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JOURNAL OF THE COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE HOUSE

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CALL TO ORDER

Chairperson Ferdinand Martin G. Romualdez called to order the meeting of the Committee of the Whole House at 3:53 p.m.

ROLL CALL DISPENSED WITH

On motion of Rep. Wilter “Sharky” Wee Palma II, there being no objection, the Body dispensed with the calling of the Roll.

CONSIDERATION OF HOUSE BILL NO. 6732

Thereafter, on motion of Representative Palma, there being no objection, the Body proceeded to the consideration of House Bill No. 6732.

Upon direction of the Chair, the Secretary General read the title of the Bill, to wit:

“AN ACT GRANTING THE ABS-CBN BROADCASTING CORPORATION A FRANCHISE TO CONSTRUCT, INSTALL, OPERATE AND MAINTAIN RADIO AND TELEVISION BROADCASTING STATIONS IN THE PHILIPPINES, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.”

Thereupon, on motion of Representative Palma, the Chairperson recognized Speaker Alan Peter “Compañero” S. Cayetano for his sponsorship speech.

SPONSORSHIP SPEECH OF SPEAKER CAYETANO (A.P.)

Quoting Ecclesiastes 3:1-3 at the beginning of his speech, Speaker Cayetano stressed the need to hold on to God’s promise that there is a proper time for everything. He said that while the new coronavirus pandemic has created a time of danger and challenges, it has also become a time of opportunity for everyone to quickly adapt, innovate, and manage adversities; a time to provide assistance; a time for unity, compassion, healing, and immense faith; a time to find solutions; and a time to build a new and better tomorrow.

After reminding everyone of the Executive Department’s commitment that all Filipino families who are in need would benefit from the Bayanihan to Heal as One Act, the Speaker noted that Congress, in its duty to respond to the health crisis, has been discussing with the national agencies, exercising its oversight function, and formulating proposals to facilitate the aid needed by the people in terms of health, income, and livelihood, among others.

He thanked the Members led by Majority Leader Romualdez (F.M.) for their hard work and for standing behind their constituents and the Duterte administration. Raising important questions that seek the Body’s attention, Speaker Cayetano underscored that Congress, while grappling with several serious and important concerns, needs to deal with the franchise renewal of ABS-CBN Broadcasting Corporation.

However, he stressed that the weight of taking immediate response to the COVID-19 pandemic is incomparable to the concern of a private corporation; but Congress had to set aside the former because of the recent action of the National Telecommunications Commission. He stated that the Body could have acted earlier on the matter were it not for the commitment given by the NTC under oath on March 10, 2020, to provisionally allow ABS-CBN to continue its broadcast upon the expiration of its 25-year franchise.

In upholding what is right, he stated that although the issue of the ABS-CBN franchise was out of timing in light of the current public health emergency, he said that Congress is now constrained to discuss the issue, and this consequently would delay deliberations on crucial matters such as the social amelioration and economic stimulus bills for all affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. He however emphasized that the ABS-CBN’s shutdown was neither a form of silencing the media nor curtailing press freedom since it is still able to broadcast its content with the help of online technology.

He then clarified that Congress respects the legal opinions of the Solicitor General and the NTC, but it objects to and takes serious offense at their deliberate and malicious actions that undermined the

authority of Congress. He added that the NTC should have informed the House of any changes in its said commitment, and that as fellow government workers, they should be working together instead of trying to bring each other down.

Addressing the media people who were calling for the renewal of the ABS-CBN franchise and those who blamed him for not passing the bill sooner, Speaker Cayetano said that he respects their stand but reminded them that calling for a hasty approval of the franchise without scrutiny of the allegations and questions raised against the network would make them just plain propagandists, which is contrary to the principles of journalism. He pointed out that unlike the cases of other networks, the ABS-CBN's application for franchise renewal is surrounded with legal issues that need careful investigation.

The Speaker recognized that the current predicament may be unfair to the network's present management but stressed that there has to be accountability in line with the franchise renewal. He also enjoined the ABS-CBN celebrities who cry injustice over their network's shutdown to support due process and fact-finding.

Subsequently, he turned his attention to a few Members who reportedly called their colleagues inutile and lazy, reminding them not to lose objectivity and propriety in the midst of the ABS-CBN issue, as he cited many of the important legislations that the Body had passed in the last ten months.

He next asked the Senate to allow the Lower House to do its job and respect the nature of their representation. He enjoined the Senators to work together with the Members but at the same time asked them to respect the Body's timing and process.

To the supporters of different political parties, he raised the importance of facts and appropriate deliberations to justify whatever decision Congress will make regarding the franchise renewal. Addressing the so-called "yellowtards," he said nothing he says will make them agree with him as they think their opinions are the law and always correct so he advised them to just discuss matters with Senator Antonio F. Trillanes IV for they deserve each other.

Next relaying to the Body that he was the one who applied for a temporary restraining order and spoke against ABS-CBN prior to the 2016 national

elections, he reiterated his stance to hold the network accountable, but said that true accountability can only come from fair and thorough conduct of hearings. Then focusing his speech on the management and employees of the ABS-CBN, he acknowledged the network's efforts and contributions especially during times of crisis and calamities but asked for everyone's cooperation and understanding, and to allow Congress to hear all sides of the issues and resolve these through its own deliberation process.

Likewise reacting to the allegation of some ABS-CBN reporters that the Speaker had previously said that he himself will be the one to switch on the network's transmitter should it be forced to shut down its operations, Speaker Cayetano stressed that it was ABS-CBN itself that voluntarily switched off its transmitter. This, as he stated that the network could have gone to the court to seek a temporary restraining order while continuing its broadcast.

In closing, Speaker Cayetano said that through House Bill No. 6732 which he and his colleagues had filed to give ABS-CBN a full-blooded franchise with limited period of until October 31, 2020, both the House of Representatives and Senate will hear the points being raised for and against the renewal of the network's franchise for another 25 years. He reiterated the importance of timing and fairness in deliberating on the matter and gave the assurance that the 18th Congress will do what is right for the nation and its people. Lastly, he underscored that whatever the outcome of the hearings would be, reforms would have to be put in place in the entire media industry as well as in Congress.

Thereafter, on motion of Representative Palma, the Chair recognized Deputy Speaker Dan S. Fernandez for his sponsorship speech.

SPONSORSHIP SPEECH OF DEPUTY SPEAKER FERNANDEZ

While highlighting the role of ABS-CBN in providing reliable sources of information especially during this time of pandemic and being part of the lives of Filipinos, Deputy Speaker Fernandez said House Bill No. 6732 would allow all parties to give their inputs which will help Congress decide on the fate of the network's franchise.

He then called on the NTC to be held accountable for releasing a cease and desist order to the ABS-CBN despite a prior agreement reached with the

House of Representatives. This, according to him, was a betrayal not only to the House but also to the Filipinos' greater interest and well-being.

In closing, he reiterated his call for the approval of the Bill and to make the NTC accountable for its actions.

APPROVAL OF HOUSE BILL NO. 6732

On motion of Representative Palma, there being no objection, the Body approved House Bill No. 6732 through *viva voce* voting.

DISTRIBUTION OF COPIES OF THE REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE HOUSE

On motion of Representative Palma, there being no objection, the Chair directed the Secretariat to prepare the Report of the Committee of the Whole House for distribution to all Members including those who were participating through teleconferencing.

SUSPENSION OF MEETING

To allow the Secretariat to prepare and distribute the Report of the Committee of the Whole House, on motion of Representative Palma, the Chair suspended the meeting at 4:52 p.m.

RESUMPTION OF MEETING

The meeting resumed at 5:15 p.m.

APPROVAL OF THE REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE HOUSE

As copies of the Report of the Committee of the Whole House on House Bill No. 6732 had been distributed to the Members, including those

participating through teleconferencing, on motion of Representative Palma, there being no objection, the Body subsequently approved the Report through *viva voce* voting.

REMARKS OF REPRESENTATIVE PALMA

Pursuant to Section 138, Rule XVIII of the Provisional House Rules, on motion of Representative Palma, the Chairperson was instructed to report the action of the Committee of the Whole House to the House.

The Chair noted the remarks of the Floor Leader.

ADJOURNMENT OF MEETING

On motion of Representative Palma, there being no objection, the Chairperson declared the meeting of the Committee of the Whole House adjourned.

It was 5:16 p.m.

I hereby certify to the correctness of the foregoing.


JOSE LUIS G. MONTALES
Secretary General

Approved:


HON. FERDINAND MARTIN G. ROMUALDEZ
Chairperson, Committee of the Whole House