

RECORD OF THE SENATE

MONDAY, APRIL 26, 1999

ROLL CALL

OPENING OF THE SESSION

At 3:28 p.m., Hon. Aquilino Q. Pimentel Jr., acting as the Presiding Officer, called the session to order.

The Presiding Officer [Sen. Pimentel]. The 83rd session of the Senate of the Second Regular Session of the Eleventh Congress is hereby called to order.

Let us all stand for the opening prayer to be led by Sen. Blas F. Ople.

After the prayer, the Senate Choir will lead us in the singing of the national anthem.

Everybody rose for the prayer.

PRAYER

Senator Ople. Kristong Panginoon, lukuban Mo po ng Iyong mabiyayang pagpapala ang Senado ng Pilipinas sa harap ng malalaking hamon na humihingi ng kalutasan, katulad ng Visiting Forces Agreement.

Bayaan Mo pong manaog ang Espiritu Santo sa aming lahat upang maliwanagan ang aming mga kaisipan at matutunan ang tamang landas para sa kapayapaan at kaligtasan ng lahat ng mga Pilipino.

At tulongan Mo po kami na malabanan ang anumang hibo at udyok ng kapangyarihan at maging mapakumbaba sa harap ng Iyong walang hanggang karunungan.

Mahal na Diyos, loobin Mo po na lubusang makaahon sa kanyang karamdaman ang aming iginagalang at minamahal na Pangulo ng Senado, Kagalanggalang Marcelo Briones Fernan.

Panginoon, loobin Mo po na manatili ang aming pagkakaisa sa kabila ng mga puwersang nais humati sa amin.

Salamat po.

Amen.

NATIONAL ANTHEM

Everybody remained standing for the singing of the national anthem.

The Presiding Officer [Sen. Pimentel]. The Secretary will please call the roll.

The Secretary, reading:

| | |
|-------------------------------------------|----------|
| Senator Teresa S. Aquino Oreta | Present |
| Senator Robert Z. Barbers | Present |
| Senator Rodolfo G. Biazon | Present |
| Senator Renato L. Compañero Cayetano | Present |
| Senator Anna Dominique M. L. Coseteng ... | Present |
| Senator Franklin M. Drilon | Present |
| Senator Juan Ponce Enrile | Present |
| Senator Juan M. Flavie | Present |
| Senator Teofisto T. Guingona Jr | Present |
| Senator Gregorio B. Honasan | Present |
| Senator Robert S. Jaworski | Present |
| Senator Loren B. Legarda-Leviste | Present |
| Senator Ramon B. Magsaysay Jr | Present |
| Senator Blas F. Ople | Present |
| Senator John Henry R. Osmeña | Present |
| Senator Sergio R. Osmeña III | Present* |
| Senator Aquilino Q. Pimentel Jr | Present |
| Senator Ramon B. Revilla | Present |
| Senator Raul S. Roco | Present |
| Senator Miriam Defensor Santiago | ** |
| Senator Vicente C. Sotto III | Present |
| Senator Francisco S. Tatad | Present |
| The President | ** |

The Presiding Officer [Sen. Pimentel]. With 20 senators present, there is a quorum.

The Majority Leader is recognized.

SUSPENSION OF SESSION

Senator Drilon. Mr. President, I move for a one-minute suspension of the session.

The Presiding Officer [Sen. Pimentel]. The session is suspended for one minute, if there is no objection. *[There was none.]*

It was 3:32 p.m.

* Arrived after the roll call

** On official mission

able to develop a personal special relationship with Jessica Alfaro, the principal witness in the Vizconde case.

In the case of Martin Soriano, his name came up several times for involvement in some illegal drug operations. Lately also, he was allegedly ambushed in San Juan where, according to some police investigators, it was a case of "ambush-me," similar to a kidnap-me or hold-up me cases. In other words, the ambush was scripted.

Mr. President, these two persons are special agents in the National Bureau of Investigation. If my memory will serve me right, the position of special agents was created during our time in the National Bureau of Investigation when Mayor Lim was then the director of the NBI. The reason for the creation of this position is that we had few regular agents who are CPAs and who are lawyers.

From then on, records will show that so many special agents were involved in so many anomalies and illegal activities. May I know if the honorable senator from Cagayan has any proposition or any plan to abolish the position of the special agents of the National Bureau of Investigation.

Senator Enrile. If that will improve the integrity, credibility and efficiency of that bureau, I will go along with it, Mr. President.

Senator Barbers. If that is the case, I will be proposing a measure to abolish this particular position in the National Bureau of Investigation, because one concern that I would like to bring out is that this is detrimental to the promotion and the growth of the regular agents in the NBI.

Moreover, there is now a pending bill in the Senate calling for a modernization of the National Bureau of Investigation. With what happened and what is going on in the NBI now in connection with this particular incident, what would then be the position of the distinguished gentleman in this particular measure?

Senator Enrile. Mr. President, I think I will have an open mind. I think we should not punish the entire bureau for the acts of a few or some in the organization. I think if we have to correct certain things by way of legislation, we must do so.

In fact, I was requested by the director of the National Bureau of Investigation if I could possibly help in supporting or sponsoring that measure. I am not going to object to any legislation that will be favorable to the NBI simply because of this incident, but I would scrutinize, however, the organization including its budget allocation. As I said in my speech, we must utilize the power of Congress over the purse to see to it that corruption, venalities and other unpleasant unwelcome activities in government, especially the commission of crimes, must be arrested, if not eradicated.

Senator Barbers. Mr. President, I am very happy and encouraged by the statement of the honorable senator because I am the principal sponsor of the modernization bill of the NBI.

Lastly, Mr. President, I would like to apologize for the actuation of my *kababayan* from Caraga region. Because of so many personal problems, probably she snapped and there were some lapses. But I still maintain my pride in being part and parcel of the Caraga region in spite of that incident.

Thank you very much, Mr. President.

Senator Enrile. I am sure that it does not reflect the quality of the voters of Caraga region.

The Presiding Officer [Sen. Sotto]. The Majority Leader is recognized.

Senator Drilon. Mr. President, we thank the gentleman from Cagayan for that very well-researched speech and timely revelation of certain incidents in the National Bureau of Investigation.

**MOTION OF SENATOR DRILON
(Referral of Senator Enrile's Speech Together with
the Interpellations Thereto to the Public Order and Illegal
Drugs Committee; and Committees on Justice and Human
Rights and on Accountability of Public Officials and
Investigations as Secondary Committees)**

May I move that the privilege speech together with the interpellations thereon be referred to the Committee on Public Order and Illegal Drugs and, secondarily, to the Committees on Justice and Human Rights, and on Accountability of Public Officials and Investigations.

The Presiding Officer [Sen. Sotto]. The Majority Leader means the Blue Ribbon Committee?

Senator Drilon. As a secondary committee, Mr. President.

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

Senator Drilon. I move that the privilege hour be terminated, Mr. President.

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

SPECIAL ORDERS

Senator Drilon. Mr. President, I move that we transfer from the Calendar for Ordinary Business to the Calendar for

Special Orders, Senate Bill No. 1545 under Committee Report No. 37, entitled

AN ACT ESTABLISHING THE PHILIPPINE
MICRONUTRIENT FORTIFICATION PROGRAM
AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.

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

BILL ON SECOND READING
S. No. 1545—Philippine Micronutrient
Fortification Program

Senator Drilon. Mr. President, I move that we consider Senate Bill No. 1545, as reported out under Committee Report 37.

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

Consideration of Senate Bill No. 1545 is now in order. With the permission of the Body, the Secretary will read only the title of the bill without prejudice to inserting in the *Record* the whole text thereof.

The Secretary. Senate Bill No. 1545, entitled

AN ACT ESTABLISHING THE PHILIPPINE
MICRONUTRIENT FORTIFICATION PROGRAM
AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

The following is the whole text of the bill:

Senate Bill No. 1545

AN ACT ESTABLISHING THE PHILIPPINE
MICRONUTRIENT FORTIFICATION PROGRAM
AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the Philippines in Congress assembled:

SECTION 1. *Title.* - This Act shall be known as the "Philippine Micronutrient Fortification Act of 1999."

SEC. 2. *Declaration of Policies.* - Section 15 of Article II of the Constitution provides that the State shall protect and promote the right to health of the people and instill health consciousness among them.

The State recognizes that nutritional deficiency problems in the Philippines, based on nutrition surveys, include deficiencies in energy, iron, vitamin A, iodine, thiamin and riboflavin.

The State recognizes that food fortification is vital where there is a demonstrated need to increase the intake of an essential nutrient by one or more population groups, as manifested in dietary, biochemical or clinical evidences of deficiency. Food fortification is considered important in the promotion of optimal health and to compensate for the loss of nutrients due to processing and/or storage of food.

Food fortification, therefore, shall be carried out to compensate for the inadequacies in Filipino diet, based on present-day needs as measured using the most recent Recommended Dietary Allowances (RDA).

SEC. 3 *Definition of Terms.* - For purposes of this Act, the following terms shall mean:

(a) Department - The Department of Health

(b) Fortification - the addition of nutrients to processed foods at levels above the natural state. As an approach to control micronutrient deficiency, food fortification is addition of a micronutrient, deficient in the diet, to a food or condiment which is widely consumed by specific at-risk groups.

(c) Fortificant - a substance, in chemical or natural form, added to food to increase its nutrient value.

(d) Micronutrient - an essential nutrient required by the body in very small quantities; recommended intakes are in milligrams or micrograms.

(e) Manufacturer - shall refer to the refinery in case of refined sugar or cooking oil, the miller in case of flour or rice, or the importer in case of imported food products.

(f) Nutrient - any chemical substance needed by the body for one or more of these functions: to provide heat or energy, to build and repair tissues, and to regulate life processes. Although nutrients are found chiefly in foods, some can be synthesized in the laboratory like vitamin and mineral supplements or in the body through biosynthesis.

(g) Nutrition labeling - a system of labeling processed foods on the basis of their selected nutrient content.

It aims to provide accurate nutrition information about each food. This is printed in food labels as "Nutrition Facts".

(h) Processed food or food products - food that has been subjected to some degree of processing like milling, drying, concentrating, canning, or addition of some ingredients which changes partially or completely the physico-chemical and/or sensory characteristics of the food's raw material.

(i) Recommended Dietary Allowances (RDA) - levels of nutrient intakes which are considered adequate to maintain health and provide reasonable levels of reserves in body tissues of nearly all healthy persons in the population.

(j) Sangkap Pinoy Seal Program (SPSP) - a strategy to encourage food manufacturers to fortify food products with essential nutrients at levels approved by the Department of Health. The fundamental concept of the program is to authorize food manufacturers to use the DOH seal of acceptance for food products other than iodized salt, after these products passed a set of defined criteria. The seal can be used by consumers as guide for selecting nutritious foods.

(k) Unprocessed food - food that has not undergone any treatment that results in substantial change in the original state even if it may have been divided, boned, skinned, peeled, ground, cut cleaned, trimmed, fresh frozen or chilled.

SEC. 4. The Philippine Micronutrient Fortification Program. - The Philippine Micronutrient Fortification Program, hereinafter referred to as the Program, shall cover all imported or locally processed food or food products, as defined in Section three (3) hereof, for sale or distribution in the Philippines: *Provided*, That, dietary supplements for which established standards have already been prescribed by DOH and which standards include specifications for nutrient composition or levels of fortification shall not be covered by this Act.

The Program shall consist of 1) Voluntary Food Fortification and 2) Mandatory Food Fortification.

SEC. 5. Voluntary Food Fortification Program. - under the *Sangkap Pinoy* Seal Program (SPSP), the Department of Health shall encourage the micronutrient fortification of all processed food or food products based on rules and regulations, which the Department shall issue after the effectivity of this Act.

Voluntary fortification shall be based on accepted standards on safety of substance in food.

SEC. 6. Mandatory Food Fortification Program.

(a) The fortification of the following staple foods based on standards set by the Department of Health or the Department of Agriculture is hereby made mandatory for:

- (1) Rice - with Iron;
- (2) Hard Wheat flour - with vitamin A;
- (3) Refined sugar - with vitamin A; and
- (4) Cooking oil - with vitamin A.

(b) The fortification of food products under this Section shall be undertaken by manufacturers, as defined in Section 3 of this Act: *Provided*, That the implementation of this Section shall be enforced over a period of three (3) years for wheat flour, refined sugar and cooking oil; and five (5) years for rice: *Provided, further*, That rice milled and/or distributed by the National Food Authority shall be fortified within three (3) years from the effectivity of this Act.

SEC. 7. Support to Affected Manufacturers. - The following government agencies shall support the implementation of this Act through their respective programs:

(a) The Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) is hereby required to assist and support affected manufacturers in upgrading their technologies by helping them obtain soft loans and financial assistance for the procurement of technologies and machines to comply with the provisions of this Act;

(b) The Department of Science and Technology (DOST) shall develop and implement comprehensive programs for the acquisition of, design and manufacture of machines and technologies and transfer said machines and technologies to manufacturers; and

(c) The Land Bank of the Philippines (LBP) and Livelihood Corporation (LIVECOR) are hereby required to assist and support the implementation of this Act by granting loans, to affected manufacturers, at preferential rates.

SEC. 8. Non-compliance with Fortification Process.

- The following shall be considered non-compliance with the fortification process:

(a) If the food fortification levels do not comply with the Department of Health or the Department of Agriculture requirements, except when the deviation from the fortification levels are justified and are properly declared in the labeling;

(b) If the fortificant used is different from that approved by the Department of Health or the Department of Agriculture;

(c) If the process of fortification does not conform to the Department of Health or the Department of Agriculture standards; and

(d) If the processed food does not comply with the fortification requirement of the DOH, it shall not be registered by the Department of Health or the Department of Agriculture and will not be allowed to be placed in the market.

SEC. 9. Implementation, Monitoring and Review. - The Department of Health shall be the lead agency responsible for the implementation and monitoring of this Act.

The Department shall also be responsible in the conduct of promotional and advocacy activities on the use of fortified food products through its *Sangkap Pinoy Seal Program (SPSP)* and/or other programs designed to promote nutrition.

The various agencies/institutions with analytical laboratories for nutrient analysis and other technology development generators shall provide the necessary services that may be required by the food industry in compliance with this Act.

The National Nutrition Council (NCC) shall conduct a comprehensive review of the effects on the implementation of this Act to the nutritional health of the Filipinos and recommend to Congress possible amendments or revision to this Act.

SEC. 10. Administrative Sanctions. - The Department of Health or the Department of Agriculture, after notice and hearing, shall impose any or all of the following administrative sanctions in cases of non-compliance with the guidelines it has set:

(a) Order the recall of the product(s) declared/found to have violated the standards for food fortification;

(b) Impose a fine of not less than Five hundred thousand pesos (P500,000.00) but not more than One Million pesos (P1,000,000.00) for violations of this Act or its Implementing Rules and Regulations;

(c) Suspend or cancel the registration of the product if violations of rules or standards occur more than once.

SEC. 11. Penal Sanctions. - Notwithstanding the administrative sanctions provided in the preceding Section, any person who violates any provision of this Act or any rules and regulations promulgated for its effective implementation shall be punished with one (1) month imprisonment for the first offense, three (3) months imprisonment for the second offense, and six (6) months imprisonment for every violation thereafter: *Provided, That*, if the violation is committed by any officer, director, of a business or juridical entity, acting beyond the scope of its authority, such officer, director or member responsible therefor shall be held personally liable.

SEC. 12. Implementing Rules and Regulations. - The Department of Health, jointly with the Department of Agriculture, and in consultation with government agencies, non-government organizations, private sector and consumer groups involved in nutrition, shall formulate the Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR) necessary to implement the provisions of this Act. The IRR issued pursuant to this Section shall take effect thirty (30) days after publication in a national newspaper of general circulation.

SEC. 13. Appropriations. - The amount necessary for the implementation of this Act shall initially be charged to the appropriations of the agencies concerned, as may be appropriated, under the current General Appropriations Act. Thereafter, the amount as may be necessary for its implementation shall be included in the annual General Appropriations Act.

SEC. 14. Repealing Clause. - All laws, decrees, rules and regulations, executive orders inconsistent with the provisions of this Act are hereby repealed or modified accordingly.

SEC. 15. Separability Clause. - If any provision of this Act is declared unconstitutional or unlawful, the remaining provisions shall remain legal and in full effect.

SEC. 16. *Effectivity.* - This Act shall take effect upon its approval.

Approved,

Senator Drilon. Mr. President, for the sponsorship speech, may I ask that Sen. Juan M. Flavier be recognized.

The Presiding Officer [Sen. Sotto]. Sen. Juan M. Flavier is recognized.

SPONSORSHIP SPEECH OF SENATOR FLAVIER

Senator Flavier. This is my sponsorship speech on An Act Establishing the Philippine Micronutrient Fortification Program.

Ladies and gentlemen of the Philippine Senate:

The Philippines is set to enter the new millennium.

And in less than nine (9) months, we will realize that we may have lost our battle to achieve "Health for All by the Year 2000."

While great strides have been achieved in bringing better health to the people, more have to be done to fulfill the government's mandate under the 1987 Constitution, which states that:

The State shall adopt an integrated and comprehensive approach to health development which shall endeavor to make essential goods, health and other social services available to the people at affordable cost.

The Hidden Hunger-Micronutrient Malnutrition

As we approach the end of the decade, malnutrition still remains as a major problem which the government and the nation must address.

For a long time, focus was made on protein-energy malnutrition and the government has embarked on projects and programs to address this concern.

Today, it is high time the government seriously addressed the other type of malnutrition, namely: micronutrient malnutrition.

Micronutrient malnutrition is also known as the "hidden hunger." The problem remains hidden because unlike the symptoms of hunger resulting from the lack of food, many of the effects

of hidden hunger are not readily apparent and not easily associated with nutritional deficiencies.

Hidden hunger, or micronutrient malnutrition, is caused by a lack of specific vitamins and minerals—such as vitamin A, iron and iodine—that are needed only in small quantities (which is why they are called micronutrients) for good health, vitality and life itself.

The Philippine Micronutrient Malnutrition Problem

Vitamin A Deficiency (VAD) remains an important public health concern because it affects up to 30 percent of preschoolers or children from 1-6 years old. In absolute figures, about 3.8 million children suffer from vitamin A deficiency.

Vitamin A Deficiency (VAD) results in the following health problems:

- Child mortality or death is increased by 23%.
- People with vitamin A deficiency are prone to severe infections
- It promotes poor growth and weaker immunity
- It causes xerophthalmia (a dry, thickened, lusterless condition of the eyeball) which may lead to blindness

Iron Deficiency Anemia (IDA) is another serious nutritional problem among Filipinos. It is prevalent among all age groups and affects about 29 percent of the population nationwide. In absolute figures, about 22 million Filipinos suffer from iron deficiency anemia.

Looking at the different age groups, iron deficiency anemia affects:

- 50% of all children below one year old, pregnant women and lactating mothers
- 25% of preschoolers
- 30% of schoolchildren

Iron Deficiency Anemia (IDA) results in the following health problems:

- In adults - fatigue, low work potential, apathy causing frequency absences and loss of "man-hour of work"

- For children - poor attention span, reduced memory, lower scores on achievement tests, poor cognitive development
- Among mother and Infants - low birth weight, increased illness, heart failure, increased maternal mortality

The Philippine Micronutrient Fortification Plan

In order to combat the present vitamin A and iron deficiency problem, we are proposing the enactment of a Philippine Micronutrient Fortification Program through Senate Bill No. 1545 under Committee Report No. 37.

The Philippine Micronutrient Fortification Program shall be composed of two components, the voluntary fortification and the mandatory fortification.

Voluntary fortification, also known as the Sangkap-Pinoy Seal Program of the Department of Health, encourages fortification of food products, not universally used by Filipinos.

Mandatory fortification, on the other hand, compels fortification of commonly eaten foods with deficient micronutrients.

Our bill proposes the fortification of the following: rice with iron, hard wheat flour with vitamin A, refined sugar with vitamin A, and cooking oil with vitamin A.

Filipino households regardless of status, including the poorest section of the society commonly use these four products, according to a survey by the Food and Nutrition Research Institute.

Issues on Mandatory Fortification

Many questions were raised about the policy of fortifying these four food products. However, the Committee on Health has tried to positively address all these concerns.

We are happy to inform this Chamber that there are already available technologies to engage in the fortification of rice, flour, sugar and cooking oil. And these technologies are in fact currently being utilized by several domestic companies.

The cost of fortification is not expensive. Data coming from the Department of Health, National Nutrition Council and the Department of Science and Technology reveal that the price of fortification is minimal and can be easily absorbed by the consumers should the producers decide to shift the cost of fortification.

For example, the projected increase in flour is only P0.10

per kilo, this translates to less than one centavo increase per piece of *pandesal*; for rice, P1.00 per kilo, this translates to less than P0.25 per cup or one serving of rice; for cooking oil, P0.25 per kilo or one centavo per cooking; for white sugar, P0.60 per kilo or one centavo per cup of coffee.

More important, fortification is cost-effective. The benefits that our country will derive from fortification greatly outweigh the cost that will have to be spent.

Benefits of Food Fortification

The enactment of this bill will greatly benefit the Filipino nation because of the following expected effects:

1. Improved vitamin A status among those aged 6 months to 6 years will dramatically increase the chance of survival from measles by 50%, diarrhea by 40%, and overall mortality by 23% to 35%.

2. Improved vitamin A status before and during pregnancy will reduce risk of mortality and morbidity during the time of child birth through increasing resistance to infection and lowering levels of anemia since vitamin A improves iron utilization.

3. Improved vitamin A status of deficient children will reduce severity of infection, illness like measles, chronic diseases; reduce the rate of hospital admissions and need for out-patient services at clinic; and lower all the cost of health services.

4. Improved iron status will increase productivity and improve achievement among preschoolers and school-age children.

Ladies and Gentlemen of the Senate, our Senate Committee on Health strongly recommends the passage of this bill.

To the country, every individual saved from hidden hunger is an added resource--one more pair of strong hands to build and produce, one more pair of eyes to find solutions to our country's problems, one more intelligent brain to plan the course of development.

Thank you very much, Mr. President.

Senator Drilon. We thank the chairman of the Committee on Health and Demography for that sponsorship speech.

For the period of interpellations, the Minority Leader has requested that he be recognized.

The Presiding Officer [Sen. Sotto]. The Minority Leader, Senator Guingona, is recognized.

Senator Guingona. Will the distinguished legal and medical luminary of the Senate respond to some questions?

Senator Flavier. With pleasure to my boss in the Minority section.

Senator Guingona. The program calls for rice with iron. May we know how this will be implemented?

Senator Flavier. That is a very good question, Mr. President, because unlike the other nutriment to be fortified, in the case of rice, what will be done—at least this is the latest technology—is to fortify just a handful of the rice grains and this will then be mixed with the bigger bulk of rice. So, there will be a need for mixer which, at this point in time, the good news is that the National Food Authority already has this.

Senator Guingona. I understand that rice per se has really no nutrient value. Would that be correct?

Senator Flavier. Not quite, because rice per se is a very important source of carbohydrates and a source of energy. However, the unpolished rice which would have the brownish cover contains a lot of vitamin B complex, and the good news is that way back to the same process, we were able to solve the problem of beriberi or B complex deficiency many years ago. We want to duplicate that this time by fortifying the rice with iron.

Senator Guingona. In point of nutrients, corn would be better than rice, would it not?

Senator Flavier. In a manner of speaking, yes, because it has much more other vitamins that rice does not have. However, from the point of view of percentage of Filipinos taking rice, rice would be a far more important product. But in the spirit of this bill, it will start with those four major products. But in time, we hope that we can add on the other foods of the country.

Senator Guingona. I was just wondering whether the Cebuano-speaking people who used to partake of corn instead of rice could not be duplicated nationwide.

Senator Flavier. That can be, Mr. President, because implicit in the gentleman's first point, actually on a comparative basis, corn outweighs the rice.

Senator Guingona. Now, considering that today food security concept includes importation, how would hard wheat flour be fortified with nutrient vitamin A, as well as refined sugar and cooking oil?

Senator Flavier. That is a very important point. Let me start with rice and rice imported through the NFA will be the easiest to handle.

In the case of wheat, sugar, and cooking oil, this will be done through the millers. That is where the good news is because there are more or less only about 14 major millers for wheat, major refineries for sugar, and major cooking oil producers in the country. And if these 14 or so institutions will toe the line, we will be in business.

The more difficult one is rice in the sense that the NFA only handles about 10% to 15% of the rice supply in the Philippines. The rest will be handled by rice millers who number about several thousands. This will be the more difficult and therefore we are giving it from three to five years, for us, to be able to achieve that. But in direct answer to the gentleman's excellent question, Mr. President, this will be done through the millers.

Senator Guingona. I notice that the cost of the fortification is not much. But could we not import hard wheat and flour already fortified with Vitamin A, so with sugar and cooking oil?

Senator Flavier. That will be excellent, Mr. President. Unfortunately, in the case of the wheat, for example, actually wheat is imported in grain form and they are then milled here. The process, by the way, is more easy than with rice, because we do not do premixing, but these are sprayed with a sprayer which is relatively easy to do, and that is to be done on site through the millers, Mr. President.

Senator Guingona. I think the benefits of food fortification are not only evident but workable. So therefore, I associate myself with the authors and sponsors of this bill.

Thank you, Mr. President.

SUSPENSION OF CONSIDERATION S. NO. 1545

Senator Drilon. Mr. President, I move that we suspend consideration of Senate Bill No. 1545 under Committee Report No. 37.

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

ADJOURNMENT OF THE SESSION

Senator Drilon. Mr. President, I move that we adjourn the session until three o'clock in the afternoon of Tuesday, April 27, 1999.

The Presiding Officer [Sen. Sotto]. Is there any objection? [Silence] There being none, the session is adjourned until three o'clock in the afternoon of Tuesday, April 27, 1999.

It was 5:07 p.m.