macauyag kay Linn Ordidor na OFW sa Taiwan dahil sa kaniya umanong kritisismo sa paraan ng pagharap sa krisis ng ating pamahalaan. Hindi po ito makatuwiran. Hindi panunupil ang kanilang kailangan, kung hindi ang pagdinig sa kanilang mga hinaing at reklamo. Hindi pambubusal, kung hindi aksyon para ayusin ang mga pinupunto nilang mga kahinaan. Kung mayroong dapat pauwiin o i-recall, dapat iyang si Labor Attache Macauyag.

Mga kapwa ko Kinatawan, itinuturing po natin na mga bayani ang ating mga frontliners, mga health workers, manggagawa, mga kawani na patuloy na nagtatrabaho ngayon sa panahon ng pandemya. May isa pa tayong tinaguriang bayani at sa katunayan, matagal na po nating silang tinatawag na mga bayani—ang ating mga migrante. Sana ay igawad natin ang pagkilala sa kanila, sa kanilang kabayanihan, sa pamamagitan ng pagtugon sa kanilang mga pangangailangan. Sana ay dinggin natin ang kanilang mga hinaing at panawagan.

Nais ko pong irehistro ang hiling ng ating mga nurses para sa pagpapalawig, pagsasaklaw ng exemption sa deployment ban ng health workers. Ayon sa Department of Labor and Employment Resolution No. 9, series of 2020, ang exempted lamang sa deployment ban ay iyong mga health workers na nakapagkumpleto na ng kanilang mga dokumento on or before March 8, 2020. Hinihiling ng ating mga nurses na isama rin sa exemption ang nagsisimula pa lang magkumpleto ng kanilang mga dokumento bago ang petsang Abril 2, 2020.

Ang hiling po na ito ay nakabatay sa dahilan na ang kanilang mga travel documents ay mapapaso kasabay ng pagtatapos ng deployment ban. Hindi po biro ang halagang ginastos na nila, ng isang nurse, upang kumpletuhin ang mga requirements o dokumento upang makapagtrabaho sa ibang bansa. Umaabot ito ng P60,000 hanggang P100,000 o P80,000 to P100,000. Marami sa kanila ay nabaon na sa utang sa pagkukumpleto lamang ng mga requirements na ito. Sila ay sumulat sa IATF. Sumulat na rin sila sa kinaaukulang komite ng Kongresong ito. Atin po sanang bigyan ng panahon ang pagsusuri sa posibilidad na bigyang katuparan ang kanilang hinihiling.

Bago po ako magtapos, amin din pong nirerehistro ang aming panawagan na ituring ding frontliners ang ating mga kawani sa OWWA, ang ahensiya na aking pinagtrabauhan dati. Amin pong hiling na sila ay mabigyan din ng PPEs o personal protection equipments, lalo na iyong talagang nasa frontline na nagbibigay serbisyo. Nararapat din na sila ay mabigyan ng kinaaukulang hazard pay at dagdag benepisyo bilang parte ng skeleton force ngayon.

Muli, hinihiling ng BAYAN MUNA ang pagpapabilis at pagpapalawak pa ng pagpapaabot ng tulong sa ating mga kababayan na nangangailangan, naririto man sila sa Pilipinas o nasa labas sila ng ating bansa.

Maraming, maraming salamat po.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER (Rep. Palma). Thank you, Honorable Gaité.

The Majority Leader is recognized.

REP. ZUBIRI. Mr. Speaker, I move that we refer the speech of Honorable Gaité to the Committee on Rules for its appropriate action. I move, Mr. Speaker.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER (Rep. Palma). Is there any objection? (*Silence*) The Chair hears none; the motion is approved.

REP. ZUBIRI. Mr. Speaker, I move that we proceed to the Reference of Business.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER (Rep. Palma). Majority Leader, with the indulgence of the Members, the Chair would like to suspend the Privilege Hour due to our limited time and that we are bound by the protocol, with the promise that tomorrow, those who have not availed of the Privilege Hour today will be called tomorrow. So, to our dear colleagues, with your indulgence, tomorrow we will call you to deliver your speeches.

The Majority Leader is recognized.

REP. ZUBIRI. Mr. Speaker, I move that we proceed to the Reference of Business.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER (Rep. Palma). Is there any objection? (*Silence*) The Chair hears none; the motion is approved.

The Secretary General will please read the Reference of Business.

ADDITIONAL REFERENCE OF BUSINESS

Upon direction of the Chair, the Secretary General read the following House Bills and Resolution on First Reading and the Presiding Officer made the corresponding references:

BILLS ON FIRST READING

House Bill No. 6711, entitled:

“AN ACT CREATING THE PHILIPPINE CENTER FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION, DEFINING ITS POWERS AND FUNCTIONS, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES”

By Representative Chipeco

TO THE DEFEAT COVID-19 *AD HOC* COMMITTEE

House Bill No. 6712, entitled:

“AN ACT GRANTING DAILY ALLOWANCE TO SERVICE VOLUNTEERS DURING PERIOD OF DISASTERS”

By Representative Cuaresma

TO THE DEFEAT COVID-19 *AD HOC* COMMITTEE

House Bill No. 6713, entitled:

“AN ACT MANDATING THE INCLUSION OF DISASTER PREPAREDNESS AND MANAGEMENT SUBJECT IN THE JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL CURRICULUM”

By Representative Cuaresma

TO THE COMMITTEE ON BASIC EDUCATION AND CULTURE

House Bill No. 6714, entitled:

“AN ACT GRANTING HAZARD PAY TO OFFICIALS AND EMPLOYEES OF THE NATIONAL, REGIONAL, AND LOCAL DISASTER RISK REDUCTION AND MANAGEMENT COUNCIL, PROVIDING FUNDS THEREFOR AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES”

By Representatives Defensor (Michael) and Teves (Jose)

TO THE DEFEAT COVID-19 *AD HOC* COMMITTEE

House Bill No. 6715, entitled:
“AN ACT MANDATING BANKS AND GOVERNMENT FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS TO OFFER FLEXIBLE LOAN PROGRAMS TO MICRO, SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES (MSMEs) AFFECTED BY THE CORONAVIRUS DISEASE 2019 PANDEMIC”

By Representative Castelo
TO THE DEFEAT COVID-19 *AD HOC* COMMITTEE

House Bill No. 6716, entitled:
“AN ACT PROMOTING THE ADOPTION OF ELECTRONIC MONEY AS A MEDIUM OF EXCHANGE FOR FINANCIAL TRANSACTIONS OF THE GOVERNMENT AND ALL MERCHANTS AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES”

By Representative Hernandez
TO THE COMMITTEE ON BANKS AND FINANCIAL INTERMEDIARIES

House Bill No. 6717, entitled:
“AN ACT IMPOSING SALES TAX IN LIEU OF VALUE-ADDED TAX, REPLACING FOR THE PURPOSE THE ENTIRE PROVISIONS OF TITLE IV, AND AMENDING SECTION 116, TITLE V, AND SECTION 236, TITLE IX, OF THE NATIONAL INTERNAL REVENUE CODE OF 1997, AS AMENDED, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES”

By Representative Hernandez
TO THE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

House Bill No. 6718, entitled:
“AN ACT CREATING THE PHILIPPINE CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES”

By Representative Hernandez
TO THE DEFEAT COVID-19 *AD HOC* COMMITTEE

RESOLUTIONS

House Resolution No. 854, entitled:
“RESOLUTION DIRECTING THE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN RIGHTS, COMMITTEE ON NATIONAL DEFENSE AND SECURITY AND DEFEAT COVID-19 *AD-HOC* COMMITTEE TO INQUIRE, IN AID OF LEGISLATION, THE CONTINUED ATTACKS OF THE MEMBERS OF THE NEW PEOPLE’S ARMY

(NPA) SINCE THE IMPLEMENTATION OF COMMUNITY QUARANTINE”

By Representatives Duterte, Tolentino, Yap (Eric) and Bautista
TO THE COMMITTEE ON RULES

ADDITIONAL REFERENCE OF BUSINESS

RESOLUTIONS

House Resolution No. 855, entitled:
“RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING THE BURIAL OF MEDICAL FRONTLINERS WHO DIED IN SERVICE DUE TO COVID-19 IN THE LIBINGAN NG MGA BAYANI”

By Representative Garbin
TO THE DEFEAT COVID-19 *AD HOC* COMMITTEE

House Resolution No. 856, entitled:
“RESOLUTION URGING ALL PRIVATE AND PUBLIC TELEVISION STATIONS IN THE COUNTRY TO ALLOT AT LEAST THREE HOURS PER DAY TO EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS THAT FOSTER HOLISTIC LEARNING AND EDUCATION TO KEEP GOVERNMENT ON TRACK IN ITS COMMITMENT TO ACHIEVE THE 17 SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS”

By Representative Villaraza-Suarez
TO THE COMMITTEE ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

House Resolution No. 857, entitled:
“RESOLUTION URGING THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION (DEPED) TO IMPLEMENT TV-BASED LECTURES FOR ELEMENTARY AND HIGH SCHOOLS IN THE COUNTRY DURING THE COVID-19 PERIOD, USE THE FACILITIES OF TWO GOVERNMENT-OWNED TV STATIONS PTV 4 AND IBC 13 TELEVISION STATIONS TO SERVE AS TRANSMISSION VEHICLES FOR SUCH LECTURES AND ENSURE GOVERNMENT CONTINUES ON ITS TRACK TO ACHIEVE GOAL 4 QUALITY EDUCATION OF THE 17 SUSTAINABLE GOALS”

By Representative Villaraza-Suarez
TO THE COMMITTEE ON BASIC EDUCATION AND CULTURE

House Resolution No. 858, entitled:
“A RESOLUTION DENOUNCING AND CONDEMNING THE ATTACKS MADE BY THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF THE

PHILIPPINES-NEW PEOPLE'S ARMY
(CPP-NPA) DURING THE ONGOING
COVID-19 PANDEMIC”

By Representatives Duterte, Tolentino, Yap (Eric)
and Bautista

TO THE COMMITTEE ON RULES

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. (Rep. Palma). The
Majority Leader is recognized.

REP. ZUBIRI. Mr. Speaker, I move that we
recognize the Gentleman from the ANAKALUSUGAN
Party-List, Cong. Michael T. Defensor, for his
manifestation.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. (Rep. Palma).
Honorable Defensor is hereby recognized.

MANIFESTATION OF REP. DEFENSOR (M.).

REP. DEFENSOR (M.). Thank you, Mr. Speaker.
Thank you, Majority Leader.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to put on record that today,
Speaker Alan Cayetano came out in a Facebook post, if
I am not mistaken, as regards the issue of the ABS-CBN
franchise. Klarong-klaro po iyong statement ni Speaker
doon. At ngayong hapon po, sa aking pagkakaalam,
nagsalita rin po ang Senado. Nagkaroon ng botohan
tungkol sa isang resolusyon na kanilang ipinapasa
tungkol sa prangkisa ng ABS-CBN.

I will not discuss any of those. In fact, I submit to
the statement of the Speaker as regards how we proceed,
Congress as an institution, in particular, the Committee
on Franchises on how they will conduct the hearings
for this purpose.

I just want to manifest, Mr. Speaker, because I
understand marami na naman pong mga reaksyon
na lalabas tungkol dito, na ang ating Kapulungan sa
ngayon, and I speak for the 160 new Members, 160 po
ang bago dito sa Kongreso—when we started in July,
immediately, we tackled the budget. Humigit-kumulang
limang buwan po iyan nang nag-usap tayo tungkol sa
budget. Pagkatapos niyan, nagkaroon tayo ng diskusyon
tungkol sa pagtaas ng suweldo ng teachers, ng nurses,
pagkatapos ay nagkaroon tayo ng Taal, nagkaroon
tayo ng COVID-19. Bago po noong March 10, nagsabi
naman po tayo na supposedly, we will be conducting
hearings while under suspension. We called for another
special session for this purpose.

I am only saying this, Mr. Speaker, just to clarify
that this Congress has 160 new Members. This franchise
has been there since 2014; 2014 pa ho nandiyan na
iyang prangkisang iyan. Noon, iba ang Chairman
ng Franchises, iba ang Presidente, iba ang Speaker
of the House. Si Pangulong PNoy, Noynoy Aquino,
ang Presidente, ang Speaker of the House that time

was Speaker Sonny Belmonte, the Chairman of the
Committee on Legislative Franchises was Chairman
Marcy Teodoro and the Senate President then was
Senator Drilon.

So, I just want this put on record, Mr. Speaker,
just to clarify because I think it is unfair to say that this
Congress, which has been in existence for 10 months,
with 160 new Members, is fully knowledgeable or is
well-informed of the issues concerning this franchise.
We are also interested to hear the issues. Gusto
naming malaman kung ano ang nangyayari at wala po
kaming—hindi puwedeng sisihin ang Kongresong ito
sa mga nangyayari sa ngayon tungkol sa renewal ng
prangkisa ng ABS-CBN.

Just a quick manifestation, Mr. Speaker, thank you.
Thank you, Majority Leader.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER (Rep. Palma). The
manifestation of Honorable Defensor is hereby noted.
The Majority Leader is recognized.

SUSPENSION OF SESSION

REP. ZUBIRI. Mr. Speaker, I move that we refer
the manifestation—Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the
session to three o'clock tomorrow ...

I move to suspend the session, Mr. Speaker.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER (Rep. Palma). The
session is suspended.

It was 5:55 p.m.

RESUMPTION OF SESSION

*At 5:58 p.m., the session was resumed with Deputy
Speaker Conrado M. Estrella III presiding.*

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Estrella). The
session is hereby resumed.

The Majority Leader is recognized.

REP. PALMA. Mr. Speaker, I move that we recognize
Hon. Carlos Zarate to give a short manifestation.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Estrella).
Yes, the Gentleman, Cong. Carlos Zarate, is hereby
recognized.

MANIFESTATION OF REP. ZARATE

REP. ZARATE. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, just a
short manifestation.

(Inaudible) Mr. Speaker, as one of the coauthors of
the pending bills calling for the renewal of the franchise
of the ABS-CBN, we thank the Speaker for the response

posted on his Facebook account. Indeed, while we have several important measures that we have to tackle during this time of the COVID-19 pandemic, the ball is now with Congress—how to resolve this issue involving the shutdown of ABS-CBN. It has great implications not only politically but economically.

So, that is all, Mr. Speaker, a manifestation that we, together with several other coauthors and authors of pending renewal bills brought to the Speaker today, are calling for the immediate conduct of a hearing related to this matter.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Estrella). The manifestation of the Gentleman is hereby noted.

The Majority Leader is recognized.

REP. PALMA. Mr. Speaker, I move to amend Journal No. 55, on page 4, to include the name of Hon. Frederick W. Siao in the list of Members who responded to the roll call and accordingly, to change the figures of “301” to “302” and “267” to “277” to reflect the correction.

I so move, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Estrella). Is there any objection? (*Silence*) The Chair hears none; the motion is hereby approved.

The Secretary General, please take note.

Yes, the Majority Leader is recognized.

APPROVAL OF THE JOURNAL

REP. PALMA. Accordingly, Mr. Speaker, I move that we approve Journal No. 55, as amended, copies of which have already been distributed, Journal No. 55 covers session dates May 4 to May 6 of 2020.

I so move, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Estrella). Is there any objection? (*Silence*) The Chair hears none; the motion is hereby approved.

Please take note, Secretary General.

REP. PALMA. Mr. Speaker, I move for the—I am sorry, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Estrella). Please proceed.

CHANGE OF REFERRAL OF H. RES. NO. 858

REP. PALMA. Mr. Speaker, I move for the change of referral of House Resolution No. 858, entitled: A RESOLUTION DENOUNCING AND CONDEMNING THE ATTACKS MADE BY THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF THE PHILIPPINES-NEW PEOPLE’S ARMY (CPP-NPA) DURING THE ONGOING COVID-19 PANDEMIC,” from the Committee on Rules, to the Committee on Public Order and Safety.

I so move, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Estrella). Is there any objection? (*Silence*) The Chair hears none; the motion is approved.

REFERRAL OF H. RES. NO. 854 ON AN INQUIRY IN AID OF LEGISLATION

REP. PALMA. Accordingly, Mr. Speaker, in accordance with our Rules Governing Inquiries in Aid of Legislation, I move that we refer House Resolution No. 854 to the Committee on Public Order and Safety.

I so move.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Estrella). Is there any objection? (*Silence*) The Chair hears none; the motion is approved.

SUSPENSION OF SESSION

REP. PALMA. Mr. Speaker, I move that we suspend the session until May 13, 2020, Wednesday at three o’clock in the afternoon.

I so move, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Estrella). The session is suspended until tomorrow, May 13, 2020, at three o’clock in the afternoon.

It was 6:02 p.m.