# Stalled gov’t ‘rightsizing’ plan

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In his first State of the Nation Address in 2022, President Marcos declared that he wanted to have the National Government Rightsizing Program (NGRP) passed to transform the bloated bureaucracy into a lean and efficient organization that can deliver better public service while ensuring the optimal use of precious financial resources.

But alas, Mr. Marcos is now halfway into his term and the chances of what was supposed to be a priority bill being passed into law before the current Congress goes on recess in June are getting slimmer by the day.

Indeed, it is becoming more likely that the Marcos administration will share the same fate as those that came before, with the efforts to streamline the government’s organizational structure and workforce complement to eliminate functions, programs that are redundant, overlapping or obsolete will be for naught.

Senate President Francis “Chiz” Escudero is not losing hope, however, and said that the bill’s passage would be prioritized by the Senate, even contemplating on renaming it from “rightsizing” to “optimization” bill to make it more palatable. “Rightsizing,” Escudero explained, “was deemed too negative.”

## Career advancement

Semantics aside, the time has come to achieve the objective that deserves support, that is to minimize redundancies, eliminate overlaps and duplication, and simplify rules, regulations, and processes to improve public service.

Mr. Marcos had emphasized that compared to previous efforts to reorganize the government, the NGRP was different as it would entail a comprehensive strategic review of the functions, operations, organization, systems, and processes of different government agencies.

Regarding personnel, the comprehensive review of the agencies plus the staffing requirements should reveal the right number of plantilla positions. Doing so will then solve the longstanding problem of government personnel stuck in job order positions that should have been converted into permanent posts, as Budget Secretary Amenah Pangandaman had advocated.

Escudero, author and sponsor of the bill, explained that the review of the government structure could even lead to the creation of new positions, offices, upgrading and upskilling of personnel “to help them fill up much-needed positions and put them on the path toward career advancement.”

## Slow and lethargic

Mr. Marcos started the ball rolling in 2022 when he abolished through executive orders several government agencies, such as the Presidential Anti-Corruption Commission and Office of the Cabinet Secretary and further streamlining should continue across departments, bureaus, commissions, boards, councils, and government-owned and -controlled corporations to slim down the government machinery.

It has, after all, grown significantly over the years thus instead of becoming more agile, the government structure has become unwieldy, slow, and lethargic, not to mention increasingly expensive to maintain with some 187 government agencies employing a combined two million personnel.

An earlier brief by the Congressional Policy and Budget Research Department (CPBRD) that was discussed by the 17th Congress showed that the number of government personnel has grown from 1.108 million in 2005 to 1.244 million in 2015 or a growth of 12.27 percent. For the same period, the total number of permanent positions in government increased from 1.15 million to 1.43 million, or a growth of 24.55 percent.

As a result, the corresponding expenditures have also ballooned: the actual expenditures of the government for personal services (PS) have expanded from P295.18 billion in 2005 to P682.62 billion in 2015, or an equivalent of 131.26 percent.

## Redundant offices

The House of Representatives had already passed its version in March 2023, thus it is now up to the Senate to beat the clock. There is only about a week left before Congress goes on break from Feb. 8 to June to give way to the May 2025 midterm election campaign before resuming from June 2 to June 13.

“Studies have shown that the existing governmental organization is bloated and overstaffed, with redundant offices and overlapping or fragmented or ambiguous functions. The situation calls for the rightsizing of the bureaucracy to promote effectiveness, efficiency and economy in the delivery of services to the people,” said the CPBRD brief.

The Philippine Institute for Development Studies also noted in its own study that from 2014 to 2021, the national government spends an average of 28.8 percent of its annual budget on PS.

This means that by going through the painful–but ultimately necessary process of reviewing the government structure to remove any excess fat, then the government will be able to free up resources for other urgent priorities such as infrastructure development, social welfare, and agriculture projects while keeping the bureaucracy fully equipped to serve the people.

That is a legacy that Mr. Marcos can and should continue to fight for. There is still time to succeed where previous administrations have failed.