

## RECORD OF THE SENATE

MONDAY, MAY 6, 2002

### OPENING OF THE SESSION

*At 3:43 p.m., the Senate President, Hon. Franklin M. Drilon, called the session to order.*

**The President.** The 77th session of the First Regular Session of the Twelfth Congress is hereby called to order.

Let us all stand for the opening prayer to be led by Sen. Renato L. Compañero Cayetano.

After the prayer, the chorale from the National Power Corporation will lead us in the singing of the national anthem. The chorale will also render another song, entitled *Hilumin*.

*Everybody rose for the prayer.*

### PRAYER

**Senator Cayetano.** Let us pray.

Lord, You have given us everything, You gave us  
Your only Son, Jesus Christ, to redeem us from our sins.

You have given us life to live and to raise children.

You have given us Mother Earth to build our houses  
and plant trees.

You have given us bodies of water to quench our  
thirst and to water our plants.

But what have we given You in return?

We have forgotten what Your Son, Jesus Christ, had  
done for us.

Instead, we keep doing our wicked ways.

We have forgotten to protect Mother Earth and  
the environment.

We have forgotten our children, leaving them  
begging in the streets and living in shanties.

We have forgotten to preserve our water.

Instead, we infected it with garbage. We have  
forgotten our nation's need, just to cater to our desires.

But we also know, Lord, that You have a forgiving  
heart.

That if we repent, we shall be forgiven.

We then pray for forgiveness for our trespasses, our  
sins, our neglect.

We pray, too, for wisdom to avoid these pitfalls,  
courage to fight all evils and peace to unite us under one  
flag and one nation.

Amen.

### NATIONAL ANTHEM

*Everybody remained standing for the singing of the  
national anthem.*

**The President.** We thank very much the choir of the National  
Power Corporation.

The Secretary will please call the roll.

### ROLL CALL

**The Secretary.** *reading:*

|                                               |          |
|-----------------------------------------------|----------|
| Senator Edgardo J. Angara .....               | Present  |
| Senator Teresa Aquino-Oreta .....             | Present  |
| Senator Joker P. Arroyo .....                 | Present  |
| Senator Robert Z. Barbers .....               | Present  |
| Senator Rodolfo G. Biazon .....               | Present  |
| Senator Renato L. Compañero Cayetano ....     | Present  |
| Senator Noli "Kabayan" De Castro .....        | Present  |
| Senator Luisa "Loi" P. Ejercito Estrada ..... | Present  |
| Senator Juan M. Flavies .....                 | Present  |
| Senator Gregorio B. Honasan .....             | Present  |
| Senator Robert S. "JAWO" Jaworski .....       | *        |
| Senator Panfilo M. Lacson .....               | Present  |
| Senator Loren B. Legarda Leviste .....        | Present  |
| Senator Ramon B. Magsaysay Jr. ....           | Present  |
| Senator Blas F. Ople .....                    | Present  |
| Senator John Henry R. Osmefia .....           | Present  |
| Senator Sergio R. Osmefia III .....           | Present  |
| Senator Francis N. Pangilinan .....           | Present  |
| Senator Aquilino Q. Pimentel Jr. ....         | Present  |
| Senator Ralph G. Recto .....                  | Present  |
| Senator Ramon B. Revilla .....                | Absent** |
| Senator Vicente C. Sotto III .....            | Present  |
| Senator Manuel B. Villar Jr. ....             | Present  |
| The President .....                           | Present  |

**The President.** With 22 senators present, the Chair declares  
the presence of a quorum.

\* On official mission

\*\* On account of illness

Now, who will determine if the financial condition of the national government is stable enough to go on with the staggered phasing of salary increases, Mr. President?

**Senator Magsaysay.** Is the gentleman referring to line 24 of Section 4?

**Senator Lacson.** Yes, Mr. President.

**Senator Magsaysay.** It says: "The implementation of this Act shall be undertaken in staggered phases, but not to exceed twenty-four months taking into consideration the financial condition of the national government."

We have been assured by the head of the Department of Budget and Management as early as March that this can be done, but of course there is always a qualification. But with the full support of the Senate and the Congress—and this is being certified by the President herself among the LEDAC measures that are prioritized—this will be implemented, Mr. President.

**Senator Lacson.** I am only concerned, Mr. President, because during the Eleventh Congress when we enacted the salary adjustments for the PNP, we were accused of congressional estafa because we were not able to implement it. So, I do not want it to be repeated in the Twelfth Congress. I am just trying to be assured that the 24-month implementation period will be complied with.

**Senator Magsaysay.** We would like to assure the gentleman that we are all one in this. If he wants to strengthen this statement, he will be having a sponsor who is open to strengthening and ensuring that this law will be implemented within the time frame.

**Senator Lacson.** Thank you very much, Mr. President.

**Senator Magsaysay.** Thank you, Mr. President.

**The Presiding Officer [Sen. Flavie].** The Majority Leader is recognized.

#### SUSPENSION OF CONSIDERATION OF S. NO. 2086

**Senator Legarda Leviste.** Mr. President, our other colleagues have reserved to interpellate Senator Magsaysay on this issue but they are not present in the hall today. I therefore move that we suspend consideration of Senate Bill No. 2086 under Committee Report No. 36.

**The Presiding Officer [Sen. Flavie].** Is there any objection? *[Silence]* There being none, the motion is approved.

#### SUSPENSION OF SESSION

**Senator Legarda Leviste.** Mr. President, I move that we suspend the session for one minute.

**The Presiding Officer [Sen. Flavie].** Is there any objection? *[Silence]* There being none, the session is suspended for one minute.

*It was 5:29 p.m.*

#### RESUMPTION OF SESSION

*At 5:29 p.m., the session was resumed.*

**The Presiding Officer [Sen. Flavie].** The session is resumed. The Majority Leader is recognized.

#### BILL ON SECOND READING

#### S. No. 2101 — Instituting a Balikbayan Program (Continuation)

**Senator Legarda Leviste.** Mr. President, I move that we resume consideration of Senate Bill No. 2101 under Committee Report No. 38.

**The Presiding Officer [Sen. Flavie].** Is there any objection? *[Silence]* There being none, resumption of consideration of Senate Bill No. 2101 is now in order.

**Senator Legarda Leviste.** May I ask that the sponsor of the measure, Sen. Noli de Castro, be recognized?

**The Presiding Officer [Sen. Flavie].** Sen. Noli de Castro is recognized.

**Senator Legarda Leviste.** We are in the period of interpellations. To interpellate, I ask that Sen. Luisa Ejercito Estrada be recognized.

**The Presiding Officer [Sen. Flavie].** Sen. Luisa Ejercito Estrada is recognized for the interpellation.

**Senator De Castro.** I am ready, Mr. President.

**The Presiding Officer [Sen. Flavie].** Sen. Luisa Ejercito Estrada may now proceed.

**Senator Ejercito Estrada.** Will the gentleman from Mindoro yield for some questions, Mr. President?

**Senator De Castro.** Yes, Mr. President. It is an honor, to the former First Lady.

**Senator Ejercito Estrada.** Thank you, Mr. President.

I would like to congratulate the honorable sponsor on his commitment in trying to uplift the lives of our overseas Filipino workers by introducing certain amendments to Republic Act No. 6768, otherwise known as "An Act Instituting a Balikbayan Program."

Mr. President, please allow me at the onset to express my appreciation to our balikbayans and their families for the help, directly or indirectly, they have given to our country in general and to our economy in particular.

As a member of the sponsor's Committee on Tourism, allow me to make it clear that I am committed to support any and all legislation that will redound to the benefit of these modern-day heroes. However, Mr. President, as I was studying the committee report vis-a-vis the materials on the subject, I noticed some inconsistencies and disagreements which I believe will have to be properly addressed and clarified by the sponsor's committee.

For example, Mr. President, the honorable sponsor said on page 3, second to the last sentence of the last paragraph of his sponsorship speech, which reads: "There are two other consequential benefits from the amendment proposed under this bill. One is the expected increase in foreign exchange earnings and other revenues that can fund the tourism program of the government." Allow me to read it again: One of the benefits is "the increase in foreign earnings and other revenues."

Now, on page 5, Section 3(a), line 6 of the committee report, it says that the balikbayan and his family shall be entitled to a tax-free maximum purchase in the amount of US\$1,000 or its equivalent in Philippine peso. In line 19, it says that the balikbayan and his family shall also be entitled to the Kabuhayan shopping privilege through an additional tax-free purchase in the maximum amount of US\$1,000 or its equivalent in Philippine peso.

My question, Mr. President, is: How could we realize the expected increase in foreign earnings and other revenues if we allow tax-free purchases in Philippine peso? Tax-free na nga in Philippine pesos pa.

**Senator De Castro.** *Ginoong Pangulo, ang isa po sa pangunahing layunin ng batas na ito ay mabigyan ng karagdagang pribilehiyo ang ating mga kababayan, especially the overseas Filipino workers, bilang pagkilala sa kanilang kontribusyon sa ating economy through the foreign exchange inflow and revenues na puwede nilang ma-generate.*

*Ang tanong po ay ito: Paano makikinabang dito ang ating pamahalaan? Because we will accept also in peso. Tatanggap tayo ng peso.*

**Senator Ejercito Estrada.** Yes, Mr. President. *Tamapo iyon.*

**Senator De Castro.** Allright. *Kung dumarating po, Ginoong Pangulo, ang ating mga balikbayan, karaniwan ay may dala silang U.S. dollars or other kind of currencies.*

**Senator Ejercito Estrada.** Yes, Mr. President.

**Senator De Castro.** Karaniwan din po iyan na pagkatapos na dumating sa ating bansa ay magpapalit ng dolyar o ang ipinamimigay nila ay dolyar din sa kanilang kamag-anak. Pero inilagay po sa ating batas na maaaring gamitin din ang piso other than US dollars and other currencies. Dahil tayo lamang po sa buong mundo ang hindi tumatanggap ng sarili nating pera, which is in peso.

Ang ating layunin po rito ay makuha natin iyong mga pera na normally ay naiiwan sa bansang pinanggalingan ng isang overseas Filipino worker or a balikbayan. So with this kind of privilege, lalo na iyong kabuhayang nadagdag dito, iyong pera na dapat maiwan doon ay gagamitin na nila sa Pilipinas sa pamimili ng mga duty-free products sa ating mga duty-free shops. Kaya kahit in pesos ay nakukuha pa rin natin iyong pera na karaniwang naiiwan sa ibang bansang pinanggalingan ng isang balikbayan o ng isang overseas Filipino worker.

**Senator Ejercito Estrada.** Ginoong Pangulo, kasi po, pag nagbayad sila in pesos, iko-convert uli ng duty-free shop iyong pesos into dollars para ibili ulit ng gamit o paninda nito.

**Senator De Castro.** From peso to dollar, Mr. President.

**Senator Ejercito Estrada.** Peso to dollar. Kasi iyong dolyar sa ating revenues ay kulang pa nga. Ito bang situwasyon na ito ay maganda sa ating ekonomiya, Ginoong Pangulo?

**Senator De Castro.** I think so, Mr. President. Unang-una, may natanggap akong reklamo dito sa OWWA at sa duty-free shops. Kung minsan ay peso na ang hawak-hawak ng isang overseas Filipino worker—I am talking about overseas Filipino workers—ngunit pagpasok nila sa mga duty-free shops, kung required ng mga duty-free shops na magbayad sila in dollars or other foreign currencies, magpapalit na naman sila ng hawak nilang peso in dollar. Kung minsan naman ay dolyar ang hawak nila, magpapalit 3 peso, ngunit pagpunta na naman nila sa duty-free shops, palit sila in dollars. Kaya nagrereklamo ang mga overseas workers.

Pero hindi lamang po iyon ang isa sa mga kadahilanan kung bakit pinahihintulutan natin ang piso. Sapagkat ang layunin ng pribilehiyong ibinibigay sa mga balikbayan o overseas Filipino workers ay para hindi nga makalabas iyong pera na karaniwang

naiiwan sa bansang pinanggalingan ng isang balikbayan o ng isang overseas Filipino worker.

So, instead of buying those products from the country na kanilang pinanggalingan, dito na lamang sa Pilipinas sila bibili through the duty-free shops. Kaya ang pera ay hindi naiiwan sa labas ng bansa kundi ito ay naipapasok sa loob ng ating bansa, either in the form of dollars or other foreign currencies.

**Senator Ejercito Estrada.** Ginoong Pangulo, kung i-insist po natin na dolyar na lamang ang babayaran natin and then the objective is to increase the foreign exchange earnings, paano kung hindi iwan ng balikbayan ang dolyar? Mas maganda kung dolyar na rin at sigurado pa tayong

**Senator De Castro.** Kasi, Ginoong Pangulo, liberalized narin ang ating foreign exchange. Hindi na masyadong istrikto dito. At ang isa ngang ibinigay kong dahilan, the only duty-free shop in the whole world na hindi tumatanggap ng sariling pera ay itong atin. So they adopted itong paggamit ng ating Philippine peso. Kaya iyong reklamo nga ng mga overseas Filipino workers, iyong dolyar na dala-dala nila at papapalitan nila ng peso, ngunit pagpunta nila sa duty-free shop ay magpapapalit uli sila in dollars dahil hindi nga tatanggapin ng mga duty-free shops iyong dollar.

**Senator Ejercito Estrada.** Thank you very much for that answer, Mr. President.

During the first committee hearing held last October 23, 2001, the representatives of various government agencies registered the following objections: From the Department of Finance and the Philippine International Trade Incorporation, which is under the Department of Trade and Industry, increasing the shopping privilege will tend to favor imported products and might be deemed as being insensitive to the current plight of Philippine manufacturers and retailers.

Mr. President, how do we explain this to local manufacturers and retailers? *Paano ninyo maipapaliwanag ito sa mga manufacturer and retailer?*

**Senator De Castro.** For example, electronics, Mr. President. *Ang laman po ng duty-free shops ay mga locally manufactured televisions, stereos and other electronic products. Isa po iyon sa nakakatulong sa ating ekonomiya.* Sapagkat nadadala iyon ng mga manggagawa sa ating bansa, lalo na sa mga pabrika ng television sets and stereos.

Pangalawa, itong bill na ito ay may kaugnayan lamang sa kabuhayang idinadagdag natin sa halagang US\$1,000. Tama po kayo na sa committee hearing ay napansin natin ang oposisyon ng local retailers dahil ang iniisip nila ay ang inaasahan o expected

losses kung saka-sakali. Pero kung isasaalang-alang natin ang experience sa ilalim ng R.A. 6768, walang epekto ito, in the same manner na wala itong epekto sa livelihood tools or equipment na bibilhin ng mga kababayan nating OFWs at balikbayan sa mga duty-free shop natin. Maliban diyan, ang ating government duty-free shops—*nais lamang bigyang diin dito, Ginoong Pangulo*, na ang pinag-uusapan natin ay owned-and-controlled duty-free shops ng ating pamahalaan—ay may limited market lang. Ang ating mga duty-free shops deal only with balikbayan. Ang halaga ng tools na puwedeng bilhin is limited only to US\$1,000, at the most is US\$2,000, dahil iyong shopping privilege na nasa R.A. 6768 ay puwedeng idagdag. Kung kulang ang US\$1,000 para sa tools or equipment, puwedeng kumuha ang isang balikbayan o isang OFW doon sa kaniyang shopping privilege.

**Senator Ejercito Estrada.** *Ito ba ang sinasabi ninyong Kabuhayan Program, Mr. President?*

**Senator De Castro.** *Opo, Ginoong Pangulo.*

**Senator Ejercito Estrada.** *Itong Kabuhayan Program, successful po ba ito o hindi?*

**Senator De Castro.** Well, there are government agencies na may sariling programa tungkol sa kabuhayan ng ating mga manggagawa, lalo na ang mga overseas Filipino workers natin. Kaya makikita natin kung paano magiging successful o tagumpay ito. At sa nakikita ko, magiging successful ito sapagkat, according to the report of OWWA, ito po ang kahilingan ng mga overseas Filipino workers. Nais nilang makabili ng murang equipment o tools na magagamit nila, lalong-lalo na kung babalik na sila sa Pilipinas. Alam naman natin na kapag bumalik na sila sa Pilipinas, at wala na silang tsansang makapagtrabaho pang muli sa ibang bansa, tiyak na maghahanap na sila ng trabaho. So their number one problem ay ang makakuha ng trabaho dito sa Pilipinas. Kaya sila nag-abroad ay dahil sa walang magandang trabahong naghihintay sa kanila rito. Kaya sa pag-uwi nila rito ay may nakahanda nang programa ang ating pamahalaan, hindi lamang iyong Kabuhayan Shopping Privilege na nagpapahintulot ng tax-free purchase ng livelihood tools, kundi may opportunity pa na puwede silang mag-avail ng mga kinakailangang training para sila ay maging economically self-reliant na miyembro ng ating lipunan upon their return to our country.

Kaya hindi lamang pribilehiyo para makabili ng tax-free na tools or equipment para magamit nila sa gusto nilang kabuhayan, kundi mayroon pang training na ipo-provide, for example, ang TESDA kung ano mang hanapbuhay ang gusto nilang pasukin kapag sila ay bumalik na sa Pilipinas.

**Senator Ejercito Estrada.** Ginoong Pangulo, since 1996 pa po ba itong Kabuhayan Program? Ano ba ang naging benepisyo

ng programang ito para sa mga balikbayan? Ito ay noong 1996 pa nag-umpisa. Ano ba ang mga benepisyong natanggap ng mga balikbayan?

**Senator De Castro.** Mr. President, are we talking about the programs of the duty-free shops?

**Senator Ejercito Estrada.** Iyong pong Kabuhayan Program.

**Senator De Castro.** Mr. President, after the economic crisis in 1997, *walang gaanong bumili ng mga equipment or tools sa Kabuhayan section ng duty-free shops.* I believe na nag-sale ito para lamang maubos ang mga paninda nito. And up to now, *may ilan pang mga tools, pero maliliit na tools na lamang ang natitira sa duty-free shop.* So, after the economic crisis in 1997, *talagang wala pong bumili.* At before, *wala ring support* from TESDA for training para sa mga overseas Filipino workers *na gustong pumasok sa anumang kabuhayan.*

So, this time, Mr. President, *kapag natuloy na ito, magkakaroon ng training para sa mga balikbayan upang sila ay maging economically self-reliant members of our society.*

**Senator Ejercito Estrada.** *Bumalik tayo, Ginoong Pangulo, doon sa objections ng Department of Finance sa inyong ginanap na committee hearing.*

The Department of Finance believes that it is too liberal if we increase the privilege from US\$1,000 to US\$2,000 as compared to the international standard which is only US\$250. Mr. President, may we know the reason for such a wide discrepancy?

**Senator De Castro.** Ginoong Pangulo, hindi po natin dinadagdagan ang shopping privilege ng mga overseas Filipino worker sapagkat ito ay nilalaman na ng ating batas. Ang panukalang-batas na ito ay nagdadagdag lamang ng US\$1,000 exclusive para sa Kabuhayan Program ng ating pamahalaan. Sapagkat naniniwala tayo na mas kinakailangan ng ating mga overseas Filipino worker at balikbayan ang hanapbuhay kapag sila ay bumalik na sa Pilipinas. Sapagkat walang naghihintay sa kanilang mga trabaho rito, walang naghihintay sa kanilang mga negosyo, at kailangang mabuhay ang kanilang pamilya.

So, instead of just buying other products like chocolate, alcohol or cigarettes sa duty-free shops, *itong kabuhayan ang ating idinagdag sa pribilehiyo para matulungan at maibalik muli ang ating mga kababayan re-integration program na nasa ilalim ng OWWA.* Sapagkat may re-integration program ang ating pamahalaan through OWWA. So consistent ito sa ating government reintegration program para sa mga overseas Filipino worker.

**Senator Ejercito Estrada.** *Nais ko lamang itanong uli ang tungkol sa mandate ng duty-free shops. Iyong net income nila ay inire-remitsa Department of Tourism for tourism development projects. Ano po ang masasabi ninyo roon? Ito ba ay tama, Ginoong Pangulo?*

**Senator De Castro.** *Ginoong Pangulo, sailalim ng Executive Order No. 46—this was the time of former President Corazon Aquino—inilagay niya ang mga duty-free shop sa ilalim ng Department of... Well, hinawakan, in other words, ng ating pamahalaan ang mga duty-free shops dahil dati itong hawak ng private—the Tantocos before. Kaya noong maging Presidente si Corazon C. Aquino ay nagpalabas ito ng EO No. 46. The duty-free shop or Duty Free Philippines was mandated to remit to the national government, sa pamamagitan ng Department of Tourism, all net profits magmula sa kanilang merchandising operation.*

Whereas under Executive Order No. 140, the Duty-Free Philippines was mandated to remit to the national government 1.5% of its net sales. *Iyong halagang inire-remitsa national government ay ginagamit naman ng Department of Tourism to finance tourism projects being undertaken o isinasagawa ng Philippine Tourism Authority, the implementing arm of the DOT on infraprojects related to tourism.*

**Senator Ejercito Estrada.** *Ginoong Pangulo, paano kung totoo na itong Duty-Free Philippines' money, which runs to billions of pesos, is not subjected to the budgetary overview of Congress?*

#### SUSPENSION OF SESSION

**Senator De Castro.** Mr. President, I move that we suspend the session for one minute.

**The Presiding Officer [Sen. Flavio].** Is there any objection? *[Silence]* There being none, the session is suspended for one minute.

*It was 5:52 p.m.*

#### RESUMPTION OF SESSION

*At 5:53 p.m., the session was resumed.*

**The Presiding Officer [Sen. Flavio].** The session is resumed. Senator De Castro may proceed.

**Senator De Castro.** Mr. President, the question of the lady senator is: *Kung ito pong budget ng Duty Free Philippines ay...*

**Senator Ejercito Estrada.** No, *ganito po iyon, Ginoong Pangulo. Iyong pera ng Duty Free Philippines*—which is worth billions of pesos—*ay hindi* subject to budgetary overview ng Congress. *Parang walang audit.*

**Senator De Castro.** All right. First, Mr. President, *hindi nangagaling sa national government itong pera ng duty-free shops, ng Duty Free Philippines. At ang Duty Free Philippines na binuo under Executive Order No. 46 ay covered ng COA rules. It is covered by COA rules and regulations.*

So it is also my understanding, Mr. President, *na sa ilalim ng ating Constitution, Article IX-D, Section 3, ipinagbabawal ang pagpapasa ng ano mang batas na mag-i-exempt sa any entity ng ating pamahalaan from the jurisdiction of the Commission on Audit. Kaya malinaw din na covered ito ng COA rules and regulations. And during the budget hearings ipini-present din ng Department of Tourism officials ang kanilang mga gastusin at nandoon kasama iyong kinukuha nila from the Duty Free Philippines para sa DOT. So pine-present rin ito sa budget hearing yearly.*

**Senator Ejercito Estrada.** *Ginoong Pangulo, ilang percentage kaya ang napupunta sa Department of Tourism iyong galing sa Duty Free Philippines?*

**Senator De Castro.** *Ginoong Pangulo, dapat po ay 100% ang ire-remit ng Duty Free Philippines sa Department of Tourism. Of course, may allowances doon sa future losses or expansion ng Duty Free Philippines. Pero kung walang kita ang Duty Free Philippines, walarin pong maire-remit sa Department of Tourism.*

For example, Mr. President, for the year 2001, according to Duty Free Philippines, *hindi sila nakapag-remit sa Department of Tourism sapagkat bagsak ang sales ng Duty Free Philippines during the year 2001. Ngayon pong 2002, according to them ay medyo umaangat na ang sales ng Duty Free Philippines.*

**Senator Ejercito Estrada.** *Maraming salamat, Ginoong Pangulo. Siguro at this time, we should maybe have time-honored concepts on transparency and check and balance. Siguro ganoon po ang puwede nating gawin.*

**Senator De Castro.** *Opo. Mr. President, may I read the Summary of Remittances ng Duty Free Philippines from the year 1987 to 2001:*

1987, *nag-remit sila ng P10 million; 1988, more than P76 million;*

1989, *more than P225 million;*

1990, *more than P171 million;*

1991, *more than P370 million;*

1992, *more than P334 million;*

1993, *more than P550 million;*

then 1994, *P555 million;*

1995, *P455 million;*

1996, *more than P961 million, almost P1 billion;*

then 1997, *more than P731 million;*

1998, *P160.560 million;*

1999, *P99 million;*

then 2000, *P36.500 million;*

2001, *iyon po walang nai-remit ang Duty Free Philippines sa Department of Tourism.*

So from 1987 to 2001, a total of P4,736,127,238.51, Mr. President.

**Senator Ejercito Estrada.** *Ginoong Pangulo, mayroon po bang ibang exporting countries na mayroon ding ganitong programa katulad ng India o kaya ibang ASEAN countries? Mayroon po basilang programa katulad ng Kabuhayan Program natin?*

**Senator De Castro.** *Ang alam ko po, Ginoong Pangulo, ay wala. Tayo lamang po. Unique ito sa Pilipinas dahil ganoon nating kamahal ang mga overseas Filipino workers natin na umaabot ng pitong milyong indibiduwal at nagpapasok sa ating bansa ng more or less US\$7 billion.*

**Senator Ejercito Estrada.** Finally, Mr. President, if we are really to strengthen the commitment and thrust of the government in appreciating the efforts and contributions of the *balikbayan*, why was the proposal to create the Balikbayan Program Council, which was supported by the BFP, not included in this committee report?

**Senator De Castro.** Mukhang hindi na po kailangan, Ginoong Pangulo, sapagkat stated na sa Republic Act No. 6768 na every two years ay i-a-amend ng Kongreso o ire-review ang nilalaman ng ating batas.

**Senator Ejercito Estrada.** Again, Mr. President, I would like to thank the gentleman for clarifying certain contentious issues contained in the committee report. We hope that the points that

we have raised would be properly addressed and acted upon by the committee.

*Maraming salamat po, Ginoong Pangulo.*

**Senator De Castro.** *Maraming, maraming salamat din po, Ginocng Pangulo, at maraming salamat din po to the good senator.*

**The Presiding Officer [Sen. Flavie].** The Majority Leader is recognized.

**SUSPENSION OF CONSIDERATION OF S. NO. 2101**

**Senator Legarda Leviste.** Mr. President, our other colleagues have also signified their intention to interpellate. The others are not present today. I therefore move that we suspend consideration of the measure.

**The Presiding Officer [Sen. Flavie].** Is there any objection? *[Silence]* There being none, the motion is approved.

**ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF THE OFFICIAL VISIT OF THE  
STUDENTS FROM THE MINDANAO STATE  
UNIVERSITY, MARAWI CITY CAMPUS**

**Senator Legarda Leviste.** Mr. President, before we adjourn, I would like to acknowledge the presence of students from the Mindanao State University, Marawi City Campus, accompanied by Prof. Mustapha Lumala Dimaro and Prof. Fatima Amirva Rujumsar.

**ADJOURNMENT OF SESSION**

I move that we adjourn today's session until three o'clock sharp tomorrow afternoon, Tuesday, May 7, 2002.

**The Presiding Officer [Sen. Flavie].** Is there any objection? *[Silence]* There being none, the session is adjourned until three o'clock sharp tomorrow afternoon, Tuesday, May 7, 2002.

*It was 6:02 p.m.*