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OF THE  
PEOPLE

May 2020



**DELINEATING THE  
NEW NORMAL**





Speaker Alan Peter “Compañero” Cayetano steers the passage of HB 6616 or the “Bayanihan to Heal as One Act” from First Reading to Third Reading in less than 24 hours during the first-ever session of the House of Representatives held via videoconference on March 23-24, 2020. An overwhelming 284 House Members voted for its approval. President Rodrigo Roa Duterte signed the measure into law on March 24.

## “Bayanihan to Heal as One Act” Approved in First Virtual Plenary Session

RESPONDING immediately to the COVID-19 pandemic, Speaker Alan Peter “Compañero” Cayetano shepherded the approval on final reading of [House Bill 6616](#), or the “Bayanihan to Heal as One Act,” during the first-ever plenary session via videoconference of the House of Representatives on March 23-24, 2020.

President Rodrigo Roa Duterte acknowledged the vital cooperation of the House in the approval of HB 6616, later [Republic Act 11469](#), declaring the existence of a national emergency arising from the COVID-19 situation, laying down a national policy, and granting presidential powers necessary to carry out such policy for a limited period of three months and with restrictions.

Congress convened after President Duterte, through Proclamation No. 933 on March 21, 2020, called for the legislature to pass a law authorizing him to exercise the necessary powers to carry out urgent measures to address the present national emergency.

The Speaker instructed the House Secretariat to immediately find ways to

effect a virtual plenary session which aimed to ensure participation of the 302 House Members but without compromising their safety amid this health crisis.

The special session lasted 17 hours, opening at 10 a.m. of March 23 and ending at the wee hours of March 24. The resulting HB 6616, or the “We Heal As One Act of 2020” garnered 284 affirmative votes, nine negative votes, and zero abstention, while eight did not vote. Prior to adjournment, the House adopted Senate Bill 1418 or the “Bayanihan to Heal as One Act of 2020” as amendment to HB 6616.

Speaker Cayetano with other House leaders and Secretariat officials led by Secretary-General Jose Luis Montales ensured that the special session followed strict social distancing protocols and effectively adopted videoconferencing and online technologies.

Speaker Cayetano cited the “unprecedented cooperation” between the executive and legislative branches as they work together to pass a comprehensive legislation that will address a national health emergency. •

# Zooming in the first House videoconference session

**T**HE HOUSE broke historic ground when it gathered most of its Members to deliberate on the “Bayanihan to Heal as One” Act from March 23 to the wee hours of March 24 by means of videoconferencing, as live proceedings were held in the Plenary Hall.

As Speaker Alan Peter “Compañero” Cayetano prepared the chamber to tackle the urgently needed legislation equipping the entire government to overcome the challenges brought on by the COVID-19 crisis, the House Secretariat had to quickly find the means to connect more than 300 lawmakers electronically in real-time.

Health regulations mandated physical distancing in gatherings, cutting down the number of people who can occupy the Plenary Hall. Many of the Members were in their hometowns and could not travel due to the Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ). The solution lay in the mixed use

of software and video livestreaming from the venue.

The Office of the Secretary General (OSG), Legislative Operations Department (LOD), Committee Affairs Department (CAD), Legal Affairs Department (LAD), and the Inter-Parliamentary and Public Affairs Department (IPPAD) worked together to ensure that Member participation in the session through videoconference would comply with the House Rules.

IPPAD DSG Darren de Jesus hosted the Zoom meeting on March 23, ensuring that each lawmaker participating from remote locations could clearly communicate with those in the Plenary Hall. Online participants were each allocated with three minutes to interpellate, with the live feed displayed on the LED screens of the Plenary Hall. They were also allowed to register their votes through text messages and online chat.

The Information and Communications Technology Ser-

vice (ICTS) had four days of preparation, repair and configuration of resources to arrive at a suitable videoconference setup. The ICTS also had to ascertain that the House network was stable enough to support the internet requirements of the Session. “Our priorities were to make sufficient bandwidth available and to ensure all ICT resources, especially the connectivity equipment in the session hall, are functional and optimally configured,” ICTS Director Angeline Garcia said.

Ultimately, the first session via Zoom was a roaring success. Only 20 Representatives were physically present in the Plenary Hall, while 281 were deemed present from offsite.

Of the unprecedented feat, LAD DSG Annalou Nachura said: “The House has never been one to put tradition over its central duty to pass responsive and timely legislation. By utilizing technology, the House continued to be relevant in this period of national crisis.” ●



(Left) Some of the 281 Members of the House in offsite locations join the proceedings of the special session on HB 6616 via Zoom videoconference while (right), inside the Plenary Hall, Majority Leader Ferdinand Martin Romualdez, as co-author of the bill, delivers his statement urging the approval of the emergency measure.





Speaker Alan Peter "Compañero" S. Cayetano explains to media the rationale in creating the Defeat COVID-19 Committee (DCC) which functions as advisory and coordinating committee of the House of Representatives, in a press briefing held on March 16, 2020.

## Defeat COVID-19 Committee brings up solutions to crisis

**I**N TANDEM with the ratification of RA 11469, or the "Bayanihan to Heal as One Act," the House created its Defeat COVID-19 Committee (DCC) as an ad hoc forum for Members of Congress to hear from Cabinet executives and experts, while crafting policies and monitoring implementation as the country meets the crisis head on.

Speaker Alan Peter "Compañero" Cayetano chairs the new committee, with Majority Leader Ferdinand Martin Romualdez as co-chairperson. The DCC is the main congressional oversight and coordination body, with jurisdiction over all matters directly and principally relating to the appropriate government response to the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects on the economy, industry, labor and the general public.

Under the DCC, various House standing and special committees were classified into four subcommittees, namely: Economic Stimulus, Health, Peace and Order, and Social Amelioration. These subcommittees report to the DCC, and the latter will then report, coordinate, advise and collaborate with the congressional oversight

committee that was tasked to supervise the provisions of the Bayanihan Act.

"We don't want to be a kind of Congress na lahat ng proposal na binigay ay hindi naman feasible, hindi naman kayang gawin o kaya lalong mapapasama ang kaso kesa mapapabuti," Speaker Cayetano said in a press conference, adding that Congress is in constant touch with the executive branch and the private sector to determine feasible measures.

The DCC subcommittees held a series of fruitful technical working group (TWG) sessions via videoconferencing, presided over by Majority Leader Romualdez with the Speaker in attendance, where each subcommittee presented their recommendations and heard from leading officials and resource persons.

The [Economic Stimulus cluster](#) consolidated two related bills, [HB 6606](#) by Rep. Joey Sarte Salceda (2nd Dist., Albay) and [HB 6619](#), authored by Rep. Stella Luz Quimbo (2nd Dist., Marikina City), into the proposed Philippine Economic Stimulus Act (PESA), that allots a P1.3-trillion

At the Technical Working Group discussion of the DCC Subcommittee on Peace and Order, House Members meet via videoconference with officials of the Philippine National Police and the Department of Interior and Local Government to thresh out pertinent details of the implementation of the Bayanihan to Heal as One Act. Majority Leader Ferdinand Martin Romualdez presided over the meeting.



assistance package, including aid and incentives for businesses and workers to get back on their feet and transition to the new post-pandemic economy. The megafund consists of interest-free loans, wage subsidies, training, direct grants and other interventions for business and labor, including the self-employed and freelancers, in affected economic sectors, such as tourism, agriculture, and micro, small, and medium enterprises.

The [Health subcommittee](#) TWG meetings invited as guests Department of Health (DOH) Secretary Francisco Duque III and his predecessors Dr. Manuel Dayrit and Dr. Esperanza Cabral, other health agency officials, and experts. Lawmakers proposed to create a COVID “War Council” and a “Laboratory Czar,” introduced by Reps. Angelina Tan (4th Dist., Quezon) and Janette Garin (1st Dist., Iloilo) respectively, while former Secretary Cabral mentioned the need for a “medical reserve corps” for medical crises.

At the April 28 TWG of the [Peace and Order cluster](#), co-chaired by Reps. Narciso R. Bravo Jr. (1st District, Masbate) and Raul C. Tupas (5th District, Iloilo), focus was on the main challenges of the government policies pertaining to the social distancing measures, stay-at-home policy and issues about the delivery of basic necessities nationwide. Rep. Bong Suntay (4th Dist., Quezon City) reminded the police and military forces that observance of human rights remains paramount even in the middle of a national health emergency and that cases of abuse will be looked into.

The [Social Amelioration cluster](#), headed by Deputy Speaker Luis Raymund Villafuerte Jr. and Rep. Lucy Torres-Gomez (4th District, Leyte), tackled a proposal to simplify the distribution process of the government’s Social Amelioration Program (SAP) as the ECQ has already resulted in massive job loss and economic slowdown. Villafuerte urged the Department

of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) to speed up the release of its cash aid for 18 million poor families by using the appropriate technology and social media. Torres-Gomez, for her part, said the ECQ downturn requires the inclusion of “newly poor” families from low-income and lower middle-income groups.

Thus far, a total of 59 measures have been referred to the DCC, including [HB 6623](#) or “The New Normal for the Workplace and Public Spaces Act of 2020,” [HB 6709](#) or “The COVID-19 Unemployment Reduction Stimulus (CURES) Act of 2020,” [HB 6633](#) or the “Modernization of Public Health Emergency Preparedness Act,” [HB 6707](#) or the proposed “Crushing COVID Act,” [HB 6612](#) or the proposed P10-billion emergency stimulus plan for tourism, [HB 6648](#) or “An Act Establishing A Philippine National Infectious Diseases Hospital And Research Center In All Regions,” and [HB 6676](#) or “The COVID-19- Related Anti-Discrimination Act.” ●

## More Inclusive Livestream

Two sign language interpreters (bottom tier) work in shifts to communicate the videoconference proceedings of the House Defeat COVID-19 Sub-Committee on Economic Stimulus to the hearing-impaired on April 21, 2020. As part of innovations to establish a relevant, responsive and reliable House of the People, the chamber invited members of the Filipino Sign Language Access Team for COVID-19, an alliance of deaf and hearing advocates for equal access to information during the pandemic, to provide services for the livestream of the meeting. Members of the same group provide interpretation services in the plenary sessions.





# Essential personnel report onsite, offices sanitized during ECQ



**E**SSENTIAL personnel of the House Secretariat reported for work since the Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ) took effect to ensure continuity of basic office operations and services and the safety of the workplace.

Sanitizing the premises became top priority during the first week of the Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ). Eleven buildings were disinfected from March 13 to 15, 2020. Designated Building and Grounds Management Service personnel supervised the thorough cleaning of the complex.

The exterior of the buildings and perimeter grounds underwent thorough disinfecting and sanitizing as well.

Quezon City Mayor Joy Belmonte sent the QC Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council personnel, together with the QC Firefighters Volunteers Association and Team Network Fire and Rescue volunteers, to conduct cleaning and disinfection operations in the House of Representatives on April 4, 2020 in response to an HRep request.

The House Medical-Dental Service continued to provide necessary assistance to House Members, employees, and their families for cases needing emergency medical attention and monitoring during the ECQ period.

Aside from offices that provided security, maintenance and medical services throughout the suspension of onsite work, the Office of the Secretary General, Finance Department, and Information and Communication Technology Service also ensured that rotational skeleton workforce were in the premises as needed. Other office personnel who were on “on-call” basis reported to the office to make certain that essential services for the public were not disrupted. Those not included in the skeleton workforce worked from home, and were expected to complete 40 hours of work a week and to submit assigned outputs.

With restrictions on mobility under the ECQ, the House issued Essential Personnel Defeat COVID-19 car passes to facilitate the movement of HRep employees who may be travelling to or from work within curfew hours or have to cross border checkpoints. ●

## Creating a COVID-Safe Workplace

(Top photo) The Building and Grounds Maintenance Service supervises the overall disinfection of exteriors and insides of structures in the Batasan Pambansa Complex. The disinfection of the building exteriors and perimeter grounds was done in coordination with Quezon City Mayor Joy Belmonte who asked the QC Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council to include the complex in the local government sanitization drive. (Lower left) All rooms undergo sanitizing to ensure safety of the House Members and their staff, Secretariat employees, and visitors. (Lower right). An acrylic countertop shield protects Medical-Dental Service (MDS) personnel during face-to-face transactions with clients.





## HRep Employees Give 800K for Parish Relief Ops

From donations of employees of the House of Representatives, a total of P801,500 was pooled at the height of the quarantine period in April 2020 to help in the relief operations of some parishes close to the Batasan Pambansa Complex. Fr. Luciano Airel Felloni (left) of the populous Kristong Hari Parish acknowledges the donation of P350,000 from the pooled fund. Another P350,000 went to the Vincentian Missionaries Social Development Foundation based in Tandang Sora, as received by its Executive Director, Fr. Budoj Borja (right). Two more parishes will be recipients of the remainder of the fund.



## Coping with the Pandemic in the Workplace

(Upper left photo) Shuttle buses will have seat markings in compliance with rules on physical distancing and occupancy limits. All riders would undergo health screening when boarding the vehicles. (Lower left photo) Provision of chairs at the Cashiering Service checkout lines helps congressional staff and consultants space themselves appropriately from each other at all times. (Right photo) Additional entrance/exit signs were installed in most frequented areas to control and direct foot traffic.

## Crushing COVID-19 in the Complex

(Left photo) The House Medical-Dental Service (MDS) personnel undergo training in systematic contact tracing, an essential step in mitigating the COVID-19 infection rate. (Middle photo) Outside the House clinic, a disinfection station stands close by, constructed by the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH). (Right photo) Persons showing virus symptoms will be brought to newly built isolation rooms, also courtesy of DPWH, at the ground floor of the North Parking Building. MDS Director Salvador Richard Dizon inspects the room facilities.



# Three House co-workers remembered



BRANDON PABELONA

THE HOUSE community of workers mourned three well-liked colleagues, two of them lost to the onslaught of COVID-19 in March.

Brandon Pabelona, 40, joined the Printing and Reproduction Service as a graphic artist five years ago. He was the eldest son of Ding and Boots Pabelona, also both House employees. Officemates remember him as a dedicated workaholic and family man, devoted to his wife, Josie Marie, and their three children.

He studied Industrial Design in UP Diliman. "He was highly skilled and worked independently, and he made many friends in and out of our service," recalled recently retired PRS Director Sonny Sarte. He passed away on March 15, 2020.

Manuel Rocha, 65, was chief of staff of Rep. Bernardita Ramos (2nd Dist., Sorsogon). A congressional staffer since 2010, he comes from an extensive private business background. He is familiar to co-workers for his regular attendance of the noontime mass.

He passed away on March 21. He is survived by his wife and two sons.

Director Apryll Dumas of the Office of the Speaker remembers Rocha as her funniest "tito" in the workplace. "In 2013, he was my main lifeline to reach my hometown in Leyte by land via Matnog after typhoon Yolanda struck. I will always be grateful for his help and our friendship. Congress will feel emptier without his laughter and ready smile," she noted.



MANUEL ROCHA



ALLAN ANDREW RAMOSO

Allan Andrew Ramoso, Committee Secretary of the Committee on Health, passed away due to illness not related to COVID-19 at age 50 on April 20, 2020. His sudden departure shocked many of his colleagues, many of whom he had been regularly interacting with at the height of the quarantine period in online forums. He was a source of updates on matters pertaining to the mysterious COVID-19 virus, owing to his position. He leaves behind his wife Luz and two children.

"Such a sharp-witted, benevolent and hard-working person ... truly a great loss to the institution," said co-worker Aileen Uy Dapuran, Committee Secretary, Committee on Public Works and Highways, in her tribute to Ramoso in social media. ●

## Heroes of the House



Non-organic personnel of the House may not be in the front lines, but they play vital roles in keeping the House clean and safe. (Upper left) Security personnel stationed at the North Gate Entrance take the temperature of all incoming employees and visitors of the House. (Lower left) Regular disinfecting of furniture and fixtures is now part of the cleaning routine of the House janitorial service provider. (Right) Amid summer heat and COVID-19 threat, MMDA Metro Parking Clearing Group sweepers continue to perform their task of cleaning the HRep road network of debris and litter.





HRep drivers overcome fear of COVID-19 to transport health workers to and from hospitals. All health workers undergo temperature checks before boarding the shuttle. Drivers wear PPEs to reduce risk of infection.

## House buses ferry frontliners

**B**USES from the House of Representatives helped hospital-based frontliners travel without cost from their homes to their place of work and back for more than a month during the enhanced community quarantine (ECQ) period from March 20 to May 2, 2020.

The House's motor pool lent two coaster-type buses and three vans to the Department of Transportation (DOTr) efforts to aid in the transportation of hospital workers, said Executive Director Renato L. dela Torre of the Engineering and Physical Facilities Bureau. Six drivers

worked on shifts for this project, namely: Randy Pairat, Dondie Abian, Marlon Mesa, Christopher Martin, Marlon Estrella, and Melchor Pigarot, while Elmer Coja served as the dispatcher.

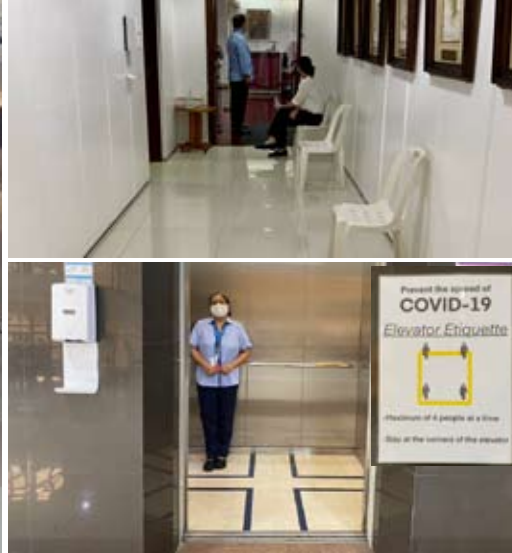
The assigned drivers reported to the Land Transportation Office (LTO) at 4:30 a.m. Their task was to ferry health workers to and from various pickup points--Centris, Providence Hospital, Capitol Medical Center, United Doctors Hospital, Delos Santos Medical Center, Philippine Children's Medical Center, St. Luke's Medical Center (QC), UERM Memorial Medical Center, Cubao-MRT

Station, SMTaytay, Mission Hospital, The Medical City, Galleria-EDSA, Cardinal Santos Medical Center, Life Homes, East Avenue Medical Center, Philippine Heart Center, National Kidney and Transplant Institute, Lung Center of the Philippines, Diliman Doctors Hospital, Commonwealth Hospital and Medical Center, National Children's Hospital, San Lazaro Hospital, Manila Doctors Hospital, Philippine General Hospital, Pasay City General Hospital, San Mateo Doctors Hospital, St. Vincent Hospital, Immaculate Conception Hospital, Marikina Valley Medical Center, and Amang Rodriguez Memorial Medical Center--in shuttle schedules that ran from 5:30 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.

ED dela Torre, with the assistance of Engineering Service Director Vicson C. Painagan and Transport Group Head Eduardo R. Tamayo, ensured safeguards were in place to protect the HRep drivers and health worker passengers. Vehicles were cleaned and disinfected regularly, drivers were given with face masks, and alcohol disinfectants were made available for the use of drivers and riders. ●



**HOPE** Stories and Pictures of HOPE in the House of the People; **Project Head** DSG Darren M. De Jesus, Inter-Parliamentary and Public Affairs Department; **Lead Service** Institutional Information and Design Service; **Co-Lead Service** Media Affairs and Public Relations Service; **Editor** SD Ferdinand M. Bolisli; **Associate Editor** SD Celine F. Buencamino, PhD; **Assistant Editors** Catherine L. Pangilinan, John Dominic Buhangin; **Layout** Waldemar Alvarez; **Contents Coordinator** Virginia Rizardo; **Writers** Rowena Bundang, Joselito Menorca, Czarina Mae Engracia, Criselda Vidal, Noelle Andrea Padrones, Monel Gonzales, Isagani Yambot Jr.; **Contributors** John Joseph Lloren; **Admin Support** Cynthia Bagaforo, Manfredo Castro III, Vanessa Valdez, Crispin Mendiola; **Photo Contributors** Ryan Labog, Perfecto Camero, Gilbert Engay, Ricardo Colobong, Vhernaleen Vergara, Ched Mellizas-Duterte, Felvyn Rallos, Beth Domingo, Jefferson Reyes; **Acknowledgements** Office of the Speaker, Office of the Secretary General, Engineering and Physical Facilities Bureau, Human Resource and Management Service, HRep Facebook, HRep Twitter; **Contact us** E-mail: InfoDesign@house.gov.ph Phone: 8931-5001 ext. 7490/7552



(Left) House Members, employees and visitors are subjected to initial health screening and disinfection at all building entrances. Footwear disinfection mats and non-contact infrared temperature guns are provided for this purpose. “No face mask, no entry” policy is strictly implemented. (Upper right) Employees observe physical distancing while queuing at the receiving area in compliance with the office occupancy limits. (Lower right) Square markings in elevator floors indicate the safe physical distance between users. Hand sanitizers are placed near the elevator doors for disinfection.

## Guidelines set for House workers

THE HOUSE of Representatives Secretariat formalized a new work protocols for Members, employees and visitors to observe in its sprawling Batasan Pambansa workplace.

Shortly before the House of Representatives resumed its First Regular Session plenary meetings on May 4, 2020, as the extended Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ) was underway, the Office of the Secretary General—after consultation with the Members, Executive Committee, and employees—released a [Memorandum](#) outlining major changes in the way work and business would be conducted in the premises.

For the protection of everyone’s health against the COVID-19 virus, the memorandum set forth the following general guidelines:

- Maintain physical distancing of at least two (2) meters from each other;
- Limit physical interaction;
- Prohibit mass gathering/activity of more than 50 persons;
- Disallow non-essential activities;
- Prioritize prevention of COVID-19 transmission in all aspects of HRep operations;
- Undertake health screening, sanitation, and disinfection protocols;
- Accord special consideration for senior citizens, persons with disabilities (PWDs), the pregnant, and those with existing medical conditions; and
- Adopt flexible work arrangements and schedules

To comply with these rules, all Members, employees, and guests shall undergo health screening, disinfection, and hygiene protocols upon entry to HRep complex and buildings which include wearing of face masks, checking of temperature, stepping on foot disinfection mats, and observing personal hygiene. Guests must have confirmed appointments and submit duly accomplished [Health Declaration Form](#) upon entering the complex. Frequent handwashing is highly encouraged. Soaps, alcohol, and alcohol-based hand sanitizers are provided in all buildings.

Occupancy of office spaces, meeting rooms and other facilities is now limited following physical distancing

protocol. The Plenary Hall’s occupancy limit is 50 persons. During sessions, a maximum of 25 House Members are allowed to be physically present while the rest join through videoconferencing. In addition to the Members, a combined total of 25 Secretariat employees, media personnel, and guests are allowed inside the hall. All committees, technical working groups, and administrative meetings, as well as political caucuses and press conferences will be conducted through videoconferencing. Barring compelling reason, physical meetings or a combination of physical and videoconferencing meetings are not allowed.

Although employees continue to observe the 40-hour work per week, the work arrangement will be modified through a combination of work-from-home and work-in-the office arrangements. Going to work onsite is only required when necessary, depending on one’s work duties. Heads of office determine the work arrangements for their employees, the rotation of its skeleton workforce, the outputs required, and the recording of attendance through issuance of Certificate of Service. Personnel who directly interact with the public are required to wear the appropriate protective gear.

Workstations and work processes have been modified to minimize close physical contact and interaction among Members, employees, and guests. To achieve this, information and communication (ICT)-based processes will be necessarily in place for the preparation, handling, transmission, custody of, and access to information and documents, except for strictly confidential information and documents. Each office will have a centralized receiving station for documents that cannot be electronically transmitted.

Further, only official travels in the performance of HRep’s mandate are allowed. Quarantine protocol after travel will be strictly observed.

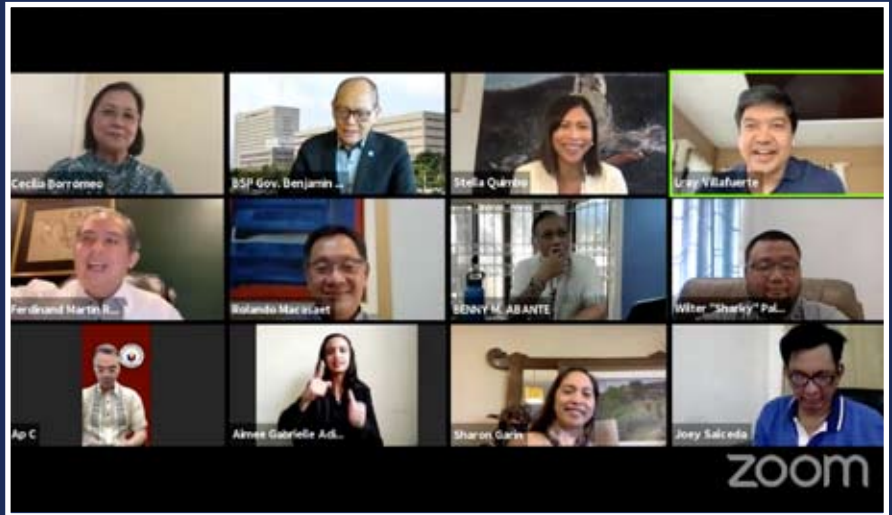
Employees are strongly encouraged to bring their food. Still, food concessionaires continue to operate but for take-out services only. Should food from outside the compound be availed, the items can only be picked up by the buyer at a designated area near the entrances.

The Medical-Dental Service oversees the implementation of the health protocols. Appropriate sanctions will be filed against violators. ●



***“This bill will prepare and educate the Filipino public for life after the lifting of COVID-19 restrictions and adapt to the new norms of physical distancing.”***

~The Authors of HB 6623



Top House leaders meet with Land Bank President Cecile Borrero and Central Bank Governor Benjamin Diokno to flesh out policy directions and economic legislation through videoconference, a new standard practice for organizations to get work done under the new normal. The authors and supporters of HB 6623 urge the adoption of strict physical and social distancing norms in public areas such as malls and restaurants, public transportation, offices and other public spaces as the economy gradually reopens.

## House prepares nation to engage the New Normal

**S**PEAKER ALAN PETER “Compañero” Cayetano, with colleagues in the House, filed a bill defining the safety protocols in offices and public places, delineating what would be the “new normal,” in this time of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As the country gears up for the scheduled lifting of the Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ) in the National Capital Region (NCR) and other areas with substantial cases of COVID-19 on May 15, 2020, the Speaker authored [House Bill 6623](#) or the proposed “New Normal for the Workplace and Public Spaces Act of 2020” to recognize that new norms are called for in working together and participating in public and economic activities.

Speaker Cayetano explained that the bill “will prepare and educate the Filipino public for life after the lifting of COVID-19 restrictions and to adapt to the new norms of physical distancing. It institutionalizes a new way of life after the Enhanced Community Quarantine and serves as a guide to the public.”

The House leaders recognize that the Filipino people will have to learn how to live with and adapt to the scourge of the COVID-19 pandemic while there are no viable treatments and vaccines available. The salient provisions of the bill requires the following: (a) universal and mandatory safety measures, such as the mandatory wearing of masks in public places and the mandatory social distancing; (b) management and regulation of government-managed public spaces and privately-managed spaces; (c) management of public

transportation; (d) monitoring of schools and learning institutions; and (e) monitoring of private commercial and industrial workplaces.

The enforcement of the measure will necessarily take into consideration the aforementioned provisions, with the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG), in coordination with the COVID-19 Inter-Agency Task Force (IATF), as the lead implementing office. Responsibility for grassroots enforcement will be placed on individual local government units (LGUs) under the supervision of Inter-LGU Coordinating Councils.

The New Normal bill contains a sunset provision, which is applicable for three (3) years from enactment or until the discovery of a vaccine and viable treatments for COVID-19.

Speaker Cayetano also emphasized the House’s readiness to prepare a draft of a stimulus package to jumpstart the economy as the country transitions towards the new normal. The proposed Philippine Economic Recovery Act (PERA) consolidates two draft bills: the “National Stimulus Strategy Act” of Rep. Joey Salceda (2nd District, Albay) and the “Economy Moving Forward as One Act” of Rep. Stella Quimbo (2nd District, Marikina City).

The Speaker acknowledges that there is a need to balance and put together the public health strategy with the strategy for economics given the new normal the country faces after the lifting of the ECQ and the consequent imposition of a General Community Quarantine throughout the country. ●

# Speaker Cayetano steers House to post-pandemic future

Members collectively take their ceremonial oath of office before Speaker Alan Peter “Compañero” S. Cayetano during the Opening of Session on July 22, 2019.

REP. ALAN Peter “Compañero” Cayetano (1st Dist., Taguig City-Pateros) made the establishment of a “relevant, responsive and reliable House of the People” his overarching goal when he was elected as the Speaker of the House of Representatives in the 18th Congress.

As a crucial partner for change of the administration of President Rodrigo Roa Duterte, he mobilized massive legislative support for priority measures that move the nation forward as well as shield the people from calamities and social distress.

In the first ten months of the 18th Congress, the Cayetano-led House filed 7,444 measures, of which 173 were approved on third reading, two are in bicameral conference, two are awaiting enrolment, five are enrolled, and eight have become law.

The eight measures enacted into law are the: P4.1-trillion [General Appropriations Act of 2020](#); [Salary Standardization Law of 2019 \(SSL V\)](#); [Malasakit Center Act](#); Postponement of the Conduct of the 2020 [Barangay and Sangguniang Kabataan Elections](#); the law [increasing the excise tax rate on alcohol beverages and electronic cigarettes](#); the law [extending the availability of the 2019 Appropriations](#) to December 31, 2020; and the law designating the third Sunday of November every year as the [National Day for Road Crash Victims and Their Families](#), and the Bayanihan to Heal As One Act.

Notably, the House approved on third reading the presidential priority bills comprising the Comprehensive Tax Reform Program, namely: the [Passive Income and Financial Intermediary Taxation Act](#); the [Corporate Income Tax and Incentive Rationalization Act](#); and the [Real Property Valuation and Assessment Act](#).

In a historic move, Speaker Cayetano with more than 200 legislators held the first out-of-town House plenary session at the Batangas City Convention Center on January 22, 2020, witnessing for themselves the damage wrought by the restive volcano in the previous weeks. The initiative fast-tracked the availability of legislative and fiscal support to those who lost their families, homes, and livelihood because of the calamity.

As the nation fell prey to a novel coronavirus raging throughout the world in March 2020, Speaker Cayetano created the Defeat COVID-19 Committee (DCC) even as Congress was in recess, highlighting the exigency and urgency of the situation. The Speaker transformed the House into a digitally connected collegial body, tapping technology for regular discussions with leading experts on ways to mitigate the spread and social impact of the virus.

The Speaker also spearheaded the House’s first virtual special plenary session through videoconferencing to fast-track approval of HB 6616, which would later be signed into law by the President as RA 11469, or the

Bayanihan to Heal As One Act. By videoconferencing, House Members interpellated each other, delivered privilege speeches, and consequently passed the crucial measure needed by the executive to swiftly respond to the looming threat of COVID-19.

Speaker Cayetano’s rallying cries amidst the pandemic are “To Heal as One” and “Defeat COVID-19.” As chairman of the DCC, he galvanized immediate support for legislation that fuel nationwide recovery from the slowdown that resulted from the extended quarantine period. Primarily, these bills are HBs 6606 and 6619, consolidated into the Philippine Economic Stimulus Act (PESA) allotting P1.3 trillion for businesses and workers to avail in their efforts to get back to their feet, HB 6709 or the COVID-19 Unemployment Reduction Economic Stimulus (CURES) securing P1.5 trillion (or P500 million a year for three years) for infrastructure spending to cushion the impact of the COVID, and HB 6623 or the New Normal for the Workplace and Public Spaces Act of 2020, mandating new ways of working and living together to keep healthy while no vaccine is in sight.

Further, the Speaker has called on executive agencies to be transparent in the disbursement of COVID-related aid under the Bayanihan to Heal as One Act while urging the construction of more hospitals spread across the country to exclusively treat COVID-related infections. ●