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COMMITTEE MEETINGS ON HOUSE MEASURES

COMMITTEE	MEASURES		SUBJECT MATTER	ACTION TAKEN/DISCUSSION
	NO.	PRINCIPAL AUTHOR		
Agrarian Reform	HB 1045	Rep. Singson-Meehan	Granting full insurance coverage to all qualified agrarian reform beneficiaries of the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP), amending for the purpose Section 14 of RA 9700, otherwise known as the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program Extension with Reforms	The Committee, chaired by Ifugao Rep. Solomon Chungalao, approved the Committee Report on HB 1045 in consolidation with HB 3451.
	HB 3451	Deputy Speaker Santos-Recto	Authorizing the grant of a full crop insurance coverage to qualified beneficiaries of the CARP, amending for the purpose Section 14 of RA 9700	
	HB 5083	Rep. Canama	Providing for the restructuring and condonation of unpaid interests, penalties, and surcharges on loans secured by farmers, fisherfolk, and agrarian reform beneficiaries from the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR), Department of Agriculture (DA), People's Credit and Finance Corporation (PCFC), Cooperative Development Authority (CDA), National Food Authority (NFA), and Quedan and Rural Credit Guarantee Corporation (QUEDANCOR)	The Committee approved the Committee Report on HB 5083.
	HB 4735	Rep. Dimaporo (M.K.)	Transferring the Provincial Agrarian Reform Office of Lanao del Norte from Iligan City to the Municipality of Tubod, Lanao del Norte and appropriating funds therefor	The Committee approved the Committee Report on HB 4735.
	HB 3029	Rep. Palma	Penalizing the conversion or causing the conversion of irrigated and irrigable lands, amending for the purpose RA 6657, as amended, otherwise known as the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Law of 1998	The Committee will deliberate further on HBs 3029 and 4360 in its next meeting. Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) Undersecretary Luis Meinrado Pañgulayan expressed his support for HB 3029.
	HB 4360	Deputy Speaker Santos-Recto	Prohibiting the conversion of irrigated and irrigable agricultural lands for non-agricultural uses, amending for the purpose Section 20 of RA 7160, otherwise known as the Local Government Code of 1991	
	HB 5507	Rep. Roman	Instituting the second phase of agrarian reform in the country, thereby completing the coverage of agricultural lands under the Agrarian Reform Program, providing state subsidy in the acquisition and distribution of agricultural lands to agrarian reform beneficiaries and creating the mechanisms for its implementation	The Committee will deliberate further on HB 5507 in its next meeting. Rep. Geraldine Roman (1 st District, Bataan), author of HB 5507, said the bill was drafted in partnership with the DAR's research office. She pointed out that problems in the implementation of the agrarian reform program since the time of former President Ferdinand Marcos have persisted up to the present.

Continuation... Agrarian Reform				<p>The resource persons from the following agencies and organizations expressed their support for the bill, with some of them presenting their respective recommendations: DAR, Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), National Irrigation Administration (NIA), National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA), Federation of Free Farmers (FFF), Pambansang Kilusan ng mga Samahang Magsasaka (PAKISAMA), KAISAHAN, and Task Force Mapalad Inc.</p> <p>On the proposal to grant full subsidy to qualified beneficiaries in the acquisition of agricultural lands, Land Bank of the Philippines (LBP) Senior Vice President Alex Lorayes commented that it will bear heavily on the finances of the national government.</p> <p>Armed Forces of the Philippines Real Estate Office (AFPREGO) Acting Chief Froilando Angat maintained that AFP-owned lands should be excluded from the coverage of the agrarian reform program in line with President Rodrigo Duterte's instruction to maximize the use of AFP lands for its modernization, and for the benefit of active and retired military personnel.</p> <p>FFF President Leonardo Montemayor criticized DAR for not effectively fulfilling its mandate and for not coordinating with the farmers, while Paragos-Pilipinas Women Coordinator Elvira Baladad expressed support for the equal implementation of the agrarian reform program for both government-owned and privately-owned lands.</p>
Games and Amusements	HR 221	Rep. Zarate	Investigation into the proliferation of Philippine offshore gaming operators or POGOs, and its effects on the Filipino people, the local economy, and national security	<p>The Committee, presided by its Vice Chair, Rep. Elpidio Barzaga Jr. (4th District, Cavite), will continue its deliberation on the issues raised in HR 221 in its next meeting.</p> <p>Rep. Carlos Isagani Zarate (Party-List, BAYAN MUNA), author of the resolution, said that the purpose of the investigation is to look into the regulation of the POGOs, their tax payments, and the status of employment of their employees. Moreover, he said the hearings will evaluate the impact of the POGO's operations on the country's peace and order and national security citing recent reports of kidnap for ransom of POGO employees by Chinese syndicates.</p> <p>Rep. Barzaga asked about the collection of taxes from the POGOs and their workers.</p> <p>BIR Assistant Commissioner James Roldan reported that the BIR collects withholding taxes from POGO workers, and a 5% franchise tax from POGOs.</p> <p>Victor Padilla, senior manager of the Philippine Amusement and Gaming Corporation's (PAGCOR) Policy and Offshore Gaming Licensing Division, also said that</p>

Continuation... Games and Amusements				<p>PAGCOR collects a 2% regulatory fee from POGOs.</p> <p>With regard to the number of POGO employees in the country, PAGCOR said that POGO workers number to 93,000 as of November this year.</p> <p>On the other hand, Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) OIC-Undersecretary Jojie Aragon reported that 71,532 POGO workers have been issued with alien employment permits (AEPs), while Bureau of Immigration (BI) Deputy Commissioner J. Tobias Javier said there are 39,831 POGO workers issued with provisional work permits (PWP). </p> <p>Rep. Barzaga asked the three agencies to explain the discrepancies in the number of POGO workers based on their respective records.</p> <p>The BI Deputy Commissioner explained that some foreign workers hired by POGOs, who have been issued with AEPs, might have failed to obtain PWPs from the BI because they might have already been terminated, they have returned to their country, or the application for PWPs might still be pending with the BI.</p> <p>Aragon concurred with the statement of Javier, adding that the DOLE will submit an updated list of AEPs issued to POGO workers.</p> <p>On the query of Rep. Zarate concerning PAGCOR-regulated POGOs, Padilla said that out of the 62 POGOs, only 49 are operational and the rest of the 13 have pending applications for approval.</p> <p>In response to the comment of Rep. Arnolfo "Arnie" Teves Jr. (3rd District, Negros Oriental) on why PAGCOR had to hire a third-party audit group, Padilla explained that PAGCOR has no technical ability to conduct an accurate audit of POGO operations. He added that hiring a third-party audit group is less expensive than buying the suggested audit software.</p> <p>The PAGCOR was requested to submit the list of the 62 POGOs and documents relative to the hiring of Global ComRCI, as the sole third-party audit partner of PAGCOR. The BIR was also requested to furnish the Committee with data on the taxes paid by POGOs since 2016.</p>
Justice	Substitute Bill to HBs 339, 1666, 1838, 4103 & 4178	Reps. Romualdo, Cabochan, Rodriguez, and Haresco	Modernizing the Bureau of Immigration (BI) by defining its powers and functions, expanding, rationalizing and further professionalizing its organization, upgrading the compensation and benefits of its officials and employees, and appropriating funds therefor	The Committee, chaired by Rep. Vicente "Ching" Veloso III (3 rd District, Leyte), approved the Committee Report on the substitute bill subject to amendments.

Continuation... Justice	Substitute Bill to HBs 597, 1603, 2327 & 2716	Reps. Silverio, Castelo, Deputy Speaker Escudero, and Rep. Gonzaga	Granting hazard pay to judges in the RTC and appropriating funds therefor	<p>The Committee approved the Committee Report on the substitute bill as amended.</p> <p>The Committee agreed that judges from first level courts will also be granted hazard pay aside from those in the second level courts or in the Regional Trial Courts as proposed in the bill.</p> <p>First level courts include the Metropolitan Trial Courts, Municipal Trial Courts, Municipal Circuit Trial Courts, and Shari'a Circuit Courts.</p>
	Substitute Bill to HBs 2088, 3995, 4150 & 5465	Deputy Speaker Abu, Reps. Agabas and Haresco	Providing support for the surviving spouse and children of slain justices and judges, amending for the purpose RA 910, as amended, or the law providing for the retirement of justices of the Supreme Court and of the Court of Appeals, for the enforcement of the provisions hereof by the Government Service Insurance System (GSIS), and to repeal Commonwealth Act 536, and appropriating funds therefor	The Committee approved the Committee Report on the substitute bill.
	Substitute Bill to HBs 4745, 4806, 4809, 4943, 5019, 5078 & 5348	Deputy Speakers Oaminal and Romero, Reps. Velasco, Olivarez, Rodriguez, Nograles (J.J.), and Gonzaga	Strengthening the Office of the Government Corporate Counsel (OGCC) by rationalizing and further professionalizing its organization, upgrading the compensation, benefits, and positions of its officials and employees, and appropriating funds therefor	<p>The Committee approved the Committee Report on the substitute bill.</p> <p>The Secretariat was directed to refer the measure to the Committee on Appropriations and the Committee on Ways and Means for their comments on the appropriations and tax provisions of the bill, respectively.</p>
	HBs 2423, 2510, 2523, 2655, 2668, 2698, 2884 & 2954	Reps. Labadlabad, Benitez, Bolilia, Bernos, Alvarez (G.), Panotes, Malapitan, and Calderon	Creating additional branches of the Regional Trial Court (RTC) and Municipal Trial Court (MTC) in various parts of the country, amending for the purpose Batas Pambansa Blg. 129, otherwise known as the Judiciary Reorganization Act of 1980, as amended, and appropriating funds therefor	The Committee approved the Committee Reports on the eight bills.
	HB 3409	Rep. Biazon	Establishing the Office of Judiciary Marshals and appropriating funds therefor	The Committee agreed to create a technical working group (TWG) to consolidate the bills.
	HBs 5403 & 5654	Deputy Speakers Pimentel and Garcia	Establishing the Office of the Philippine Marshals Service under the Supreme Court of the Philippines and appropriating funds therefor	<p>Deputy Speaker Henry Oaminal (2nd District, Misamis Occidental) was designated as head of the TWG.</p> <p>Deputy Speaker Johnny Ty Pimentel (2nd District, Surigao del Sur), author of HB 5403, said that his bill seeks to create the Philippine Marshal Service to protect judges and justices, as well as to secure court proceedings and court properties used by members of the judiciary who are vulnerable to aggression and violence from presumably hateful litigants and other lawless elements.</p>
	HBs 5528 & 5691	Deputy Speaker Villafuerte and Rep. Rodriguez	Creating the Philippine Marshal Service, defining its functions and powers, appropriating funds therefor	Deputy Speaker Oaminal manifested that his bill, HB 5736, be included in the TWG deliberations since it has a similar subject matter. HB 5736, which was recently referred to the Committee, also seeks to establish a Philippine Marshal Service.

Continuation... Justice				<p>Representatives from the Supreme Court (SC), National Bureau of Investigation (NBI), Department of Justice (DOJ), and Public Attorney's Office (PAO) expressed their support for the bill.</p> <p>On the other hand, Philippine National Police - Police Security and Protection Group (PNP-PSPG) Director Marcelo Morales commented that the proposed law, particularly HBs 5528 and 5654, which authorizes court marshals to conduct investigations concerning allegations of irregularities committed by the justices, judges, court officials and personnel, may run in conflict with the functions of other law enforcement agencies.</p> <p>Moreover, Morales said that the provision in HB 5403 which mandates the Philippine Marshal Service to "undertake investigations of crimes and other offenses against the laws of the Philippines, upon its own initiative and as the public interest may require" appears to be a blanket authority for the proposed agency to engage above and beyond its basic mandate.</p> <p>The Committee requested the resource persons to submit their respective position papers on the proposed law.</p>
	HBs 5527 & 5584	Deputy Speaker Villafuerte and Rep. Leachon	Further expanding the jurisdiction of the Metropolitan Trial Courts (MeTC), Municipal Trial Courts in Cities (MTCC), MTC, and Municipal Circuit Trial Courts (MCTC), amending for the purpose Batas Pambansa Blg. 129, as amended	<p>The Committee agreed to create a TWG to consolidate HBs 5527 and 5584.</p> <p>Rep. Ruwel Peter Gonzaga (2nd District, Compostela Valley) was designated as head of the TWG.</p> <p>Rep. Doy Leachon (1st District, Oriental Mindoro), author of HB 5584, said that the measure seeks to expand the jurisdiction of the first level courts nationwide to help de-clog the dockets of the second level courts. The bill increases the jurisdictional threshold of first level courts to P2 million for civil actions, probate proceedings, and admiralty and maritime actions; and P400,000 for civil actions which involve title to, or possession of, real property, or any interest therein, whether in or outside Metro Manila.</p> <p>Supreme Court Administrator Jose Midas Marquez thanked the authors for filing the bills. He said that the increased jurisdiction of small claims cases will help expedite the resolution of such cases which are presently handled in the second level courts.</p> <p>Rep. Edcel Lagman (1st District, Albay) suggested that the TWG refer to HB 4664, which seeks to institute reforms in the country's real property valuation and assessment, to be guided in determining the jurisdictional threshold of courts on property valuation. HB 4664 was approved on Third Reading by the House on November 25, 2019.</p>

Local Government	Substitute Bill to HBs 41, 89, 180, 650, 2176 & 3756	Reps. Benitez, Garbin, Suansing (H.), Tambunting, Castelo, and Rodriguez	Changing the term of office of barangay officials and members of the Sangguniang Kabataan from three to five years, and providing for limitations on recall, amending for the purpose Sections 43 (c) and 74 of RA 7160, as amended, otherwise known as the Local Government Code of 1991	The Committee, chaired by Rep. Noel Villanueva (3 rd District, Tarlac), approved the substitute bill.
	HBs 384, 656 & 1497	Reps. Zamora (M.), Abaya, and Tan (A.)	Declaring special non-working holidays in certain parts of the country to commemorate special events	The Committee approved HBs 384, 656 and 1497.
	HB 1566	Rep. Angara	Declaring every 28 th of April of every year as a special working holiday in the Province of Aurora to commemorate the death anniversary of Doña Aurora Aragon-Quezon	The Committee approved HB 1566.
	HB 596	Rep. Silverio	Creating a barangay to be known as Barangay Tigpalas in the Municipality of San Miguel, Bulacan	The Committee approved HB 596.
	HB 201	Rep. Garcia (J.)	Creating the Metro Bataan Development Authority, defining its powers and functions, providing funds therefor	<p>The Committee deferred the consideration of HB 201 pending the submission of position papers by the resource persons.</p> <p>Rep. Jose Enrique "Joet" Garcia III (2nd District, Bataan), author of HB 201, said that the proposed Metro Bataan Development Authority (MBDA) will integrate and coordinate the delivery of basic services as well as the enforcement of laws, rules and regulations between and among the cities and municipalities in the Province of Bataan.</p> <p>Rep. Geraldine Roman (1st District, Bataan) said that the duties and functions of the proposed MBDA should be properly delineated and clarified so as to avoid any overlap with the functions of the concerned local government units (LGUs).</p> <p>Rep. Rufus Rodriguez (2nd District, Cagayan de Oro City) expressed his support for the bill.</p> <p>National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) Assistant Director Cynthia Villena said that the bill runs counter to the government's efforts to rationalize the bureaucracy.</p> <p>Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) Region III Legal Officer Charmaine Paulino interposed no objections to the bill.</p>
Poverty Alleviation	HBs 3754 & 4718	Reps. Rodriguez and Nieto	Establishing financial assistance programs for poor litigants	<p>The Committee, presided by Rep. Raymond Democrito Mendoza (Party-List, TUCP), agreed to create a technical working group (TWG) to consolidate the bills and to consider the recommendations of the stakeholders.</p> <p>Rep. Rufus Rodriguez (2nd District, Cagayan de Oro City), author of HB 3754, said that his bill seeks to provide poor litigants financial assistance while their cases are pending in</p>
	HB 4014	Rep. Villarica	Providing free legal assistance to all indigent Filipinos, amending for the purpose Chapter 5, Title III, Book IV of EO 292, otherwise known as the Administrative Code of 1987 and appropriating funds therefor	

Continuation... Poverty Alleviation				<p>court. Financial assistance will cover travelling expenses and subsistence allowance, bond for provisional liberty or civil liability, and other incidental expenses.</p> <p>The Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) and the Public Attorney's Office (PAO) expressed their support for the bills.</p> <p>However, PAO Public Attorney Maria Joy Karen Adraneda-Filio recommended that the source of funds needed to implement the financial assistance program be specified in the bill. She said that there is no allocation in PAO's existing budget for this program.</p> <p>Adraneda-Filio also said that PAO has no basis right now for determining the corresponding amount for "reasonable traveling expenses and subsistence allowance" to be given to poor litigants, as proposed in the bills. She likewise said that the determination of the amount of the bond for provisional liberty and civil liability is generally left to the discretion of the judge, thus this responsibility may not be given to PAO.</p> <p>The Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) will submit its position paper on the bills.</p> <p>Rep. Rodriguez requested PAO to study the bills within a six-month period and thereafter submit to the Committee its proposals on the bills.</p>
Revision of Laws	HBs 369, 2488, 3441, 3730, 4720, 4831, 5251 & 5460	Reps. Olivarez, Castelo, Deputy Speaker Santos-Recto, Reps. Agabas, Nieto, Deloso-Montalla, Quimbo, and Deputy Speaker Savellano	Declaring July 27 of every year a special national non-working holiday in the entire country to commemorate the founding anniversary of Iglesia Ni Cristo, amending for the purpose RA 9645	The Committee, chaired by Rep. Cheryl Deloso-Montalla (2 nd District, Zambales), approved the eight bills, with instructions to the Secretariat to come up with a substitute bill.
	HBs 1637 & 2090	Rep. Vargas and Deputy Speaker Abu	Imposing stiffer penalties for the stealing or vandalizing of government road signs and other risk reduction devices, accessories, and other facilities	<p>The Committee approved HBs 1637 and 2090, with instructions to the Secretariat to come up with a substitute bill.</p> <p>Deputy Speaker Raneo "Ranie" Abu (2nd District, Batangas), author of HB 2090, underscored the need to impose stiffer penalties against those found stealing or vandalizing government road signs and other road safety devices. He said that efforts exerted by concerned agencies to put up road safety measures are put to naught as road accidents continue to occur due to the absence of road signs which were either stolen or vandalized.</p> <p>The Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH), Philippine National Police-Highway Patrol Group (PNP-HPG), and the</p>

Continuation... Revision of Laws				Metropolitan Manila Development Authority (MMDA) expressed their support for the bills. The resource persons were requested to submit their respective position papers. The traffic enforcement agencies were also asked to submit data on the number of apprehensions due to stealing and vandalizing of road signs and similar devices.
	HB 2512	Rep. Almario	Declaring the fourth Thursday of November as National Thanksgiving Day	The Committee approved HB 2512 subject to style.
	HB 146	Deputy Speaker Marcoleta	Providing for a prescriptive period from which the Commission on Audit (COA) may conduct audits and issue a decision on cases, amending PD 1445 or the State Audit Code of the Philippines	<p>The Committee will deliberate further on HB 146 in its next meeting.</p> <p>Rep. Deloso-Montalla said that the purpose of the bill is to expedite COA's audit process, citing the agency's practice of conducting post audit many years after funds for the projects have been released to implementing agencies.</p> <p>Expressing objection to the bill, COA's Legislative Affairs Office OIC-Division Chief Erwin Lapitan opined that it contradicts the provisions of the Constitution granting independence to Constitutional Commissions, which include the COA, and granting COA the exclusive authority to define the scope of its audit and issue rules relating to it.</p> <p>Lapitan also explained that the main cause of delay in conducting audits and releasing decisions is due to COA's lack of manpower. He added that the audit process can only commence once the agencies have already submitted all the requirements.</p> <p>Lawyer Sorayda Omar, also from COA's Legislative Affairs Office, mentioned that the Commission has come up with a draft revised State Audit Code, which is still awaiting review by COA Chair Michael Aguinaldo.</p> <p>The Committee will invite the COA Chair in the next meeting to answer some of the queries of the Members.</p>
Trade and Industry jt. w/ Health	HBs 40, 500, 1508, 1510, 1703, 2277, 2862, 2929, 3049, 3083, 4816, 5072, 5099, 5310, 5510, 5561, 5630 & 5702	Reps. Biazon, Barbers, Garbin, Deputy Speaker Villafuerte, Reps. Garcia (J.E.), Salo, Castelo, Tan (A.), Olivarez, Singson-Meehan, Roman, Garin (S.), Herrera-Dy, Alonte, Minority Leader Abante, and Rep. Rodriguez	Regulating the manufacture, importation, packaging, use, sale, distribution, and advertisement of electronic nicotine delivery systems and electronic non-nicotine delivery systems (ENDS/ENNDS) and heated tobacco products (HTPs)	<p>The Joint Committee, co-presided by Rep. Wes Gatchalian (1st District, Valenzuela City), Chair of the Committee on Trade and Industry, and Rep. Jose Enrique "Joet" Garcia III (2nd District, Bataan), Vice Chair of the Committee on Health, will deliberate further on the 18 bills in its next meeting.</p> <p>In today's meeting, the Committee invited resource persons from foreign health facilities/organizations to present their studies and recommendations on the proposed regulation of ENDS/ENNDS and HTPs in the Philippines.</p> <p>Konstantinos Farsalinos, a cardiologist and research fellow at the Onassis Cardiac</p>

Continuation... Trade and Industry jt. w/ Health				<p>Surgery Center in Greece, explained that using electronic cigarettes is less harmful than smoking tobacco or the conventional cigarettes, and that e-cigarettes are effective smoking cessation aids. He added that there is no recorded case in any country where the use of e-cigarettes has led to an increase in the number of smokers. Instead, it was observed that e-cigarette use has substantially reduced the prevalence of smoking. Strict regulations on e-cigarettes may inadvertently encourage the continued use of tobacco products, he said.</p> <p>Andrew da Roza, an addiction psychotherapist and quit-smoking counselor at the Promises Healthcare Pte. Ltd. in Singapore, explained that majority of tobacco cigarette smokers find it hard to quit despite existing preventive measures and quit-smoking programs. If the use of e-cigarettes will be regulated by the government, he recommends that the objective is to make e-cigarettes more accessible to smokers than tobacco cigarettes, and not to put barriers in the selling and buying of e-cigarettes. Da Roza added that based on studies, e-cigarettes serve as an effective nicotine replacement to help smokers quit or reduce their smoking.</p> <p>On the other hand, Ranti Fayukon, a scientist at the Department of Prevention of Non-Communicable Diseases of the World Health Organization (WHO), said that ENDS/ENNDS and HTPs are harmful to the health of their users. She stressed that these products should be subject to the same regulatory measures being applied to all other tobacco products.</p> <p>Both Rep. Rosanna "Ria" Vergara (3rd District, Nueva Ecija,) and Rep. Kristine Singson-Meehan (2nd District, Ilocos Sur) asked the WHO to give recommendations on how e-cigarettes should be regulated. Fayukon replied that WHO's role is to provide evidence-based and precise information to aid governments in making informed policy decisions. She added that WHO leaves the decision, whether to regulate or not, to the discretion of the country.</p> <p>Deputy Speaker Rodante Marcoleta (Party-List, SAGIP) and Rep. Alfredo Garbin Jr. (Party-List, AKO BICOL) noted that Fayukon's recommendations lack references to scientific studies that would support them and are only her personal opinion.</p>
Ways and Means	Substitute Bill to HB 178	Rep. Suansing (H.)	Imposing excise tax on single-use plastic bags, creating for the purpose Section 150-C of the National Internal Revenue Code (NIRC) of 1997, as amended	<p>The Committee, chaired by Rep. Joey Sarte Salceda (2nd District, Albay), approved the substitute bill. The Secretariat was directed to draft the corresponding Committee Report.</p> <p>The Committee agreed to adopt the following amendments:</p>

Continuation... Ways and Means				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The amount of P20.00 shall be collected as excise tax for every kilo of single-use plastic bag removed from the place of production or released from the customs house, instead of the original proposal of P10.00; and The proceeds from the excise tax on single-use plastic bags shall accrue to the Solid Waste Management Fund provided under Section 46 of RA 9003 or the Ecological Solid Waste Management Act of 2000. <p>Rep. Salceda assured that the proposed measure will not adversely affect the plastic industry as it is only meant to change consumer behavior towards reducing residual wastes, which comprise 90% of the wastes dumped in sanitary landfills.</p> <p>Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) Undersecretary Benny Antiporda suggested that "labo" plastic bags or thin-filmed plastic carrier bags used in supermarkets be replaced with thicker, more durable plastic bags to encourage people to re-use them. He likewise cited the downside of biodegradable bags as they are still made of plastic and are still harmful to the environment.</p>
Visayas Development	HB 4801	Rep. Lagon	Declaring the month of January every year as Visayan Heritage Month	The Committee, chaired by Rep. Vincent Franco "Duke" Frasco (5 th District, Cebu), deferred the deliberation of HB 4801 pending the submission of position papers of concerned government agencies.

SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING				
COMMITTEE	MEASURES		SUBJECT MATTER	ACTION TAKEN/DISCUSSION
	NO.	PRINCIPAL AUTHOR		
Subcommittee on Police Operations (Public Order and Security)	HBs 745, 3971, 5252 & 5628	Rep. Biazon, Deputy Speaker Villafuerte, Reps. Quimbo and Cabochan	Prohibiting the dissemination of false information of any threat concerning bombs, explosives or any similar device or means of destruction and imposing penalties for violation thereof	<p>The Subcommittee, chaired by Rep. Eddiebong Plaza (2nd District, Agusan del Sur), agreed to draft a substitute bill to the four bills, incorporating therein the pertinent recommendations of the resource persons.</p> <p>A bill with similar subject matter was approved on Third Reading during the 17th Congress.</p> <p>Rep. Stella Luz Quimbo (2nd District, Marikina City), author of HB 5252, said the bill imposes stiffer penalties on the malicious dissemination of false information or making a willful threat concerning bombs, explosives or any similar devices. She said that these bomb threats and similar irresponsible acts cause panic and anxiety among the people, disrupt the activities of the affected area, and result in economic losses and unnecessary expenses on the part of the government.</p> <p>HB 5252 imposes a penalty of imprisonment of 6-12 years or a fine of P1 million to P5 million,</p>

Continuation... Subcommittee on Police Operations (Public Order and Security)				<p>or both, which are higher than the existing penalties.</p> <p>Rep. Diego Ty (1st District, Misamis Occidental) sponsored HBs 745, 3971, and 5628 in behalf of the authors.</p> <p>Supporting the bills were representatives from the Philippine National Police (PNP), Office for Transportation Security (OTS), Department of Justice (DOJ), and Philippine Ports Authority (PPA).</p>
	HBs 503 & 5399	Reps. Barbers and Cabochan	Requiring mandatory autopsy on bodies of crime victims and deaths under mysterious and suspicious circumstances	<p>The Committee agreed to draft a substitute bill to the two bills, incorporating therein the pertinent recommendations of the resource persons.</p> <p>PNP Crime Laboratory Forensic Chemist Grace Eustaquio, PNP Medical Division Lieutenant Colonel Joseph Palmero, and National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) Deputy Director Ferdinand Lavin expressed support for the bills.</p> <p>Eustaquio said that the mandatory autopsy on the bodies of crime victims will facilitate the conduct of investigation by law enforcement agencies.</p> <p>Palmero suggested that clearance should first be secured from the PNP, NBI, and Department of Health (DOH) before the body of a crime victim is cremated.</p> <p>Lavin suggested that persons who will conduct the autopsy should be sensitive of the ethnic tribal practices of the dead and should be cautious in handling bodies with contagious diseases.</p>

AGENCY BRIEFINGS		
COMMITTEE	SUBJECT MATTER	DISCUSSIONS
Mindanao Affairs	Briefing by concerned government agencies on the status of the Mindanao railway project	<p>The Committee, chaired by Rep. Mohamad Khalid Dimaporo (1st District, Lanao del Norte), listened to the briefing by concerned government agencies on the status of the Mindanao railway project.</p> <p>Department of Transportation (DOTr) Undersecretary Timothy John Batan gave a brief overview on the 100-kilometer Tagum-Davao-Digos railway project, which was approved by the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) Board on November 29, 2019.</p> <p>Batan said that the railway, which will have a total of eight stations, will reduce travel time between Tagum City, Davao del Norte and Digos, Davao del Sur from 3.5 hours to 1.3 hours. The P81.7 billion-project, which is funded by the China Official Development Assistance, will start its construction in the first quarter of 2020 and is expected to become fully operational by the fourth quarter of 2022.</p> <p>The lawmakers asked why the project design will have a one-track non-electrified railway system instead of a two-track electrified railway system.</p>

Continuation... Mindanao Affairs		<p>Batan disclosed that the DOTr's original design was a two-track electrified railway system but was changed by the NEDA Board to a one-track non-electrified system. Nevertheless, Batan said that the DOTr made provisions in the railway design for a future upgrade to a two-track system.</p> <p>Rep. Sergio Dagooc (Party-List, APEC) and Rep. Eddiebong Plaza (2nd District, Agusan del Sur) favor the use of a two-track electrical railway system because its operation would be cheaper considering that electricity rates in Mindanao are lower as it is home to several hydro-electric power plants, aside from the fact that this system is the present global standard.</p> <p>On the query of Rep. Dimaporo regarding the high cost of airfare going to Mindanao, Civil Aeronautics Board (CAB) Deputy Executive Director Alexander Paul Rivera that ticket prices are dictated by market forces, adding that the airline industry is operating under a deregulated regime. However, Rivera noted that the entry of low-cost carriers such as the Cebu Pacific in 1996 and Asia Pacific in 2010 exemplified the beneficial impact of deregulation.</p> <p>Rivera also informed the Committee that the CAB has recently implemented the "compassionate rate" for airline tickets, where immediate relatives of deceased persons may enjoy a 25% discount on airfares, on top of other promos, when they fly home to attend their relative's wake or burial.</p> <p>The lawmakers proposed expanding the coverage of the "compassionate rate" to benefit other individuals, such as senior citizens, persons with disability (PWDs), and the underprivileged.</p> <p>Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) Assistant Secretary Ann Claire Credo-Cabochan mentioned that the CAB is the more competent body to handle complaints against excessive prices of airline tickets.</p>
Visayas Development	Briefing on the regional profile of and budget allocation for the Visayas	<p>The Committee, chaired by Rep. Vincent Franco "Duke" Frasco (5th District, Cebu), made a brief presentation on the national budget distribution and allocation for the Visayas, as compared to the budget allocations for Luzon and Mindanao from 2018-2020.</p> <p>Representatives from the Departments of Public Works and Highways (DPWH), Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), Tourism, (DOT), Education (DepEd), and Agriculture (DA) also presented their respective budget for Regions VI, VII, and VIII for the same period. It was observed that the regional offices of the agencies in the Visayas get the lowest share from the national budget.</p> <p>The Committee Members questioned the meager budget allocated for the regional office of the DOT in Visayas, even if the region accounted for 63.04% of foreign tourist arrivals in the country in 2018. They urged the government agencies to coordinate with the Committee regarding any budget deficiency and to submit their budget proposals ahead of the national budget deliberations. In this way, the Members can better assist the regional offices of these government agencies when their respective budgets are taken up in Congress.</p>

DISCUSSION WITH AGENCIES/ENTITIES		
COMMITTEE	SUBJECT MATTER	DISCUSSIONS
Good Government and Public Accountability jt. w/ Public Accounts	Discussion with the Manila Water Co. Inc. and Maynilad Water Services Inc. on the arbitral ruling of the Permanent Court of Arbitration	The Joint Committee, co-chaired by Rep. Jose Antonio "Kuya Jonathan" Sy-Alvarado (1 st District, Bulacan), Chair of the Committee on Good Government and Public Accountability, and Rep. Michael

<p><i>Continuation...</i> Good Government and Public Accountability jt. w/ Public Accounts</p>	<p>(PCA) in Singapore on the case they filed against the Philippine government; and the planned increases in water rates</p>	<p>Defensor (Party-List, ANAKALUSUGAN), Chair of the Committee on Public Accounts, will continue its discussion on the arbitral case filed by Manila Water and Maynilad against the Philippine government and the planned increases in water rates in January 2020.</p> <p>Members took turns asking the two Metro Manila water concessionaires – Maynilad and Manila Water – about the latter's next course of action after the PCA ruled in their favor. The two water concessionaires won the case against the government which is compelled to pay P3.4 billion and P7.4 billion, respectively. The combined amount of P10.8 billion serves as compensation for the supposed losses incurred by the two companies arising from government's refusal to allow water rate hikes since 2015.</p> <p>Other issues that cropped up during the meeting were the alleged 780% increase in water rates next year and the onerous provisions in the water concession agreements.</p> <p>Manila Water President and CEO Jose Almendras and Maynilad President and CEO Ramoncito Fernandez announced that they would no longer demand for the payment of the arbitral award from the government. They also informed the Committee that they will not increase, or at least they will defer, any rate hike come January 2020.</p> <p>Rep. Elpidio Barzaga Jr. (4th District, Cavite) asked Almendras and Fernandez to submit to the Committee a waiver of non-implementation of the PCA's decision.</p> <p>Rep. Defensor urged the water concessionaires and concerned government agencies, including Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System (MWSS), to review the provisions of the concession agreements. He said the Department of Justice (DOJ) found onerous provisions in the concession agreements which include barring the government from interfering in the setting of water rates and connection charges, and allowing the water concessionaires to pass on to the consumers the arbitration expenses and business taxes.</p>
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