

RECORD OF THE SENATE

MONDAY, JANUARY 8, 2001

OPENING OF THE SESSION

This being the day set by Presidential Proclamation No. 429 for the opening of a Special Session of the Congress of the Philippines to consider legislations for the implementation of Article VI, Section 26 (2) of the Constitution, the President of the Senate, Hon. Aquilino Q. Pimentel Jr., called the session of the Senate to order at 10:20 a.m.

The President. The first session of the Senate in the Fourth Special Session of the Eleventh Congress of the Philippines is hereby called to order.

Let us all stand for the opening prayer to be led by Sen. Teresa Aquino-Oreta.

After the prayer, Ms. Jamie Rivera will lead us in the singing of the national anthem. After which, she will also give another song, entitled "*Lord, Heal Our Land.*"

Everybody rose for the prayer.

PRAYER

Senator Aquino-Oreta.

Teach us Lord to be kind and gentle
in all the events of life:
in disappointment
in the thoughtlessness of others
in the insincerity of those we trusted
in the unfaithfulness of those we
have relied on.

Let us put ourselves aside, to think of
the happiness of others
To hide our little pains and heartaches so
that we may be the only one to suffer them.

Teach us, Lord, to profit by the suffering that
comes across our path.
Let us so use it that it may mellow us
Not to harden nor bitter us
That it may make us patient, not irritable,
That it may make us broad in our forgiveness
Not narrow, haughty and overbearing.

May no one be less good for having come
within our influence
No one less true, no one less kind

Less noble for having been a fellow traveler
in our journey towards eternal life.

As we go our rounds from one distraction to
another
Let us whisper from time to time
A word of love for You.

May our lives be lived in the supernatural
Full of power for good and strong in its purpose
of sanctity.

Amen.

NATIONAL ANTHEM

Everybody remained standing for the singing of the national anthem.

[Applause]

The President. We would like to congratulate and thank Ms. Jamie Rivera for that very appropriate song.

Thank you, Ms. Rivera.

The Secretary will please read the Proclamation of the President of the Philippines, calling Congress to a special session.

The Secretary.

MALACAÑAN PALACE
Manila

BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE PHILIPPINES PROCLAMATION NO. 429 CALLING THE CONGRESS OF THE PHILIPPINES TO A SPECIAL SESSION

Pursuant to the powers vested in me by the Constitution, I, JOSEPH EJERCITO ESTRADA, President of the Philippines, do hereby call the Congress of the Philippines to a Special Session from January 8 to 12, 2001 to urgently consider the passage of the following vital legislative measures on:

1. General Appropriations Act 2001;
2. Power Bill;
3. ARMM Organic Act;
4. New Central Bank Act;

Coseteng	Yes
Defensor Santiago	Yes
Drilon	Yes
Enrile	Yes
Flavier	Yes
Guingona Jr.	Yes
Honasan	Yes
Jaworski	Yes
Legarda-Leviste	
Magsaysay Jr.	Yes
Ople	
Osmeña (J.)	Yes
Osmeña III	
Revilla	Yes
Roco	
Sotto III	Yes
Tatad	Yes
The President	Yes

APPROVAL OF P. S. RES. NO. 725 ON THIRD READING

The Presiding Officer [Sen. Defensor Santiago]. With 16 affirmative votes, no negative vote, and no abstention, Proposed Senate Resolution No. 725 is approved on Third Reading.

CONFERENCE COMMITTEE ON S. NO. 2225/H. NO. 8791
(Imposition of VAT on Other Services)

Senator Tatad. Madam President, I move that we now constitute the Senate panel to the Bicameral Conference Committee on the disagreeing provisions of Senate Bill No. 2225 and its House counterpart. For that purpose, I hereby nominate Sen. Juan Ponce Enrile as chairman and Senators Jaworski and Flavier, as members.

The Presiding Officer [Sen. Defensor Santiago]. Is that a nomination?

Senator Tatad. Yes, Madam President.

The Presiding Officer [Sen. Defensor Santiago]. Is there any objection to this nomination? *[Silence]* There being none, the nominations are unanimously approved by the Body.

MOTION OF SENATOR TATAD
(Transfer of S. No. 10621 from Justice & Human Rights
Committee to Ways and Means Committee)

Senator Tatad. Thank you, Madam President.

I move that we transfer House Bill No. 10621 from the Committee on Justice and Human Rights to which it had been earlier referred to the Committee on Ways and Means.

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

BILL ON SECOND READING
S. No. 2129 – Strengthening the ARMM Organic Act
(Continuation)

Senator Tatad. Madam President, I move that we now resume consideration of Senate Bill No. 2129. We are still in the period of individual amendments. I ask that the distinguished sponsor, the Senate President, be recognized to receive proposed individual amendments, if there are any.

The Presiding Officer [Sen. Defensor Santiago]. The Senate President, Sen. Aquilino Q. Pimentel Jr., is recognized.

Senator Pimentel. Thank you, Madam President.

We have some individual amendments that have been furnished this representation which I would like now to read.

On page 2, delete lines 11 to 31. That is the proposed amendment, Madam President. On page 2, delete lines 11 to 31.

The Presiding Officer [Sen. Defensor Santiago]. Is there any comment on this proposed amendment? *[Silence]*

Senator Pimentel. I think everybody knows the amendment based on the records, Madam President.

Very briefly, Madam President, the amendment seeks to strike out proposals to allow the merger of municipalities into the Organic Act even if their provinces do not vote for inclusion. That is the essence of the proposed amendment. By striking it out, individual municipalities will no longer be allowed to become members or to opt for membership in the coverage of the Organic Act so long as their provinces do not wish to be included in the coverage of the Organic Act. That is the idea.

Senator Guingona. Madam President.

The Presiding Officer [Sen. Defensor Santiago]. Thank you. The Minority Leader is recognized.

Senator Guingona. Thank you, Madam President.

Just for clarification and to make it of record. This is also true, vice versa, of municipalities where Christians are dominant and would like to opt outside of ARMM. In other words, it applies to both situations.

Senator Pimentel. May we consider that as a separate amendment, if the Chair will allow.

Senator J. Osmeña. Madam President.

The Presiding Officer [Sen. Defensor Santiago]. Sen. John H. Osmeña is recognized.

Senator J. Osmeña. This is not to object, but simply to put it on record. As the author well knows, as many of us know who are familiar with the situation, in some frontline provinces in Mindanao, like Lanao del Norte, Zamboanga del Norte and perhaps even in the case of North Cotabato, South Cotabato, and Sultan Kudarat, there are municipalities in these provinces which are predominantly Christian which have populations that are predominantly Muslim. In particular, there are four municipalities in Zamboanga del Norte wherein this is the case, and there are a number of municipalities in Lanao del Norte where the majority of the populace is Muslim.

I have no objection to the amendment, because later on the members of Congress of these provinces can pass or submit bills which would, in effect, change the boundaries of these provinces, and this legislation would have to be submitted to the people in a plebiscite, in any case.

So, I would just like to put it on record that I think it is the better arrangement for all these municipalities whose ethnicity is such to be moved to provinces where they would be a majority. But if it is not done now and it might not be opportune to do it in this bill, I would hope that the congressmen of these districts would take the initiative.

Thank you, Madam President.

Senator Pimentel. Madam President, again, we would like to say that the issue raised by the distinguished gentleman, Senator Osmeña, could probably be taken up at some other time not necessarily for purposes of this motion to delete lines 11 to 31.

So we submit the motion for consideration of this Chamber, Madam President.

The Presiding Officer [Sen. Defensor Santiago]. Is there any opposition to this motion to amend? Could the sponsor kindly repeat the specific location of the amendment, please?

Senator Pimentel. Yes. On page 2, Madam President, the motion is to delete line 11 up to line 31 of Article II found on page 2 of the proposed amendments to the Organic Act as of December 19, 2000.

The Presiding Officer [Sen. Defensor Santiago]. Is there any objection? [Silence] There being none, the motion to amend page 2, specifically Article II, lines 11 to 31, is hereby approved.

Senator Pimentel. Madam President, on page 3, lines 16 and 17, the amendment being proposed is to insert the word AND between the words "PROVINCES" and "CITIES".

The Presiding Officer [Sen. Defensor Santiago]. On page 3, lines 16 and 17, the proposal is to insert a grammatical correction of the text by adding the word AND between "PROVINCES" and "CITIES".

Senator Pimentel. Yes. And thereafter, Madam President, as a necessary consequence, the words "AND MUNICIPALITIES" would have to be deleted.

The Presiding Officer [Sen. Defensor Santiago]. In effect, the amendment is to transpose the word "AND" between "PROVINCES" and "CITIES" rather than between "CITIES" and "MUNICIPALITIES".

Senator Pimentel. That is correct, Madam President. In other words, the word "MUNICIPALITIES" will now be deleted.

The Presiding Officer [Sen. Defensor Santiago]. Such that the proposed text would read --

Senator Pimentel. "PLEBISCITE QUESTION FOR THE VOTERS OF THE PROVINCES AND CITIES PROPOSED FOR INCLUSION IN THE EXPANDED AUTONOMOUS REGION", et cetera.

The Presiding Officer [Sen. Defensor Santiago]. Are there any comments or objections? [Silence] If there are none, the amendment is approved.

Senator Pimentel. Madam President, on the same page, page 3, line 28, after the word "province", delete the punctuation mark and in lieu thereof, insert the word OR.

The Presiding Officer [Sen. Defensor Santiago]. Such that it would read—

Senator Pimentel. Such that it would now read, on that line alone, Madam President, "your province OR city". And then as a consequence, we will also move to strike out the words "or municipality" in that same line.

The Presiding Officer [Sen. Defensor Santiago]. Just a reminder. We are on page 3, line 28. The proposed text will read: "your province OR city in the Muslim autonomous region".

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

Senator Pimentel. On page 4, line 3, after the word "provinces", delete the punctuation mark and in lieu thereof, insert the word AND.

The Presiding Officer [Sen. Defensor Santiago]. Will the term "and municipalities" remain?

Senator Pimentel. In other words, with that amendment, we will further amend that line by striking out the words "and municipalities". So for clarity the line will read: "the inclusion of the provinces AND cities that vote for their inclusion in the..."

The Presiding Officer [Sen. Defensor Santiago]. We are on page 4, line 3. The proposed text is "the inclusion of the provinces AND cities that vote for their inclusion..."

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

Senator Pimentel. Madam President, for facility's sake and upon suggestion of the Majority Leader, may we have an omnibus motion to effect the changes corresponding to the proposed amendments in areas where they apply?

The Presiding Officer [Sen. Defensor Santiago]. Yes, please. Would the distinguished gentleman like to restate this omnibus motion?

Senator Pimentel. The omnibus motion is to delete the word "municipalities" and insert the word AND between "provinces" and "cities" where applicable, Madam President.

The Presiding Officer [Sen. Defensor Santiago]. Wherever this particular arrangement of words might be found in the text.

Senator Pimentel. Yes, Madam President.

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

The Deputy Majority Leader is recognized.

Senator Sotto. Madam President, may I also include in that motion, if we can either reconsider it or be it another motion, that the same be done with the phrases where the word "or" is used instead of "AND".

Senator Pimentel. Yes, with reference to "municipalities," Madam President.

SOTTO AMENDMENT

Senator Sotto. The phrase "provinces, cities or municipalities" becomes "provinces OR cities" in much the same way as "provinces, cities and municipalities" will now become "provinces AND cities".

The Presiding Officer [Sen. Defensor Santiago]. Let us treat this as a separate motion.

Senator Pimentel. Yes, Madam President, we can.

The Presiding Officer [Sen. Defensor Santiago]. This is an omnibus motion. That is to say, it will affect the entirety of the text wherever applicable.

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

Senator Pimentel. Now, on page 13, Madam President, particularly in lines 16 to 18, after the word "years", delete the phrase "which shall begin, unless otherwise provided by law, at noon on the 31st day of March next following their election." And once that is approved, Madam President, we will add a phrase which we will mention subsequently.

The Presiding Officer [Sen. Defensor Santiago]. Could the distinguished gentleman kindly repeat the text of the amendment, please?

Senator Pimentel. So the text of the amendment on page 13, lines 16 to 18, is to delete, after the word "years", the phrase "which shall begin, unless otherwise provided by law, at noon on the 31st day of March next following their election." There will be a substitution, Madam President, after that.

The Presiding Officer [Sen. Defensor Santiago]. Could the distinguished gentleman kindly read Section 4 as it would appear after amendment?

Senator Pimentel. "The members of the regional assembly, including the sectoral representatives, shall have a term of three (3) years which shall begin at noon on the 31st day of March next following THE DAY OF THE ELECTION AND SHALL END AT NOON OF THE SAME DATE THREE (3) YEARS THEREAFTER."

That will be the complete amendment to that particular line, Madam President.

Senator J. Osmeña. Madam President.

The Presiding Officer [Sen. Defensor Santiago]. Sen. John H. Osmeña is recognized.

Senator J. Osmeña. Just to seek a clarification. The other day in the budget hearing that we held on the proposed budget of the Commission on Elections, Commissioner Tancangco, who appeared on behalf of the Commission on Elections, expressed the view that if we approve this measure in the session, the plebiscite should be held together with the May 14 elections. Because, according to her, the Commission on Elections cannot

possibly undertake, parallel with the preparations for the regular election of May 14, a plebiscite in the areas covered by this measure between now and May 14. So she suggested that the plebiscite be held on May 14 and the election be held 60 to 90 days after May 14.

Madam President, the question that I would like the distinguished Senate President, who is sponsoring this bill, to clarify is: What is this bill now going to provide? Was he notified by the Comelec of this arrangement? Are we now going to spell out—I think we have to—the date of the plebiscite and therefore the term of office should be synchronized or should be harmonized with these dates that we are setting?

Senator Pimentel. Madam President, the distinguished gentleman is correct. We have to synchronize the start of the term of the newly elected or who would be newly elected officials of the ARMM after the plebiscite shall have been held. At this point, however,—and this has to do with the motion that I have just presented—we really do not know yet just exactly when the plebiscite will be held. I must confess I have no idea when the plebiscite shall be done, although we can propose it in this bill.

Senator J. Osmeña. So when is the term of the newly elected officials going to start? I heard the sponsor say March.

Senator Pimentel. Yes. That was an error. I must withdraw that proposal because I got confused by the presentation here on the paper that was handed over to me. But I think the start of their term of three years shall follow on the day when they are duly proclaimed and this will have to come after the plebiscite is held, which means this will have a repercussion on the term of office of the present incumbents.

Senator J. Osmeña. Because they may not be proclaimed on the same date. There may be protests, pre-proclamation protests.

Senator Pimentel. Yes. But we can provide in this particular amendment just exactly when we want their terms to begin.

Senator J. Osmeña. I leave it, Madam President, to the wisdom of the Senate President who has worked on this bill. I just wanted to interject that information which I was able to arrive at in the course of the budgetary hearings of the Comelec.

The Presiding Officer [Sen. Defensor Santiago]. Could the distinguished gentleman kindly repeat his report on the budget hearing, please?

Senator J. Osmeña. I was told by Commissioner Teresa Tancangco of the Comelec—Teresa or Luz *ba*?

Senator Pimentel. Luz, Madam President.

Senator J. Osmeña. Luz. That the Comelec would not be able to conduct the referendum or the plebiscite that would be required by this bill before the May 14 election, because to do it simultaneously with the preparations for the May 14 election would be too burdensome for the Comelec. So her suggestion was that it should be held—the referendum or the plebiscite—at the time that we vote in the May 14 election. And then after that, the provinces that will support or will approve this measure will have to elect the ARMM governor in an election to take place 60 or 90 days after the May election. That is why, on the basis of that suggestion, I asked the Comelec officials for a supplemental budget for a prospective election in the ARMM, for the officials of ARMM because they will not be elected on May 14 since that is the date of the plebiscite. And that is the way it stands now in the Committee on Finance—that in addition to the budget of the Comelec for the regular May elections, there will be a supplemental appropriation for an election sometime after, as we may determine in this bill.

Thank you, Madam President.

Senator Pimentel. Madam President, in view of the manifestation of Senator Osmeña, we would like to request that we recast our proposed amendments accordingly but we probably will need until tomorrow to do so on this particular issue of when the terms of office of the newly elected ARMM officials will begin and end. So, with the Chamber's permission, we can do that tomorrow. But we can proceed as to the rest of the proposed amendments now.

The Presiding Officer [Sen. Defensor Santiago]. The distinguished sponsor will keep this under advisement until tomorrow.

In the meantime, shall we just skip the proposed amendment to Section 4 or shall we continue with it?

Senator Pimentel. We hold that in abeyance and we go to another page, Madam President.

The Presiding Officer [Sen. Defensor Santiago]. Yes, please proceed.

Senator Pimentel. On page 68, line 12, Madam President, we propose that after the word "government", delete the phrase "at a price agreed upon by the central government and the regional government" and in lieu thereof, insert the following: AT A PRICE TO BE DETERMINED BY THE OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE AS PROVIDED FOR IN SECTION III OF ARTICLE XIX OF THIS ACT, WITHIN THREE (3) MONTHS FROM THE HOLDING OF SAID PLEBISCITE: PROVIDED, THAT ANY DISPUTE ON THE PRICE AS DETERMINED BY THE OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE MAY BE APPEALED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE PHILIPPINES, WHO

SHALL DECIDE ON THE SAID PRICE WITH FINALITY WITHIN THREE (3) MONTHS FROM RECEIPT OF THE APPEAL. THE PROCEEDS OF THE PURCHASE SHALL BE REMITTED TO THE REGIONAL GOVERNMENT OF THE MUSLIM AUTONOMOUS REGION IN MINDANAO.

I have another paragraph to be added, Madam President, and it reads as follows:

THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT SHALL, WITHIN THREE (3) MONTHS FROM ITS ACQUISITION OF SAID LAND AND PERMANENT BUILDINGS OR STRUCTURES, SELL, TRANSFER, AND CONVEY THE SAID PROPERTIES IN FAVOR OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT UNIT HAVING TERRITORIAL JURISDICTION THEREOVER AND WHICH IS WILLING TO PURCHASE THE SAID LAND AND BUILDINGS OR STRUCTURES OR PORTIONS THEREOF AT THE SAME PRICE PAID BY THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT TO THE REGIONAL GOVERNMENT OF THE MUSLIM AUTONOMOUS REGION IN MINDANAO.

May I just explain very briefly, Madam President, that this proposal will expedite the transfer of properties of the autonomous region which are located in areas that do not wish to be included in the expanded area of the autonomous region. And specifically, this has to do with certain properties of the ARMM which are located in the city of Zamboanga.

So the amendment being proposed now will simplify the resolution of any dispute on the price of the properties to be transferred, and originally the price will be determined by the oversight committee, but if the oversight committee's decision is not acceptable to the parties, the decision will be appealed to the President of the Philippines who will have the final say on the matter within three months from receipt of the appeal.

In the original proposal, appeals could be coursed through the courts. It was brought to my attention that if that is the process, it will entail a long time before decision can be had on this issue. Therefore, the proposal now is to enable the Office of the President to say with finality, "This is the decision, we transfer the properties or we buy the properties from the autonomous region." Then the purchase price from the sale of the properties will be given back to the autonomous region, Madam President, so there will be no cause to say that they are being deprived of their property without due process.

The Presiding Officer [Sen. Defensor Santiago]. This is a substantial amendment, therefore we will have to request the distinguished Senate President to specify once more the exact location of the amendment and its text.

Senator Pimentel. It is on page 68, Madam President.

The Presiding Officer [Sen. Defensor Santiago]. Page 68.

Senator Pimentel. And this is found on page 68, line 12, Madam President,—

The Presiding Officer [Sen. Defensor Santiago]. Page 68, line 12.

Senator Pimentel. —starting with the phrase "at a price agreed upon by the central government and the regional government..." We delete that phrase starting from line 12, "at a price agreed upon by the central government ..." going into line 13, "and the regional government..." So strike that entire phrase out, Madam President, so that those particular lines will now read: "...purchased by the central government within six (6) months from the date of the holding of the plebiscite as mandated by this Act."

Now, for clarity, Madam President, the rest of the amendment that I have read will be inserted after the word "Act." But for this particular discussion so we are not confused, we will just move to strike out this phrase starting from line 12, "...at a price agreed upon by the central government and the regional government..."

The Presiding Officer [Sen. Defensor Santiago]. On page 68, lines 12 and 13, the motion to amend intends to strike out the clause already specified. Is there any objection?

Senator Drilon. Madam President.

The Presiding Officer [Sen. Defensor Santiago]. Sen. Franklin M. Drilon is recognized.

Senator Drilon. This is not an objection, Madam President. Since this is a substantial amendment, may we request a written copy of the amendment so that we can look at it --

Senator Pimentel. Yes, certainly.

Senator Drilon. —before we act on it, Madam President.

Senator Pimentel. Yes, Madam President. We can either do that tomorrow or today, depending upon the mood of the Chamber.

Senator Drilon. Anyway, there is another pending item which will be submitted tomorrow. So, maybe, if it is not imposing on the sponsor, we can act simultaneously tomorrow with the written proposal.

Senator Pimentel. Yes, I have no objection to that. But can we act on this motion just to delete this particular phrase in lines 12 and 13?

Senator Drilon. No problem with that, Madam President.

The Presiding Officer [Sen. Defensor Santiago]. Is there any other comment or objection, just on the motion to delete? *[Silence]* There being none, the motion to delete is carried.

By mutual agreement, we shall take up the paragraph intended to be inserted in this part of the text tomorrow.

Senator Pimentel. May we proceed to other matters of amendment, Madam President?

The Presiding Officer [Sen. Defensor Santiago]. Yes, please.

Senator Pimentel. On page 72, line 17, after the word "Mindanao", delete the sentence starting with the phrase "Municipalities that vote for their inclusion in the autonomous region..." That means all the way down to line 22, Madam President. In line 17, starting with the phrase "Municipalities that vote for their inclusion in the autonomous region", that means all the way down to line 22, "as provided in this act" will now be deleted as a logical consequence of the previous amendments that have already been approved by this Chamber.

The Presiding Officer [Sen. Defensor Santiago]. Page 72, starting in line 17, the proposal is to amend by deletion.

Senator Pimentel. Yes, Madam President. Starting from the word "Municipalities" in line 17 up to the words "this act" in line 22.

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

Senator Pimentel. Thank you, Madam President. In line 25, it is proposed that we delete the entire phrase "as far as the said provinces are concerned." So the period (.) will now be put at the end of the word "ratified" and then strike out the phrase "as far as the said provinces are concerned."

The Presiding Officer [Sen. Defensor Santiago]. Still on page 72, line 25, the motion is to amend by deletion. Is there any objection? *[Silence]* There being none, the amendment is approved.

Senator Pimentel. On page 73, line 17, Madam President, between the words "exist" and "until", insert the phrase ONLY IN THE FOUR PROVINCES CONSTITUTING THE PRESENT ARMM AND IN THE PROVINCES AND CITIES THAT OPT TO JOIN THE EXPANDED AUTONOMOUS REGION.

The Presiding Officer [Sen. Defensor Santiago]. Is the motion to insert but otherwise to retain the text?

Senator Pimentel. Yes, Madam President.

The Presiding Officer [Sen. Defensor Santiago]. Page 73, line 17, the motion is to amend by insertion.

Senator Pimentel. That is correct, Madam President.

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

Senator Pimentel. That will be all, Madam President, with the exception of the amendments that will have to be reduced to writing so we can follow the amendments more specifically.

Thank you, Madam President.

Senator Tatad. Madam President, at this point, I move to suspend consideration of Senate Bill No. 2129.

Senator Roco. Madam President.

The Presiding Officer [Sen. Defensor Santiago]. Sen. Raul S. Roco is recognized.

Senator Roco. I am just wondering if I can propose some amendments before we close.

Senator Tatad. I withdraw the motion then, temporarily, Madam President.

Senator Roco. If the distinguished chairman...

Senator Pimentel. Willingly, Madam President.

ROCO AMENDMENTS

Senator Roco. Madam President, I have a few proposed amendments. As I understood it, we will begin from page 1 again as I propose. It is not very extensive. I think I have 10 amendments.

The first one is a matter of style, and this might have been done already. I notice that "constitution", "republic" and "congress" of the Philippines are in small letters in the Preamble and in the rest of the text. It may not be totally grammatical, but would it seem better to the chairman to start with initial capitalization of "C" in "constitution", initial capitalization of "R" in "republic" and initial capitalization of "C" in "congress" if only to stress the importance of constitution, republic and congress?

Senator Pimentel. We have no problem with that. It is accepted, Madam President.

The Presiding Officer [Sen. Defensor Santiago]. In view of the chairman's acceptance, if there is no objection, the amendment is approved. *[There was none.]*

Senator Pimentel. Can we make that an omnibus motion just in case there are other words...

Senator Roco. Yes, it will be an omnibus motion.

The Presiding Officer [Sen. Defensor Santiago]. And the corresponding omnibus motion is as well approved, if there is no objection. *[There was none.]*

Senator Tatad. Madam President.

The Presiding Officer [Sen. Defensor Santiago]. The Majority Leader is recognized.

TATAD AMENDMENT

Senator Tatad. Madam President, for the same reason the phrase "organic act" in line 8 may be similarly considered.

Senator Pimentel. We accept the amendment, Madam President.

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

Senator Roco. Then on page 5, Madam President.

Senator Pimentel. Page 5.

Senator Roco. *The Devolution of Powers.* Again, I would like to submit a concept rather than specific words to modify Section 3. It reads: "The regional government shall adopt a policy on local autonomy whereby regional powers shall be devolved", et cetera.

But it is very clear in my mind that this is adequately covered by the Local Government Code authored by the gentleman and where I had some participation as a congressman on, I think, two of the books of that Code. I was hoping the idea of education, health, human resource and technology, priority on technology and science consciousness, as well as greater decentralization and people empowerment could be introduced as concepts in this devolution of power as an additional standard in the present text of Section 3. But I did not really have the time to face it. But if the concepts are acceptable, Madam President, then maybe the chairman and the staff can just put the proper phraseology as regards that concept.

Senator Pimentel. Madam President, we are willing to discuss this issue with the gentleman, but it will take us a little time to insert some ideas that he has propounded, probably by tomorrow.

Senator Roco. Yes. Just so the Chamber is clear that what we are trying to introduce as a concept is a greater consciousness on the human --

Senator Pimentel. The human resource.

Senator Roco. —resource aspect. Because writers observe that in some of the areas of our Muslims friends, Madam President, there is a tendency to be feudal and to be centralized in a personal way. Even the educational thrust or the devolution thrust should be conscious of the development, so that people are empowered to be able to contribute to the autonomous region.

Senator Pimentel. Yes. We will, of course, consider these ideas, Madam President. We will probably need until tomorrow to effect them into final form.

Senator Roco. Yes.

The Presiding Officer [Sen. Defensor Santiago]. The distinguished Senate President will keep the proposal under advisement until tomorrow.

Senator Roco. Yes, Madam President. Then on page 11, Section 2, on *Cabinet Membership*. As I kept rereading this fairly voluminous bill, I tended to get the impression that we kept stressing central government versus autonomous regional government. And Section 2 is one of the better examples which says "The central government", as though central versus autonomous. And to me, there is no need to be stressing that. This Cabinet Membership, that is one point. The other point is, I always tend to react against quotas as though... All right, let us give them one, give them something to chew on and everybody will be happy. Can we just say in general that the autonomous region shall be represented in the Cabinet of the Government of the Republic of the Philippines?

Senator Pimentel. In fact, Madam President, the version of Congress states that "where feasible..."

Senator Roco. Whatever.

Senator Pimentel. If the concept is acceptable, Madam President, it is all right.

Senator Roco. So that we stop referring to central versus autonomous. They are still part of our country. But we are exerting every effort to give them autonomy as mandated by the Constitution.

Senator Pimentel. We will make the proper revisions by tomorrow, Madam President.

The Presiding Officer [Sen. Defensor Santiago]. Yes, please.

Senator Roco. Thank you, Madam President.

I am now on page 27, Article VII, Administration of Justice.

Again, Section 1, *Exercise of Judicial Power*. Maybe the distinguished chairman will ask the staff to put this more in line with the constitutional provision of judicial power because we are not really changing. But the way this is phrased, it gives connotations that may not be meant. It says: "The supreme court shall continue to exercise its judicial powers as defined by the Constitution..." Whereas, we are really saying that judicial power is always with the Constitution and such inferior courts as defined by existing law. And it is only the Shari'ah courts that shall give in special stress.

So, I understood the concept, as explained by the chairman, that the judicial power remains, of course, with the Supreme Court and all other inferior courts. That is not changed constitutionally. But we give Shari'ah special attention in special jurisdictional qualifications for the ARMM.

If my understanding is correct,—

Senator Pimentel. That is correct, of course.

Senator Roco. —may we modify it to reflect precisely that concept.

Again, I do not have specifics, Madam President, because with our schedules, we have not had time to go into... But I can work certainly with the staff or the chairman, if there is some...

Senator Pimentel. We will appreciate some suggestions from the gentleman, Madam President.

Senator Roco. Now, I will raise a question as regards Section 3, *Membership in the Judicial and Bar Council*. It says: "The President shall appoint a qualified person as a member of the judicial and bar council recommended by the regional governor in consultation with the concerned sectors... The person recommended by the regional governor shall first be confirmed by the regional assembly. Once appointed by the President, the appointee shall sit with the judicial and bar council only to consider matters of appointments to judicial positions in the autonomous region."

For two or three years, I think, when I joined this Chamber, Madam President, I sat with the Judicial and Bar Council, and I clearly got the impression that this Judicial and Bar Council—although we cannot do anything about it because it is mandated by the Constitution—tends to politicize the appointment process.

This additional section tends to politicize even further for the appointment of judges in the ARMM. So, while I appreciate some special attention, some affirmative action or affirmative attitude in the selection of judges for this area, the way it is

phrased, the way we look at all the politicized points, one must be appointed by the President to sit, then the region, then they sit only especially for selecting the three.

So, it becomes so politicized, Madam President, that I was wondering whether we may want to delete this altogether.

Senator Pimentel. Our only problem here, Madam President, is the fact that this is embodied in the Jakarta Agreement. Probably it is a matter of wording, as the gentleman tried to point out. And if the gentleman has any specific suggestions, we can probably work on that as a starting point.

Senator Roco. Yes, Madam President. So that if we make it then broad, the Judicial and Bar Council shall take affirmative action as regards appointments in the area, something broad like that. How it is implemented then by the government and by the leaders of the ARMM, does not give details that give people every opportunity to identify the political process. We will now go to the regional, we will campaign there and we will get all the regional assembly members to nominate, and then the poor guy will be loaded with nominees and he will be the carrier of these nominees to the Judicial and Bar Council, and then the judges or the applicants will now be published. It is a terrible process, Madam President.

Senator Pimentel. Well, yes. Certainly, we will consider what the good gentleman would want done with the wording of this proposed amendment to the Organic Act. But we only wish to point out that, as I said, the Jakarta Agreement sort of binds our hands in this regard.

Senator Roco. Yes.

Senator Pimentel. But I am very sure there are ways of wording the amendment so as not to offend constitutional processes.

Senator Roco. I did not realize that it was in the Jakarta Agreement. But perhaps those are not even the words in the Jakarta Agreement, so that we can craft words that apply or that implement the Jakarta Agreement without necessarily creating areas for high politicalization.

Senator Pimentel. Yes, Madam President. So we await the gentleman's suggestions in this regard.

Senator Roco. Now, I am on page 37, Section 13. I do not know if this has been modified. But it says, "The regional assembly may grant exemptions from regional taxes."

I was hoping we could pattern, we could use BY ABSOLUTE MAJORITY, BY A VOTE OF ABSOLUTE MAJORITY OF the assembly, which is the standard given anyway to Congress of

the Philippines, to the House of Representatives when granting exemptions.

Senator Pimentel. BY ABSOLUTE MAJORITY of the members of the regional assembly.

Senator Roco. Yes. That is the constitutional standard given even to the House of Representatives. So the same should be, I thought, given as a standard to the regional assembly.

Senator Pimentel. So, Madam President, we can already accept that. In other words, in line 23, delete the period (.) there and add the phrase BY ABSOLUTE MAJORITY... No, BY A VOTE...

ROCO-PIMENTEL AMENDMENT

Senator Roco. Or we can say, "The regional assembly BY A VOTE OF ABSOLUTE MAJORITY OF ALL ITS MEMBERS, may grant exemptions from regional taxes."

Senator Pimentel. Yes, we accept the amendment, Madam President.

The Presiding Officer [Sen. Defensor Santiago]. On page 37, line 22, the motion is to amend by insertion.

Senator Pimentel. Yes. Will the gentleman kindly repeat the insertion? The regional assembly BY A...

Senator Roco. "VOTE OF ABSOLUTE MAJORITY OF ALL ITS MEMBERS OR BY ABSOLUTE MAJORITY, may grant exemptions from regional taxes."

Senator Pimentel. Yes, subject to—

Senator Roco. Subject to style.

Senator Pimentel. —styling, Madam President. We accept the amendment.

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

Senator Roco. Thank you, Madam President.

Now, on page 42, Section 1. Section 1, as I understand it, Madam President, is an effort to give guidelines or directive principles to the regional economy in the conservation of patrimony. And it says: "Consistent with the constitution and existing laws, the regional assembly may enact laws pertaining to the regional economy and patrimony that are responsive to the needs of the region. The regional government may not lower the

standards required by the central government..."—by the way, that is covered by an omnibus motion—"....for the protection, conservation and enhancement of the natural resources."

Now, there are two aspects in my mind, Madam President, that does not seem to be reflected here. In the particular case of the ARMM, first, as a region that has certain culture, recognition of its cultural unity and diversity is critical to development, is critical even to economic development. And here the differences between the tribes, the differences even between the Muslims and the Lumads, and, of course, between the Muslims and the Christians themselves who have settled there must be given particular attention even in regional economic planning.

Again, I do not know where to insert that concept, if that concept is acceptable. But we must make it conscious as the Senate of the Republic. We must transmit to our friends and colleagues and brothers and sisters in the autonomous region that diversity as well as the cultural situation in the region must be a factor for economic development.

Senator Pimentel. We have no problem with that, Madam President. It is only a question of wording it.

Senator Roco. Yes.

Senator Pimentel. We will do so by tomorrow.

Senator Roco. Yes. Thank you.

Senator Pimentel. So we hold in abeyance action on the proposal until tomorrow then, Madam President?

The Presiding Officer [Sen. Defensor Santiago]. Yes, please. This is with reference to page 2, Section 1.

Senator Pimentel. That is correct, Madam President.

Senator Roco. Page 42, Section 1. I then come to page 47, Section 17.

Senator Pimentel. Section 17.

Senator Roco. Yes. When we speak of incentives, tax rebates, and holidays, I was wondering, since we have accepted the majority, absolute majority or 50 percent plus one of the Regional Assembly, maybe the same standard should be invoked here.

Senator Pimentel. Yes, the same proviso may be inserted here, Madam President. In other words, subject to approval by majority of all the members of the Assembly?

Senator Roco. Yes. So that the specific wordings should be: "The regional assembly may WITH THE APPROVAL OF THE ABSOLUTE MAJORITY," or "THE SUPPORT OF THE ABSOLUTE MAJORITY may by law grant incentives," et cetera.

Senator Pimentel. Yes. Subject to style, Madam President, we accept.

The Presiding Officer [Sen. Defensor Santiago]. On page 47, line 17,—

Senator Pimentel. Yes, Madam President.

The Presiding Officer [Sen. Defensor Santiago]. —the motion is to amend by insertion. Is there any objection? *[Silence]* There being none, the amendment is approved.

Senator Roco. Thank you. On page 55 then.

Senator Pimentel. Page 55.

Senator Roco. Yes. On page 55, I would just call attention to...Because, originally, I had put here "Note that the state universities and colleges should not be modified". But we do have it on page 60 on Educational Structure.

Senator Pimentel. What page?

Senator Roco. Page 60, Section 8, line 22.

Senator Pimentel. Page 60.

Senator Roco. Yes. The recognition of state colleges and universities within the autonomous regions—that these shall enjoy academic freedom and fiscal autonomy and shall continue to be governed by their respective charters.

Senator Pimentel. Yes, Madam President.

Senator Roco. Can we remove or delete as modified by this Act, as amended?

The reason for this, Madam President, is, there has been so much effort to have standard charter for the state universities and colleges that facilitated educational direction, that facilitated financing in the budget, to the extent that the state university system and the state universities and colleges have somehow a standard with reference to each other. The concept was all around. So if we can delete the phrase "as modified by this Act, as amended", we preserve that concept, Madam President. So, may we ask that this be...

Senator Pimentel. Yes, there seems to be some validity to the gentleman's observation. But may I just point out that the

modification sought to be established by this phrase is only insofar as making and placing the state colleges and universities as part of the Regional Educational Subsystem. In other words, some reference will have to be mentioned as regards that intention—that even if these are state colleges and universities, these will become a part of the regional educational subsystem.

Senator Roco. Yes, Madam President.

Senator Pimentel. That is the idea only, Madam President, not to enable the ARMM to modify their charters because these are charters given to them by central government laws. And probably, we can just make sure that that intention is clearly understood.

Senator Roco. May we suggest then the following proposed amendment.

Senator Pimentel. Yes, Madam President.

Senator Roco. "State colleges and universities within the autonomous region shall be part of the..." What was the word used? "...SHALL BE PART OF THE—"

Senator Pimentel. —Regional Educational Subsystem.

Senator Roco. "Regional Educational Subsystem within the autonomous region..."

Senator Pimentel. Yes, Madam President.

ROCO AMENDMENT

Senator Roco. So we insert between the word "universities" and the word "within" the phrase "State colleges and universities SHALL BE PART OF THE REGIONAL EDUCATIONAL SUBSYSTEM within the autonomous region AND shall enjoy academic freedom..." until line 24 where we delete the phrase "as modified by this Act, as amended."

Then, we do recognize that it is part of the subsystem-

Senator Pimentel. Yes, Madam President.

Senator Roco. —but the charter and so much effort to standardize them remain.

Senator Pimentel. Including fiscal autonomy.

Senator Roco. Of course, in the charter, all the state universities and colleges.

Senator Pimentel. Yes. We accept the amendment, Madam President, subject to style.

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

Senator Roco. Thank you, Madam President. That seems to be the final point that I was able to ascertain from readings of this bill. We thank the chairman and the Chamber.

The Presiding Officer [Sen. Defensor Santiago]. The Chair would like to thank Senator Roco.

Senator Pimentel. Thank you very much, Madam President.

The Presiding Officer [Sen. Defensor Santiago]. Will the distinguished sponsor welcome written submissions of individual amendments? And if so, what should the deadline be?

Senator Pimentel. By tomorrow, if possible, Madam President. If that is possible.

The Presiding Officer [Sen. Defensor Santiago]. Yes, please.

So, the sponsor will continue to receive individual amendments in writing so that he can incorporate them in his next draft.

Senator Pimentel. Yes, Madam President.

The Presiding Officer [Sen. Defensor Santiago]. The Minority Leader is recognized.

Senator Guingona. Madam President, in the previous sessions, we submitted three proposed amendments to the sponsor on the Shari'ah law. The Shari'ah law is here. I am looking for the preaudit proposal. I do not seem to...

Senator Pimentel. All right.

Senator Guingona. As well as the one on education.

Senator Pimentel. On education, can the distinguished gentleman kindly remind us...

Senator Guingona. I did not have the specific proposal in writing but we left it to the distinguished sponsor.

It says here that the control, supervision and management of education is vested in the autonomous region. While that may be good, the Madaris System that is adopted educates the Muslim on the oneness of State and Church—religion, rather. We respect that because it is their belief that State and Church or Government and Church are one. This may come into conflict with the Constitution, unless the supervision is still vested in

the national government and the respect for duly constituted authorities is stated there.

Senator Pimentel. Yes. Will the distinguished gentleman be satisfied if we place "SUBJECT TO THE PROVISIONS OF THE CONSTITUTION" and insert also at the proper place his observation that respect for duly constituted authorities in accordance with law shall be observed?

Senator Guingona. Yes, Madam President.

I think that the national government should also periodically supervise the implementation of education in the area.

Senator Pimentel. Yes, Madam President. We will see where we can insert the gentleman's observations. As regards his observation on the need to audit...

Senator Guingona. Preaudit in areas where there is lack of adequate internal control.

Senator Pimentel. What we can do is, we will probably give the Commission on Audit the leeway to do so without specifying just exactly what it can do. Because if we mention preauditing as a requirement for the ARMM region, we might come up against, you know, observations that we are trying to single it out in this matter.

Senator Guingona. Yes. And also for the COA to undertake seminars.

Senator Pimentel. Yes. All such activities which will enhance transparency and prevent the commission of graft and corruption at that level.

Senator Guingona. And then on page 28, the Shari'ah Appellate Court. Its jurisdiction is limited to family, persons and property relations, although we are saying that they may, in consultation with the Supreme Court, adopt a wider --

Senator Pimentel. Yes, Madam President.

Senator Guingona.—Shari'ah law. So, that has to be related.

Senator Pimentel. We will see how we can incorporate those observations, Madam President.

Senator Guingona. Yes. That is all, Madam President. Thank you.

The Presiding Officer [Sen. Defensor Santiago]. Thank you, Senator Guingona.

Senator Drilon. Madam President.

The Presiding Officer [Sen. Defensor Santiago]. Sen. Franklin Drilon is recognized.

Senator Drilon. Madam President, this is just an inquiry.

Did the discussion between Senator Roco and Senator Pimentel also include the possible amendment in Section 2 of Article VIII on the Administration of Justice? Or is it limited to the membership in the Judicial and Bar Council?

Senator Pimentel. Our discussion had to do with membership in the Judicial and Bar Council, Madam President.

Senator Drilon. Because Section 2 requires—or I do not know whether this is a requirement or simply an adoption of policy—that at least one Justice of the Supreme Court and two Justices of the Court of Appeals shall come from the qualified jurists of the autonomous region. Is this a limitation on the plenary authority of the Judicial and Bar Council to nominate?

Senator Pimentel. That might be in the nature of a policy statement modifying that rule because of the Jakarta Agreement, Madam President. That is what I can say about that.

Senator Drilon. The problem is, the jurisdiction of the Judicial and Bar Council is plenary and is found in the Constitution. It has no limitation.

Senator Pimentel. Can we say it is recommendatory or directory? It is not mandatory, in that sense.

Senator Drilon. That is why I am raising the issue because I cannot really answer the question myself by just looking at this.

Senator Pimentel. Maybe we can reword. Probably, we can reword the way it is done.

Senator Drilon. Section 3, Madam President, talks about the membership in the Judicial and Bar Council. We wish to draw the sponsor's attention to the fact that the membership in the Council is defined by the Constitution. Is this an additional member being proposed?

Senator Pimentel. Well, if the distinguished gentleman's contention is correct, then we probably have to make sure that there is a member of the Judicial and Bar Council coming from that region or nominated by the region, I think.

Senator Drilon. That is precisely my point, Madam President. The definition of membership in the Judicial and Bar Council is found in the Constitution, and I was wondering what Section 3 purports to do. Does it add another member to the JBC? If so, can we do that? Because that would be an amendment to the total membership of the JBC under the Constitution, especially

the last sentence of Section 3 on page 28 which says: "Once appointed by the President, the appointee shall sit with the Judicial and Bar Council only to consider matters of appointment to judicial positions in the autonomous region."

I could not figure out whether this is an additional member. Maybe, if the sponsor can consider a setup where the representative of the autonomous region sits as an adviser, because there are advisers designated by the Chief Justice in the JBC, Madam President.

Senator Pimentel. That is correct, yes. We can place a consultant, adviser...

Senator Drilon. Or a consultant rather than as a member because we may have problems under the Constitution if we impose an additional member. Maybe we can provide for a consultant or an adviser. And even to sit as a consultant in all proceedings and not only when the appointments to the autonomous region will be taken up.

Senator Pimentel. Yes. Subject to the better judgment of our colleagues, that observation can very well be accepted by us, Madam President.

The Presiding Officer [Sen. Defensor Santiago]. That is an important point. And the Chair would like very humbly to offer this observation.

This issue will arise if the other signatory or signatories to the Jakarta Agreement raises the issue. Otherwise, what will happen is this: If the issue is raised in a Philippine Court, the Philippine Court will always rule in favor of the Philippine Constitution. But if the issue is raised in a regional or other form of international legal forum, that international forum will always rule in favor of the international agreement. So it seems likely that the best solution will be to keep the language as vague as possible.

Senator Pimentel. Yes, Madam President.

Senator Drilon. Is Section 2, Madam President, also a provision of the Jakarta Agreement?

Senator Pimentel. Will the gentleman kindly read it, Madam President?

Senator Drilon. Section 2 is a statement of policy on appointments to the judiciary. May I read it, Madam President. It says:

SEC 2. Justices from Autonomous Region.- It shall be the policy of the central government that, at least, one (1) justice in the supreme court and two (2) justices in the court of appeals shall come from qualified jurists

of the autonomous region. For this purpose, the regional governor may, after consultations with the regional assembly and concerned sectors in the autonomous region, submit the names of qualified persons to the judicial and bar council for its consideration. The appointments of those recommended by the regional governor to the judicial positions mentioned above are without prejudice to the appointments that may be extended to other qualified inhabitants of the autonomous region to other positions in the judiciary.

Senator Pimentel. Madam President, the answer is yes. That provision is found in the Jakarta Agreement. And I would like to advert to the fact that the House version on this particular issue puts a qualifying phrase "wherever feasible," words to that effect.

So, even if there is such a statement in our version that does not have the qualifying phrase "wherever feasible," we can expect that phrase to crop up during the bicameral conference committee. If necessary, we might just be amenable to putting in that phrase.

Senator Drilon. Thank you, Madam President.

The Presiding Officer [Sen. Defensor Santiago]. Thank you, Senator Drilon.

Sen. Renato L. *Compañero* Cayetano is recognized.

Senator Cayetano. Thank you, Madam President. Just for the information of my two colleagues, Senators Pimentel and Drilon, the Constitution, with respect to four permanent members, provides for the following sectors: First, the Integrated Bar of the Philippines; second, the academe or professor of law; third, the retired justices; and fourth, the private sector. So, those are the four limited sectoral representatives in the Judicial and Bar Council.

Perhaps, as suggested by Senator Drilon,—and I think the Senate President and I used to sit there—the Supreme Court has consultants. Maybe the one coming from the autonomous region can be a consultant.

Senator Pimentel. Yes.

Senator Cayetano. Thank you, Madam President.

Senator Pimentel. Thank you very much, Madam President.

Senator Legarda-Leviste. Madam President.

The Presiding Officer [Sen. Defensor Santiago]. Sen. Loren Legarda-Leviste is recognized.

Senator Legarda-Leviste. May I inquire, Madam President, if we may still include a very brief amendment.

Senator Pimentel. Of course, Madam President.

Senator Legarda-Leviste. On page 7, Section 3, line 9, Article III of the bill, between the word "children" and the period (.), insert the phrase INCLUDING THE RIGHT OF WOMEN TO ENGAGE IN LAWFUL EMPLOYMENT.

Senator Pimentel. That is found on what particular line?

Senator Legarda-Leviste. Page 7, line 9, Section 3, Article III.

Senator Pimentel. Yes, "uphold and protect the fundamental rights of women".

Senator Legarda-Leviste. Yes.

Senator Pimentel. That is where the distinguished senator wants to insert that phrase.

LEGARDA-LEVISTE AMENDMENT

Senator Legarda-Leviste. Yes. Between the word "children" and the punctuation mark period (.), kindly insert the phrase INCLUDING THE RIGHT OF WOMEN TO ENGAGE IN LAWFUL EMPLOYMENT. This is added to ensure the protection of Muslim women by providing them the right to engage in employment especially during these times when the income brought about by their husbands is deemed insufficient.

Senator Pimentel. It is accepted, Madam President, subject to style.

Senator Legarda-Leviste. Thank you very much, Madam President.

The Presiding Officer [Sen. Defensor Santiago]. Is there any objection to this motion to amend by insertion? *[Silence]* There being none, the amendment is approved.

This bill is 73 pages long. It might considerably reduce the heavy burden already inflicted on the Senate President if those with remaining individual amendments could submit them in written form, if possible, by the end of the working day today.

The Majority Leader is recognized.

SUSPENSION OF CONSIDERATION OF S. NO. 2129

Senator Tatad. Madam President, there being no further proposed amendments at this point, I move that we suspend consideration of Senate Bill No. 2129.

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