

RECORD OF THE SENATE

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 28, 1999

OPENING OF THE SESSION

At 3:29 p.m., the Senate President, Hon. Marcelo B. Fernan, called the session to order.

The President. The 85th session of the Senate in the First Regular Session of the Eleventh Congress is hereby called to order.

We shall be led in prayer by Sen. Sergio R. Osmeña III.

Everybody rose for the prayer.

PRAYER

Senator Osmeña III.

Our Father in Heaven, You are the eternal source of life and everything that is good. We offer You honor, glory, praise and thanksgiving, as we gather around today to perform our daily tasks.

Open our eyes to the awesome responsibilities that rest upon our shoulders as lawmakers. With these powers, which it has pleased You to bestow upon us, we can help alter the fate of our nation and the destiny of our people. We can uplift the lives of so many of the little ones, and deliver succor to the oppressed. Infuse in us then the courage and zeal to accomplish the work that You would have us do.

May Your loving compassion and mercy be the yardstick of everything that we do, so that we may contribute our share in bringing about a gentler economy, a kinder society and a better world.

Amen.

ROLL CALL

The President. The Secretary will please call the roll.

The Secretary, reading:

Senator Teresa Aquino-Oreta Present
Senator Robert Z. Barbers Present
Senator Rodolfo G. Biazon **
Senator Renato L. Compañero Cayetano Present
Senator Anna Dominique M.L. Cosceng 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 Present
Senator Vicente C. Sotto III Present
Senator Francisco S. Tatad Present
The President Present

The President. With 21 senators present, the Chair declares the presence of a quorum.

The Majority Leader is recognized.

THE JOURNAL

Senator Drilon. Mr. President, I move that we dispense with the reading of the *Journal* of the previous session and consider it approved.

The President. Is there any objection? [*Silence*] There being none, the motion is approved.

Senator Drilon. I move that we proceed to the Reference of Business.

The President. Is there any objection? [*Silence*] There being none, the motion is approved.

The Secretary will read the Reference of Business.

REFERENCE OF BUSINESS

BILLS ON FIRST READING

The Secretary. Senate Bill No. 1553, entitled

AN ACT CREATING A TASK FORCE ON
COMMUNICATION TO REVIEW AND
ASSESS THE STATE OF THE PHILIPPINE

* Arrived after the roll call

** On official mission but arrived after the roll call

COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM AND RECOMMEND POLICY, INSTITUTIONAL AND INFRASTRUCTURAL MEASURES TO ENSURE THE DEVELOPMENT OF THIS SECTOR AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR

Introduced by Senator Legarda-Leviste

The President. Referred to the Committees on Public Services; and Finance

The Secretary. Senate Bill No. 1555, entitled

AN ACT PROMOTING THE ROLE OF THE COOPERATIVE MOVEMENT IN COOPERATIVE DEVELOPMENT, AND STRENGTHENING THE ADJUDICATIVE FUNCTION OF THE COOPERATIVE DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY (CDA), RENAMING IT AS THE COOPERATIVE REGULATORY AUTHORITY (CRA) AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES, AMENDING THEREFOR REPUBLIC ACT NO. 6939

Introduced by Senator Magsaysay Jr.

The President. Referred to the Committees on Cooperatives; and Civil Service and Government Reorganization

The Secretary. Senate Bill No. 1556, entitled

AN ACT TO GOVERN THE INTRODUCTION, PROMOTION AND DEVELOPMENT OF TELECOMMUNICATIONS RELATED CONVERGING TECHNOLOGIES AND SERVICES

Introduced by Senator Magsaysay Jr.

The President. Referred to the Committee on Public Services

RESOLUTION

The Secretary. Proposed Senate Resolution No. 440, entitled

RESOLUTION URGING THE COMMITTEE ON TRADE AND COMMERCE AND OTHER APPROPRIATE COMMITTEE/STO CONDUCT A COMPREHENSIVE INQUIRY, IN AID OF LEGISLATION, ANENT THE REPORTED RESURGENCE OF A CEMENT CARTEL WITH THE SUCCESSIVE BUYOUTS OF LOCAL

CEMENT MANUFACTURERS BY GIANT AND GLOBAL CEMENT CORPORATIONS, DETERMINING ITS EFFECTS TO THE SMALL AND INDEPENDENT CEMENT ENTITIES, PRICING AND LOW COST PRODUCTION ASPECTS VIS-A-VIS FILIPINO CONSUMERS, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

Introduced by Senator Magsaysay Jr.

The President. Referred to the Committee on Trade and Commerce

COMMITTEE REPORT

The Secretary. Committee Report No. 39, prepared and submitted jointly by the Committees on Health and Demography; Trade and Commerce; Finance; and Local Government on Senate Bill No. 1554 with Senators Flavies, Santiago, Sotto III, Revilla, Legarda-Leviste, Magsaysay Jr., J. Osmeña and Pimentel Jr. as authors thereof, entitled

AN ACT REGULATING THE LABELLING, SALE AND ADVERTISING OF CIGARETTES (AND OTHER TOBACCO PRODUCTS), PROHIBITING SMOKING IN PUBLIC CONVEYANCES AND IN ENCLOSED PUBLIC PLACES, PROVIDING PENALTIES FOR VIOLATIONS THEREOF AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES,

recommending its approval in substitution of Senate Bill Nos. 3,301,445,875,1101,1110 and 1113.

Sponsors: Senators Flavies, Magsaysay Jr., J. Osmeña, Pimentel Jr., Santiago, Sotto III, Revilla and Legarda-Leviste

The President. To the Calendar for Ordinary Business

The President. The Majority Leader is recognized.

BILL ON SECOND READING

S. No. 1404—Solo Parents Welfare Act
(Continuation)

Senator Drilon. Mr. President, I move that we resume consideration of Senate Bill No. 1404 as reported out under Committee Report No. 15.

The President. Is there any objection? [Silence] There being none, resumption of consideration of Senate Bill No. 1404 is now in order.

Senator Drilon. Mr. President, I ask that the Chair recognize Sen. Teresa Aquino-Oreta, the principal sponsor. We are in the period of individual amendments. For that purpose, may I also ask the Chair to recognize Sen. Miriam Defensor Santiago.

The President. Sen. Teresa Aquino-Oreta is recognized. Likewise, Sen. Miriam Defensor Santiago is recognized for her amendments.

Senator Santiago. Mr. President, I shall utilize the following procedure in proposing amendments. I shall designate the page and line numbers. I shall read out the proposed text of the amendment, and then I would like to have a minute or two to explain the reason for the proposal.

I am using the copy that was distributed with the legend "With Approved Committee Amendments As of March 16, 1999." May I inquire please from the distinguished lady senator if this is the latest copy that has been circulated to the senators?

Senator Aquino-Oreta. Yes, Mr. President.

Senator Santiago. Thank you. Then we shall both be using the same copy.

SANTIAGO AMENDMENT

I will now refer to page 1A. On page 1A, the proposed amendment is to delete lines 19 and 19a, and instead in line 20c, after the word "OFFENDER," I propose that we insert the phrase PROVIDED, THE MOTHER DECIDES TO KEEP AND RAISE THE CHILD. We will, of course, naturally have to delete the semicolon (;).

The explanation for the proposed amendment is this: The present form of the bill only provides that a woman who gives birth as a result of rape is qualified as a solo parent. My submission is that for this bill to be effective, the woman must keep and raise the child. If she gives it up for adoption or if she chooses not to raise it herself, she should not be qualified.

So, to repeat, the proposal is to insert the phrase in line 20c: PROVIDED THE MOTHER DECIDES TO KEEP AND RAISE THE CHILD.

Senator Aquino-Oreta. The amendment is accepted, Mr. President.

The President. Is there any objection? [Silence] There being none, the amendment is approved.

Senator Santiago. Thank you.

SUSPENSION OF SESSION

Senator Aquino-Oreta. Mr. President, I move that we suspend the session for one minute.

The President. The session is suspended for one minute, if there is no objection. [There was none.]

It was 3:38 p.m.

RESUMPTION OF SESSION

At 3:39 p.m., the session was resumed.

The President. The session is resumed. Senator Santiago is recognized.

Senator Santiago. Mr. President, I will now refer to page 2, lines 4 to 5a.

My proposal is to delete the phrase "because of incarceration of spouse for AT LEAST ONE (1) year due to criminal conviction OR INDICTMENT."

Instead of this phrase, I propose to insert the following phrase: WHILE THE SPOUSE IS DETAINED OR IS SERVING SENTENCE FOR CRIMINAL CONVICTION FOR AT LEAST ONE (1) YEAR.

Thus, the provision, as amended, would read: "Parent left solo or alone with responsibility of parenthood WHILE THE SPOUSE IS DETAINED OR IS SERVING SENTENCE FOR CRIMINAL CONVICTION FOR AT LEAST ONE (1) YEAR;"

The reason for this proposed amendment is that the bill in its present form uses the term "indictment" which is a term not used in the Philippine legal system.

Senator Aquino-Oreta. It is accepted, Mr. President.

Senator Santiago. Thank you.

The President. Is there any objection? [Silence] There being none, the amendment is approved.

Senator Santiago. Still on page 2, referring to line 23b. I propose that after line 23b, we add the following paragraph: A CHANGE IN THE STATUS OR CIRCUMSTANCE OF THE PARENT CLAIMING BENEFITS UNDER THIS ACT, SUCH THAT HE/SHE IS NO LONGER LEFT ALONE WITH THE RESPONSIBILITY OF PARENTHOOD, SHALL TERMINATE HIS/HER ELIGIBILITY FOR THESE BENEFITS.

The explanation for this proposed amendment is that this general provision will ensure that the solo parent will no longer be able to claim the benefit if he or she gives up the child or the child dies or the absent spouse returns to the family or the solo parent finds a life partner to aid him or her in the care of the child.

Senator Aquino-Oreta. It is accepted, Mr. President.

The President. Is there any objection? *[Silence]* There being none, the amendment is approved.

Senator Santiago. I go now to page 4, line 26. My proposed amendment is to delete the word "least" and in its place, to insert the word MOST, such that the provision shall now read: "In addition to leave privileges under existing laws, parental leave of at MOST ten (10) working days every year shall be granted to any solo parent employee who has rendered an aggregate service of at least six (6) months for the last twelve (12) months."

The explanation for this proposed amendment is that the bill proposed initially a parental leave of at least 10 working days. It has set no ceiling for the number of leave days, meaning, that the leave can be any number from 10 days to an infinite number of days. I submit that it would not be good policy to allow this open-ended leave period because this can be abused. A maximum of 10 days should be sufficient unless the distinguished lady Senator believes that the number might be changed upward within a reasonable frame of time.

Senator Aquino-Oreta. Mr. President, we envisioned a maximum of 10 days, so we accept the amendment of deleting the word "least" and changing it to the word MOST.

The President. Instead of "at least", it will become "at MOST"?

Senator Aquino-Oreta. No, it will become "parental leave of at MOST ten (10) working days every year."

The President. What does the sponsor say?

Senator Santiago. In effect, the distinguished sponsor has accepted the amendment.

Senator Aquino-Oreta. It is accepted, Mr. President.

The President. Is there any objection? *[Silence]* There being none, the amendment is approved.

Senator Santiago. Mr. President, that is all with this bill. I thank Senator Aquino-Oreta.

Senator Aquino-Oreta. Thank you, Senator Santiago.

The President. Thank you, Senator Santiago.

Senator Tatad. Mr. President.

The President. Sen. Francisco S. Tatad is recognized.

TATAD AMENDMENTS

Senator Tatad. Mr. President, I wonder if the distinguished sponsor would care to consider some further amendments.

On page 2, line 23a, between the words "OTHER" and "CARE-GIVERS", I propose to insert the word SOLO.

Senator Aquino-Oreta. May we have the amendment again?

Senator Tatad. In line 23a, between the words "OTHER" and "CARE-GIVERS", I propose to insert the word SOLO.

Senator Aquino-Oreta. So it is going to be ADOPTIVE PARENT OR OTHER SOLO CARE-GIVERS...

It is accepted, Mr. President.

The President. Is there any objection? *[Silence]* There being none, the motion is approved.

Senator Tatad. In the same line, I propose to change the number of CARE-GIVERS from plural to singular, striking the last letter "S" and thereafter, I propose to add letter S to the word "PROVIDE". So that we shall simply have a singular CARE-GIVER. OTHER SOLO CARE-GIVER WHO PROVIDES PARENTAL CARE.

Senator Aquino-Oreta. It is accepted, Mr. President.

The President. Is there any objection? *[Silence]* There being none, the motion is approved.

Senator Tatad. On the same page, after line 23b, I propose to insert a new sentence No. 11 to read as follows:

ANY FAMILY MEMBER WHO ASSUMES THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF HEAD OF FAMILY AS A RESULT OF THE DEATH, DESERTION, DISAPPEARANCE OR PROLONGED ABSENCE OF THE PARENTS OR SOLO PARENT.

Senator Aquino-Oreta. It is accepted, Mr. President.

The President. Is there any objection? *[Silence]* There being none, the motion is approved.

Senator Tatad. Finally on page 3, after line 15, I propose to insert a new Section 5 to read as follows:

FOR PURPOSES OF THIS ACT, PARENTS OR FAMILIES WHOSE COMBINED INCOME FALLS BELOW THE POVERTY THRESHOLD SHALL SIMILARLY BE ELIGIBLE TO THE ASSISTANCE DESCRIBED IN THE PRECEDING SECTION.

SUSPENSION OF SESSION

Senator Aquino-Oreta. Mr. President, I move that we suspend the session for one minute.

The President. The session is suspended, if there is no objection? *[There was none.]*

It was 3:48 p.m.

RESUMPTION OF SESSION

At 3:49 p.m., the session is resumed.

The President. The session is resumed.

Senator Tatad. Mr. President, may I briefly explain the proposal.

The President. Please proceed.

Senator Tatad. As the records will bear, this point was discussed during the interpellation. It was pointed out very clearly that not all solo parents would be entitled to the benefits proposed under this bill. The only solo parents that would be entitled to the benefits are those whose combined family income falls below the poverty threshold as defined by NEDA.

Under such circumstances, it makes very little difference whether a family is headed by one or two parents. If the family income falls below the poverty threshold, then that family should be entitled to the benefits being proposed under this bill. This is the reason why we are proposing this particular amendment. We have considered the case of solo parents, but they may not be benefited under this bill if their income is above the poverty threshold. Why then should other families with two parents not enjoy the same benefit if and when their income falls below the threshold?

The fact that there are already two parents and still the income is below the threshold tells us something that this family is in extreme difficulty and needs assistance from the State. So even if they do not have the distinction of being solo, their situation is even much more difficult than that of the solo parent trying to raise

a family. This is the point. I think it is a very important issue which I believe our distinguished sponsor should be able to support.

Senator Aquino-Oreta. Mr. President, may I react. It is difficult for us to accept the amendment precisely because this bill zeroes in on solo parent. The family that the distinguished senator referred to, yes, may be living below the poverty level and, yes, they are very much in need but there are two of them to cope with the problem. Aside from the financial help that we will give the solo parent, we are also trying to emphasize here that there is this "emotional support" that the solo parent will not have or at least a support from another person that the solo parent will not have.

But in the family described by the distinguished senator, there are two people trying to cope with the trials or difficulty of raising a family. If we will allow that, then we feel that we are taking away the focus of the bill on the trials or hardships of a solo parent. She is not only disadvantaged, she does not only have an income below the poverty line but she is alone. She does not have the moral and emotional support that will help her alleviate her problem.

Senator Tatad. Mr. President, true, a solo parent may not have "emotional support" from a spouse because the spouse does not exist. But emotional support can come from the children.

In the case of two parents trying to raise a family but are having extreme difficulty trying to earn enough income, they may have each other to provide emotional support but precisely because of the extreme difficulty which prevents them from earning enough for their family, their situation may even be worse. I hope our distinguished colleague will give that some consideration.

Senator Aquino-Oreta. Mr. President, as we have indicated, it is quite difficult for us to accept such an amendment because we are afraid that we might take away the focus from the solo parent. Yes, we are aware that both are facing extreme cases of poverty, but the thing is, one is facing it alone and the other one, there are two of them trying to face the situation. The reason we wanted this bill is precisely to help because the solo parent does not only need financial help but we also feel that she needs all the other help, like emotional or moral help, that can be given to the solo parent to cope with her difficulties.

It is very difficult for us to accept the amendment. Maybe we can be a little more precise in zeroing in on a responsible solo person giving out parental care. If we can just be very precise on that, Mr. President.

Senator Tatad. Mr. President, I appreciate the position of the distinguished sponsor, but the situation is as follows:

We have two persons trying to raise a family with extreme difficulty. If at a certain point, they are able to surmount that difficulty, then they cease to qualify for the benefits. In the case of the solo parents, the sponsor need not worry about the focus of the bill because the proposed benefits for families living below the poverty threshold will not remove anything from the solo parents who are primarily intended to be the beneficiaries of this bill. So, it is a mere question of media packaging. I do not believe we should worry too much about that. The bill, as worded, will continue to give to qualified solo parents the benefits intended. What will be given to the other families living below the poverty line will not be taken away from the solo parents. I do not believe our sponsor should have any difficulty as far as that point is concerned.

Senator Aquino-Oreta. Mr. President, then I am afraid that the couple in the same situation as the solo parent will be a competitor for the resources that we are trying to reserve for solo parents. If we will accept such an amendment, the focus that we want, the affirmative action that we want for solo parents might dissipate, and we are just holding on to the very little resources that can be given to people in this situation.

It is quite difficult for us to accept two people—a couple in line—and say that they may be in the same situation. We would like to help the very person who is caring for her child and that one person is alone in doing such a job vis-a-vis another with two of them trying to cope with the rearing of a child.

Senator Tatad. Mr. President, I cannot add any further points to what I have already mentioned, but the answer of our distinguished colleague indicates to us one of the difficulties in implementing this bill. The resources are not known. Even the number of prospective beneficiaries is not known. So, it is a bill which, if we pass it, is guaranteed to join the list of bills that we have not been able to implement.

In any case, since the distinguished sponsor has declined my proposed amendment, I would like to ask the Body to indicate its position on this particular amendment.

Senator Aquino-Oreta. Mr. President, before we do that, the number right now will be unknown, but if there is a declaration and there is an affirmation that the person is solo, caring and rearing for the child and that solo parent lives below the poverty line, then the meager resources we have can be given to her. The number right now may be unknown but there will be a declaration, and then again there will be an affirmation or there will be an assessment by the agency that will handle this. Only then will she be able to have the benefits of this bill.

Senator Tatad. Mr. President, I thank the distinguished

sponsor for her very patient replies but I would like to appeal to the Body on this particular amendment.

The President. Before the Body takes a vote, the Chair would like to suggest if it is possible to go into that remedy without saying that this is the only remedy available. It can be in another law later on. It can be worded in such a way that right now the focus of attention is on solo parents.

Senator Tatad. Mr. President, that is a genuine remedy available if this proposed amendment is not supported by the Body. But I believe that it is perfectly in order for this representation to ask the Body to indicate its position on this issue—whether it supports the amendment or not. If it does not, then the amendment is lost completely and we will have to devise another means of bringing that into the law. I believe that this is an opportunity to do so and it will not violate the spirit of the law as far as I can see it.

Senator Sotto. Mr. President.

The President. Senator Sotto is recognized.

Senator Sotto. Mr. President, before we vote, may we hear again the amendment or the proposal and its reason, because we might be voting for an elephant.

Senator Tatad. Mr. President, the proposed amendment is a proposed Section 5 on page 3, after line 15. After the benefits for solo parents have been enumerated, we are making this proposal: "FOR PURPOSES OF THIS ACT, PARENTS OF FAMILIES WHOSE COMBINED INCOME FALLS BELOW THE POVERTY THRESHOLD SHALL SIMILARLY BE ELIGIBLE TO THE ASSISTANCE DESCRIBED IN THE PRECEDING SECTION."

The reason is that although this bill talks of solo parents, not all solo parents are entitled to the benefits. The only solo parents entitled to benefits are those whose income falls below the poverty threshold. Therefore, the critical issue is the income. Where the income is below the poverty threshold, then the State is expected to provide some assistance.

Now, we have families with two parents but whose income is below the poverty threshold. We are saying that for purposes of this Act, they should be treated as solo parents.

Senator Biazon. Mr. President.

The President. Senator Biazon is recognized.

Senator Biazon. Will the gentleman from Catanduanes yield for a few questions?

Senator Tatad. Willingly, Mr. President.

Senator Biazon. I would like to be enlightened on the proposed amendments. Does the gentleman have the figure or the data to indicate to us the possible additional cost to the program of including two-parent families whose income fall below the poverty line?

Senator Tatad. That is a very good question, Mr. President. I do not have the figure, in the same manner that the sponsor of the measure does not have the figure on solo parents and on the resources needed.

Senator Biazon. I would then direct the question to the senator from Tarlac. Do we have the statistics to tell us how many solo parents there are in the Philippines?

Senator Aquino-Oreta. Mr. President, right now it is difficult for us because there is no indication, there is no grade or there is no line, when we call for a census now that says "solo parent," precisely because they are not yet recognized. But we know that in our society now, there are solo parents. So we are looking to this affirmative action in the sense that maybe the State can now start looking into this sector of society that was never looked into before. We know the meager resources we have, so we indicated that only those who are alone in performing parental duties, who live below the poverty level, who are marginalized can benefit from this bill.

So when a person goes to an agency, for example, we indicated here the DSWD, that person will declare himself or herself a solo parent. After an assessment of the DSWD, then the agency will indicate that that person is indeed a solo parent and can avail herself of the benefits of this bill only after a declaration that that person is marginalized and has an income below the poverty level.

Senator Biazon. Yes, Mr. President. The bottom line is, if we do approve the basic proposed bill without having to know or without knowing how much it would cost the government and then if we approve the amendment, it will even add more to the requirements of the program.

Mr. President, there are 32 legislated programs since the Eighth Congress—legislated programs that would require a total of P620 billion to implement. These are laws which range from modernization of agriculture to modernization of the educational system, the Armed Forces, health programs, education programs, et cetera. If we add this program—I agree with the gentleman from the Philippines, specifically Catanduanes—this bill may join these 32 other legislated programs in the waste basket.

So we need to know, Mr. President, the cost to the government if we approve this program. Can it be supported? This question becomes even more material if we consider the proposed amendments. That is why we have to know how many of two-parent families qualify under this program and how much do we need to consider in support of the program?

Senator Aquino-Oreta. Mr. President, actually, aside from the benefits here, we were also expecting the State to start recognizing the plight of solo parents—the trials and the hardships of solo parents which are a reality. For example, in 1995, we had a census of about 2 million that have been left or widowed and we would categorize them as "solo." As I said, right now, we do not have a distinct number of solo parents.

But what we are saying is, at last, the State will now recognize that there are some individuals in our community, which is a reality, that are caring for their children, that are performing parental duty and are doing these all by themselves.

Senator Biazon. Mr. President, may I point out something through an example. A two-parent family has six children and has a combined income which falls short of the poverty threshold. In order to avail themselves of the program, they declare that they are separated, one parent taking three of the children, and the other also, taking the other three, and apply for the program. Will this program encourage such situation? This is happening in the social security society of the United States, where even if they are not separated, they declare separation where the husband lives in the closet in the daytime and come out in the bed at nighttime.

Are there provisions for these? This is the clarification of the proposed amendment. Those are the questions, Mr. President.

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

The President. Before the suspension is granted, may I inform the Body and for the information of everyone. The very title of the bill clearly covers only "solo parents and their children." That is the point I wanted to drive at, and at the same time, can be debated continuously.

The Majority Leader is asking for a suspension?

SUSPENSION OF SESSION

Senator Drilon. Yes, Mr. President.

The President. Is there any objection? [Silence] There being none, the motion is approved.

It was 4:12 p.m.

RESUMPTION OF SESSION

At 4:15 p.m., the session was resumed with Sen. Ramon B. Magsaysay Jr. presiding.

The Presiding Officer [Sen. Magsaysay]. The session is resumed.

SUSPENSION OF CONSIDERATION OF S. NO. 1404

Senator Drilon. Mr. President, I move that we suspend consideration of Senate Bill No. 1404 under Committee Report No. 15.

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

**MOTION OF SENATOR DRILON
(Inclusion of Senator Flavier in the Bicameral
Conference Committee on Senate Bill No. 1505)**

Senator Drilon. Mr. President, for purposes of the Senate contingent to the Bicameral Conference Committee on Senate Bill No. 1505 under Committee Report No. 28, on the Y2K bill, I move for the inclusion of Sen. Juan M. Flavier.

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

**MOTION OF SENATOR DRILON
(Inclusion of Senator Flavier in the Bicameral Conference
Committee on Senate Bill No. 1137)**

Senator Drilon. Likewise, Mr. President, I also move for the inclusion of Sen. Juan F. Flavier as a member of the Senate contingent in the Bicameral Conference Committee to discuss the disagreeing provisions on Senate Bill No. 1137 under Committee Report No. 3. This is the Safety Belt Act.

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

**CONSIDERATION OF COMMITTEE REPORT NO. 30
(On Centennial Projects, Centennial Scam)**

Senator Drilon. Mr. President, I move that we resume consideration of Committee Report No. 30 on Proposed Senate Resolution Nos. 52, 231 and 235. This is the inquiry in aid of legislation on the alleged irregular or anomalous construction of the Centennial Exposition and other related projects at the Clark Special Economic Zone.

Senator Roco. Mr. President.

The Presiding Officer [Sen. Magsaysay]. Senator Roco is recognized.

Senator Roco. Point of inquiry, Mr. President. Is this the same as the elephant report?

The Presiding Officer [Sen. Magsaysay]. I believe so.

Senator Roco. Thank you, Mr. President.

Senator Drilon. Is Senator Roco interposing any objection to the resumption of consideration of Committee Report No. 30 on Proposed Senate Resolution Nos. 52, 231 and 235?

Senator Roco. I only wanted to make sure that it is related to the elephant report, Mr. President.

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

Senator Drilon. Mr. President, I ask the Chair to recognize the principal sponsor, Sen. Aquilino Q. Pimentel Jr., and to continue his interpellation, the Minority Leader, Sen. Teofisto T. Guingona Jr.

The Presiding Officer [Sen. Magsaysay]. Senators Pimentel and Guingona are recognized.

Senator Pimentel. Mr. President, at the end of the session last night when the elephant trampled upon the Pajero, there were a number of questions that were left hanging in the air. I would like to tackle some of them as far as I can recall so that we can complete our responses to the questions raised by the Minority Leader.

I would like to start by saying, Mr. President, that, yes, we have complied with the rules regarding the placing of Mr. Ocol under the Witness Protection Program, and we have the communication to that effect signed by this representation and by the Senate President, addressed to the Director of the Witness Protection Program of the Department of Justice. I think a copy of this was shown to Senator Guingona.

Senator Guingona. Yes. But that is not all. When the "elephant" intervened last night, we had a number of questions but we go first to this matter of Mr. Ocol.

He has already been admitted as a witness under the program. But under the law, what is needed is not just a recommendation. There has to be a certificate of acceptance. And the members of the Blue Ribbon Committee must be part of the recommending body. After all, I think the distinguished chairman will agree that