

RECORD OF THE SENATE

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 29, 2000

OPENING OF THE SESSION

At 3:34 p.m., the Senate President, Hon. Blas F. Ople, called the session to order.

The President. The 66th session of the Senate in 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. Vicente C. Sotto III.

Everybody rose for the prayer.

PRAYER

Senator Sotto.

Dear Lord God, Our Father,

Thank You for our beds and bless all who are sleeping rough.

Thank You for our warm beddings and bless all who are cold and frightened.

Thank You for the food we have eaten this day and bless all who go to bed hungry.

Thank You for the roof over our heads and bless all who are homeless.

Thank You for the safety of our children and bless all whose children are missing or unjustly jailed.

Thank You for the peace of the neighborhood and bless and comfort all who fear the knock at the door.

Thank you, Father, for everything You have given us and make us mindful of the needs of others for Jesus' sake.

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. Coseteng ..	Present*
Senator Franklin M. Drilon	Present
Senator Juan Ponce Enrile	Present*
Senator Juan M. Flavíer	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 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	**
Senator Miriam Defensor Santiago	Present
Senator Vicente C. Sotto III	Present
Senator Francisco S. Tatad	Present
The President	Present

The President. With 15 senators present, there is a quorum.

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.

*Arrived after the roll call

**On official mission

EXPLANATION OF VOTE OF SENATOR PIMENTEL

Senator Pimentel. Mr. President, may I place on record my vote of no to this bill for the simple reason that the safeguards that were originally present in both the Senate and the House of Representatives' versions of this bill are no longer found in this present text that we are voting on tonight.

Therefore, I am afraid that in the absence, for example, of an external regulator, the finances that we have included in this bill would go down the drain the way the P40 billion disappeared from the coffers of the National Home Mortgage and Finance Corporation only to be dissipated in a manner that is not conducive to the national welfare.

For these reasons, Mr. President, I vote no.

The Presiding Officer [Sen. Sotto]. The Minority Leader, Sen. Teofisto T. Guingona Jr., is recognized.

EXPLANATION OF VOTE OF SENATOR GUINGONA

Senator Guingona. Thank you, Mr. President.

I wish to register a no vote for the reason that the original and basic concept of the then HIGC has now been transformed from an insurance guarantee to a purely guarantee corporation thereby discouraging the development of a secondary market. And as already explained by Senator Serge Osmeña, no matter how big the resources of one, that will eventually be eaten up by the guarantees directly made and there is no development for other sources of funding in this regard.

Therefore, while we associate ourselves with the noble objectives of this bill to provide adequate housing, it is self-defeating because in the long run, there may be no funds to build the necessary homes.

I, therefore, register a no vote.

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

BILL ON SECOND READING
S. No. 1902—E—Commerce Law
(Continuation)

Senator Drilon. Mr. President, we now proceed with the next item in our agenda.

I move that we resume consideration of Senate Bill No. 1902 under Committee Report No. 179.

The Presiding Officer [Sen. Sotto]. Is there any objection? [Silence] There being none, resumption of consideration of Senate Bill No. 1902 is now in order.

Senator Drilon. Mr. President, this is the proposed measure providing for an electronic commerce law in the Philippines. We are still in the period of interpellations. For that purpose, may I ask the Chair to recognize Sen. Ramon B. Magsaysay Jr., the principal sponsor.

The Presiding Officer [Sen. Sotto]. We are still in the period of interpellations. The principal sponsor, Sen. Ramon B. Magsaysay Jr., is recognized.

Senator Drilon. Sen. Sergio R. Osmeña III wishes to take the floor for the period of interpellations. May I ask the Chair to recognize Sen. Sergio R. Osmeña III.

The Presiding Officer [Sen. Sotto]. Sen. Sergio R. Osmeña III is recognized.

Senator Osmeña III. Thank you, Mr. President. Would the distinguished sponsor of the e-commerce bill kindly yield for a few questions?

Senator Magsaysay. Willingly, Mr. President, to our colleague from Cebu.

Senator Osmeña III. Mr. President, I am not a lawyer, but I would like to touch on the commercial aspect of the e-commerce bill. For example, in the sponsorship speech of the distinguished senator from Zambales, he stated that the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development defines "e-commerce" as "commercial transactions based on electronic transmission of data over communication networks such as the Internet."

Is e-commerce, therefore, confined to the Internet or is e-commerce any type of transaction that is done through the wires?

Senator Magsaysay. The e-commerce is not limited to the Internet. The gentleman is right, Mr. President. It can be in any other medium that is electronic in nature. It could be wired or wireless even.

Senator Osmeña III. I see. Mr. President, the definition also utilized the word "commercial." Now, if the transaction is noncommercial but still subject of a contract, would that be part of the e-commerce?

Senator Magsaysay. That is correct, Mr. President. The e-commerce is just a generic title that has encompassed commercial or noncommercial electronic data interchange or transaction.

Senator Osmeña III. Thank you, Mr. President.

Therefore, if I wish to make an agreement and sign a contract via Internet with someone in San Francisco or Florida, even if no money is involved, even if business is not involved, even if no exchange of services or goods is involved, it still would fall within the definition of e-commerce?

Senator Magsaysay. That is correct, Mr. President.

Senator Osmeña III. I would like to thank the gentleman for that clarification.

Mr. President, is Internet part of media?

Senator Magsaysay. I would think that Internet is not part of media.

Senator Osmeña III. That was a very hesitant answer—so that I would think—

Senator Magsaysay. Yes, that is true.

Senator Osmeña III. We are here about to make specific definitions which will guide our judges, our courts, far into the future, Mr. President.

Now, let me not beat around the bush. The Constitution defines media as something that has to do with mass broadcasting, mass media.

Cable television has been in the middle of a debate as to whether it is part of media or not part of media. Which is why the cable television bill which was heard by the distinguished Presiding Officer has been under consideration for such a long time in both Houses of Congress because there is still a gray area as to whether cable television should fall under mass media or it should be defined in, for, or by itself, as a new form of electronics.

So, may we ask now the distinguished sponsor this question: Is cable television mass media?

Senator Magsaysay. Right now, the committee report that was reported out by the Committee on Public Services, Senator Sotto, defined "Cable Television" as plain cable television and it is not part of broadcast media. Cable television is more of a physical infrastructure which carries programs or signals.

Senator Osmeña III. These copper cables of PLDT, are they not also just infrastructure, Mr. President?

Senator Magsaysay. That is correct, Mr. President.

Senator Osmeña III. We go to the Internet. The Internet is connected by a cable, cable TV wires, telephone wires, and in some countries, by satellite signals which connect both parties—one abroad and the one locally. Would Internet by any chance be considered part of mass media?

Senator Magsaysay. That is still not within our capacity to decide whether Internet is part of mass media or not. Right now, the "Internet" is simply defined as an infinite number of computers connected to each other which provides the Internet. It is what we call a physical form made up of wires, routers, including communication links that the distinguished senator mentioned, including satellite. It could be wired or wireless, including telephone system. An alternative would be the cable system and terrestrial or satellite.

So these are all physical forms, including the terminal which is the computer or the appliance, including the web TV which together become a network of networks. That is why it is the Internet.

Senator Osmeña III. So is the distinguished sponsor defining the "Internet" as hardware?

Senator Magsaysay. That is correct, Mr. President.

Senator Osmeña III. Would all those with websites on the Internet be not part of the Internet?

Senator Magsaysay. They are using the Internet. They are in effect making use of the medium, the physical infrastructure, to reach their intended market—the web surfers or the subscribers—to get into an interactive mode.

So it is like the highway. We are looking at the Internet as the highway and we are looking at the web pages as the vehicles that make use of this highway. That is how I would compare the Internet with the physical highway.

Senator Osmeña III. Mr. President, I am just trying to find an analogy. For example, television companies have also their highway, their hardware. They use microwave links. They have transmitters but they also originate programs.

If my memory serves me right, "mass media" is defined as any medium which reaches out to the masses. Is that more or less accurate, Mr. President?

Senator Magsaysay. Yes, Mr. President.

Senator Osmeña III. All right. Therefore, in narrowing down the definition of the Internet to merely the hardware—the

wire, the satellite or the transmission cable, the desktop computers, the cathode ray tube, the keyboard—are we not eliminating what is the most important part of the Internet which is the program content, which is the website, the information, the data therein, which is also distributed worldwide to the masses?

My only concern, Mr. President, is, I would like to come up with a bill—I am in favor of the e-commerce bill—that will not be challenged as to its constitutionality later on because we might have defined it in the same way that mass media is defined in this country.

So, what about the software, the program content over the Internet? Would that not be part of the Internet? Would that not be in violation—would we be in violation of our Constitution allowing somebody to show movies in the United States and for us to download the movies here in much the same way that we watch movies on television?

Senator Magsaysay. We can say, Mr. President, that the Internet is basically the combination of the hardware, the infrastructure and, of course, the programs or the software, the content and other value-added website designs. It is correct that we need to come up with provisions. I would be very happy to accept amendments just so we will not get into the ownership issue because this is basically a global development on communications and creativity that we would like to be developed and be given access by all, sort of universal access, so to speak, that each Filipino will have the same access as the others to level the playing field. So, we welcome any amendment to define so that we will have less problems with the courts.

There is an opinion by the secretary of Justice. This is Opinion No. 40 on the Internet. May I read it for the record:

Internet business does not constitute mass media and accordingly cannot fall within the coverage of the constitutional mandate limiting ownership and management of mass media to citizens of the Philippines or wholly owned and managed Philippine corporations.

This is the opinion of the Department of Justice, Mr. President.

Senator Osmeña III. I thank the distinguished gentleman for that, Mr. President. But I just feel that whoever penned that opinion might not have been very familiar with what is possible on the Internet.

For example, today, no foreigner may own a single share of stock in any mass media company which is normally identified as radio stations, newspapers, magazines and television stations.

However, if some smart guy—if, there is the first “if”—if they are able to finally develop affordable screens for one’s desktop computer that will give the same quality as one’s television set—and that is soon coming maybe by next year—and, second, if some smart media owner will now send his signals through the Internet, whether it is NBC, CBS, Turner Broadcasting, CNN, or BBC of London, what happens then? We would, in effect, have a foreign media outfit broadcasting its signals through the Internet. As of today, they are already broadcasting their signals through cable television. Would this, in effect, not be violative of our constitutional provision on mass media?

Senator Magsaysay. I do not think so, Mr. President. Because, would the cable television, being an infrastructure, carrying contents—foreign or local, or even closer to home, the broadcast channels, Channels 2, 7, 5, 9, 13, 31, et cetera—carrying foreign films—

Senator Osmeña III. The sponsor forgot Brother Eddie Villanueva’s Channel 11.

Senator Magsaysay. —Channel 11 of Brother Eddie Villanueva, carrying foreign programs, comparably the same wired as in cable or wireless as in broadcast terrestrial or another wireless through satellite broadcast, we have to separate the two—the content, and the highway—the infrastructure.

Senator Osmeña III. Mr. President, what we are not only institutionalizing in this bill but legalizing is electronic commerce. This is not only electronic commerce within the country but internationally. In other words, we are legitimizing, legalizing, and institutionalizing any transaction, commercial or noncommercial, between somebody in the Philippines and somebody outside the Philippines. Am I correct, Mr. President?

Senator Magsaysay. I would like to modify the question of my colleague that it is not “legalizing.” This is legal. We are just making the documents legal evidence, legal framework. We are not legalizing one that is not legal. We are putting a legality on the documents that will be used in the e-commerce transactions.

The Presiding Officer [Sen. Sotto]. In addition the Chair would like to inform that there is no difference between cable television and Internet as far as their relationship with the terrestrial broadcasting is concerned because both can only be accessible through line application, unlike mass media which is available. Internet and cable television are only accessible through line application. I think that should be an additional information that could be discussed.

Senator Osmeña III. Mr. President, may I just take exception to that. By “line,” does the Chair mean hard wire?

The Presiding Officer [Sen. Sotto]. By line application, we mean we cannot get access if we do not apply for a line to be able to ...

Senator Osmeña III. Does the Chair mean that it is not free through the air?

The Presiding Officer [Sen. Sotto]. It is not free, yes.

Senator Osmeña III. Supposing they make it free?

The Presiding Officer [Sen. Sotto]. May we ask the Senate President Pro Tempore to replace the Presiding Officer because I think it is very unethical for the Presiding Officer to join the debate.

The Majority Leader is recognized.

SUSPENSION OF SESSION

Senator Drilon. Mr. President, I move that we suspend the session for one minute.

The Presiding Officer [Sen. Sotto]. The session is suspended, if there is no objection. *[There was none.]*

It was 5:07 p.m.

RESUMPTION OF SESSION

At 5:08 p.m., the session was resumed with the Hon. John H. Osmeña, Senate President Pro Tempore, presiding.

The President Pro Tempore. The session is resumed.

The Majority Leader is recognized.

Senator Drilon. Mr. President, Sen. Vicente C. Sotto III wishes to intervene with the permission of the gentlemen on the floor.

Senator Magsaysay. I have no objection, Mr. President.

The President Pro Tempore. Sen. Vicente C. Sotto III is recognized.

Senator Sotto. Thank you, Mr. President.

As earlier manifested while this representation was presiding, just an additional information to the two gentleman probably add or spice up their interpellation, we would like to manifest the sentiment that has been reached by the committee when we reported out the Cable Television Act.

Cable television, as defined, can only be reached by line application as compared to terrestrial broadcasting where every household with a television set can easily access. I was saying that this is the same with the Internet. It is not accessible to just anyone. One must apply and must be given a line or access to be able to get into it. That is the information, Mr. President.

Senator Osmeña III. Mr. President, this is where the distinguished Assistant Majority Leader might have to revisit his bill for the simple reason that while today... Actually, we do not have to apply to access the Internet. We just apply to a service provider which has a leased line to the United States, because the Internet is owned by nobody and nobody needs to apply to the Internet.

As a matter of fact, Destiny Cable has offered open access to the Internet for some time now. Home Cable and now ZPDEE of SkyCable also allow us to access the Internet practically free of charge by just getting a cable TV line to our house.

And time again will come, Mr. President, where somehow these guys will think of something where anybody will be able to access the Internet through their cellphone. So we do not even have to apply for a line. We will just be able to access the Internet without going through an Internet service provider. I am trying to anticipate developments in the future to make sure that our definitions today will include possible electronic revolution that will happen in the future.

Senator Sotto. Mr. President, we are willing to listen to any proposal that the distinguished gentleman would like to give. But at the moment, I beg to disagree as far as the issue of line is concerned. Because, as the distinguished gentleman has mentioned, the new technology that has been introduced by Destiny and web TV in the United States, we still have to apply for a line. It is still not accessible. Even if we are going to access an Internet line, we must go through an Internet service provider. We cannot just open our television set and get it, or we cannot just use our telephone and connect our computer without getting through an Internet service provider.

So until that is resolved by new technology, at the moment this is what the committee is proposing. Therefore, as I said, we will be willing to accept any proposed amendment that will address this probably in the future.

Senator Osmeña III. We will certainly look at that, Mr. President. I just wanted to know whether that was considered in this bill. Because while it might be true that one still has to apply to SkyCable or Home Cable or Destiny Cable or whatever for a cable attachment to one's home to enable one to access the Internet, there will come a time when the Internet will be

accessible simply by turning on our cellphone through satellite. And everybody knows that this is forthcoming today.

Docomo in Japan already has some experiments along that basis. And the way things are moving, probably in two or three years, we will see free access to the Internet without even having to go through an Internet service provider because we know that portals and websites make their money through advertising. That is why we can access any website practically free of charge because it is through advertising on the website that they make their money and not through access charges or "hits" as they call it on the Internet website.

In any case, Mr. President, going back to my question of the distinguished sponsor, in his sponsorship speech on e-commerce he talked about allowing us to purchase a book, buy a box of pizza, obtain information from government. May I know if the distinguished sponsor here was for allowing foreigners to engage in retailing in the Philippines?

Senator Magsaysay. That question was answered when I voted during the Retail Trade Law issue. The issue in front of us this evening, Mr. President, is basically how to establish a legal framework so that the documents that are generated by e-commerce transactions will be made legal evidence in court. That is the issue that is in front of us.

Senator Osmeña III. But there is also a very important peripheral issue here, Mr. President, where in his speech he says that retailing or sales through the e-commerce has reached an estimated \$202 million in revenues, or is estimated to be reached in the year 2000, this year. Are these revenues not sales abroad?

Senator Magsaysay. I have already answered that question, Mr. President.

Senator Osmeña III. No. Perhaps I could not get the point, Mr. President—the \$200 million in revenues. Are these retail sales—the \$200 million?

Senator Magsaysay. That is gross, I think.

Senator Osmeña III. Gross what?

Senator Magsaysay. Turnover.

Senator Osmeña III. But these are essentially sales, Mr. President, from...

Senator Magsaysay. That is correct, Mr. President.

Senator Osmeña III. All right. Therefore, would the distinguished gentleman call this "retailing," Mr. President?

Senator Magsaysay. I would think so, Mr. President.

Senator Osmeña III. Thank you, Mr. President, very candid.

Senator Magsaysay. This could be more than retail. It could be business to business or business to consumer or even consumer to business. So this is business transaction. Because if it is business to business, it is between two businesses, so it is not retail. It is based on purchase order. So it is more than retail, Mr. President.

Senator Osmeña III. I understand, Mr. President, I accept that. But essentially, of the \$200 million estimated revenues on e-commerce expected to be generated in the Philippines by the year 2000, some of these would be local sales. Right? Cebu-Manila. Many of these might be even medical consultations—somebody talking to his doctor in San Francisco. Some of these might be legal consultations—an international operator talking to his lawyer in Manila. But would it be safe to assume that most of these—maybe 60 percent, 70 percent or 80 percent of the \$200 million in revenues—are retail sales? In other words, sales made as the distinguished sponsor said in another part of his speech through amazon.com.

Senator Magsaysay. Actually, Mr. President, the business to consumer is not even five percent of the total revenue. It is business to business that is the big part of e-commerce.

Senator Osmeña III. That is very interesting, Mr. President.

Then, can we have a breakdown of the \$200 million on e-commerce that are expected to be generated in the Philippines?

Senator Magsaysay. Mr. President, we do not have the... This is the IDC summary report. This is the summary report of the International Data Corporation. I think it has a branch office in Singapore.

Senator Osmeña III. And it has no breakdown of this?

Senator Magsaysay. It must have a summary.

Senator Osmeña III. All right.

Mr. President, we know that we have just recently passed the Retail Trade Liberalization Law but there were certain conditions that were included in the bill—which we hope will be signed into law very soon by our beloved President—that limited foreigners from engaging in retail in the Philippines.

I remember that one must have a paid-up capital or networth

of \$200 million. One may not open a retail outlet in the Philippines unless it is capitalized at P33 million or more, et cetera.

Are we not violating even the new Retail Trade Liberalization Law because of certain sections in the e-commerce bill?

Mr. President, I want the distinguished sponsor to understand that I am for completely liberalizing retail trade. But since I was the author and sponsor of that bill that we have just passed recently, I wanted to know: Would this not violate some provisions of that bill?

Senator Magsaysay. I do not think so, Mr. President.

Senator Osmeña III. So it is all right for a Wal-Mart or a Macy's or a small vendor in Hong Kong or in Singapore to sell to the Filipinos—as long as it is through the Internet, it is not retailing? Would that be wholesaling?

Senator Magsaysay. It could be wholesaling. It could be business to business, which is not retail.

Senator Osmeña III. I am not talking of business to business, Mr. President. I understand that is not retail. It is not the final consumer. But if Mr. Juan de la Cruz buys one book from amazon.com, one CD from Borders or Barnes and Nobles, would that be retailing or would that be considered wholesaling?

Senator Magsaysay. Strictly speaking, Mr. President, if it is business to consumer, that could be retailing.

Senator Osmeña III. Mr. President, perhaps it is not too late to amend the last bill on retail trade that we passed and just completely eliminate the minimum capitalization involved because the e-commerce is here already.

Senator Magsaysay. That is up to the sponsor, Mr. President. I think the Bicameral Conference Committee has already met, but I would not mind if the gentleman would recall it.

Senator Osmeña III. No, Mr. President. I just hope that we would be consistent in passing laws because I know these are questions that will be asked of us by foreign investors. The president of the Philippine-American Chamber of Commerce will also be arriving tomorrow, and he wanted to meet with us. I am sure he will meet also with the distinguished chairperson of the Trade and Commerce Committee. How do we align our laws so that we do not look silly or foolish to the international investment community?

If we allow a little store in Palo Alto that is selling second-hand long-playing vinyl records to sell retail in the Philippines,

why did we put up a minimum of P33 million per branch for foreign retailers in the Philippines? But I guess that is a question that should be best studied first. I am going to request perhaps the staff of the Trade and Commerce Committee and also the staff of the secretary of Trade and Industry just to take a look at this so that we can align our laws and make them more consistent.

Senator Magsaysay. May I beg the gentleman's pardon, Mr. President.

Senator Osmeña III. Mr. President, perhaps we have lost the attention of the distinguished sponsor. I was just trying to ask the distinguished sponsor if he could request perhaps his staff and the experts of the Department of Trade and Industry to see whether we could realign some of our laws, like e-commerce will allow retailing in the Philippines through the Internet. On the other hand, the Retail Trade Liberalization bill severely limits... What I am trying to say, Mr. President, is...

Senator Magsaysay. We are not trying to amend any existing law or laws. What we are trying to do in this bill is to establish a legal framework of conducting business through the e-commerce. It is simply allowing the electronic documents to be made admissible in court because there are certain provisions in the Civil Code which provide that we must have the written documents—paper trail. That is the objective of this bill. We are not here to change the landscape. We are here to supplement so that we will also be at par with the rest of the world and be competitive in the use of the information technology, in particular the e-commerce transactions.

Senator Osmeña III. Mr. President, I understand this bill is trying to institutionalize contracts that are done electronically.

Senator Magsaysay. That is correct, Mr. President.

Senator Osmeña III. But unfortunately, when we legitimize or institutionalize those contracts, most of those contracts would cover retail sales. As a matter of fact, most of the examples given by the sponsor in his sponsorship speech is about retailing or "e-tailing" as it is better-known today.

He mentioned amazon.com, he mentioned buying a pizza on the Internet, he mentioned purchasing of books, et cetera. I have no objections there. All I am saying is, this bill will definitely be understood to open up retailing to all those who are able to go on the Internet.

Ang sinasabikopo, why will we buy a book from amazon.com and give a job to an American when we can ask those people to set up their stores over here and give jobs to Filipinos and do their retailing here? That is my point.

I just wanted to create more jobs here rather than give jobs to somebody out in Des Moines, Iowa who is on the Internet, some store in Florida, in California, or in Texas. *Iyon lamang po*. There is a conflict. There is definitely some policy conflict here.

With this e-commerce bill, which I agree with, we are going to allow foreigners to retail wholeheartedly in the Philippines and I am not against that. What I am saying is, let us align that with the laws that we have passed. Perhaps, we might be able to get our act together on this and become more credible to the rest of the world.

I thank the distinguished sponsor for his patience, Mr. President.

Senator Magsaysay. Mr. President, the points raised by the distinguished gentleman are well-taken. The gentleman from Cebu and Panay have brought up certain very stimulating points especially on the infrastructure and also on retailing. But on retailing, what can happen from abroad can also happen here.

San Miguel Corporation is now retailing locally and delivering through e-commerce purchase orders and that is exactly what we want—that more of our enterprising Filipinos will use the Internet to be able to compete not only within the Philippines but also in export because of our creativity in our use of the universal language which is English.

As I said, the points raised by the gentleman are very well-taken. The Internet is a developing part of our global communications and there will be more developments every three months. It keeps rephrasing itself. The only thing that we have to do is to pass this bill so that we can catch on and become part of the e-commerce global economy. Transactions will be made more transparent. The retailers and other users will have more confidence as to the integrity of the e-documents that they will be using.

Senator Drilon. Mr. President, Sen. Sergio R. Osmeña III was the last in our list of those who have manifested their desire to avail themselves of the period of interpellations.

That being the case, I move that we close the period of interpellations on Senate Bill No. 1902 under Committee Report No. 179.

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

SUSPENSION OF CONSIDERATION OF S. NO. 1902

Senator Drilon. Mr. President, I move that we suspend consideration of Senate Bill No. 1902.

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

Senator Drilon. Mr. President, I move that we proceed to the Additional Reference of Business.

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

The Secretary will read the Additional Reference of Business.

ADDITIONAL REFERENCE OF BUSINESS

MESSAGE OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE PHILIPPINES

The Secretary.

February 18, 2000

HON. BLAS F. OPLE
Senate President
Senate of the Philippines
GSIS Bldg., Financial Center
Roxas Blvd., Pasay City

Dear Senate President Ople:

The Department of Agriculture has determined that a shortfall in the supply of corn may occur during the first semester of this year. There is thus an urgent need to alleviate such a shortfall to enable the livestock and poultry industries to produce meat and meat products at prices affordable to consumers.

In view thereof, and pursuant to Section 6 of Republic Act No. 8178 or the Agricultural Tariffication Act, may we submit to Congress our proposal to increase the 2000 Minimum Access Volume for corn by 151,000 metric tons, or from 173,550 metric tons to 324,550 metric tons. Section 6 of the Act also states that if Congress fails to act on this request within fifteen (15) days from receipt, this request will be considered approved.

Thank you for your usual support.

(Sgd.) JOSEPH EJERCITO ESTRADA

cc: HON. MANUEL B. VILLAR
Speaker of the House
House of Representatives
Quezon City