

MONDAY, MAY 31, 1999

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

SUSPENSION OF CONSIDERATION OF S. NO. 1545

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

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

BILL ON SECOND READING

S. No. 1438--Early Childhood Care & Development
(Continuation)

Senator Drilon. Mr. President, I move that we resume consideration of Senate Bill No. 1438 as reported out under Committee Report No. 22.

The President. Is there any objection? [Silence] There being none, resumption of consideration of Senate Bill No. 1438 is now in order.

Senator Drilon. Mr. President, we are still in the period of interpellations. May I ask the Chair to recognize the principal sponsor, the Chairman of the Committee on Education, Arts and Culture, Sen. Teresa Aquino-Oreta.

The President. Sen. Teresa Aquino-Oreta is recognized.

Senator Drilon. Mr. President, to interpellate the principal sponsor, may I ask the Chair to recognize Sen. Aquilino Q. Pimentel, Jr.

The President. Sen. Aquilino Q. Pimentel Jr. is recognized.

Senator Pimentel. Mr. President, will the lady Senator kindly respond to a few questions?

Senator Oreta. With pleasure, Mr. President.

Senator Pimentel. Mr. President, in Section 3, under paragraph 3.2 of the proposed bill, it states that among the objectives is to enhance the physical, social, emotional, cognitive, psychological, language and spiritual development of young children.

May we know how this is supposed to be achieved?

Senator Oreta. Mr. President, studies have shown that the early years of a child, that is from zero to 6 years old, is the most critical and formative years of a child. With this program, we can introduce to the child the basic needs, like health development and learning. The physical, social, emotional,

cognitive, psychological, language and spiritual development of young children will come in the form of the early education of the child. So this will be answered by the program that we are setting up.

Senator Pimentel. Mr. President, who is going to define the program?

Mr. President, right now, the different line agencies, like the Department of Education, Culture and Sports, the DSWD, and the DOH, have their own programs for children. For example, the Department of Health has its nutrition and immunization programs. The DSWD has other programs. The DECS has also this early childhood education program. All these will be coordinated by the National Early Care and Childhood Program Coordinating Council. That means a council will be there to integrate all the efforts of the different line agencies for this kind of program and again, eventually with the assistance of the local government units.

Senator Pimentel. Mr. President, I can understand the importance of this proposed bill. As a matter of fact, I would like to commend the lady Senator for thinking of this bill and initiating the filing of this bill. Nonetheless, probably there is a need to be more concrete, just exactly who these service providers are. I am pretty sure that this requirement of clarity will most likely be addressed by the lady Senator during the time of amendments.

Senator Oreta. Mr. President, the teachers are the service providers. But this time, they are not just plain teachers. We said that the different programs of the line agencies, like the DOH and the DSWD, will come into play.

Senator Pimentel. That is why, Mr. President, I would think that there is probably a need to define just exactly who are covered by the term "service providers".

Senator Oreta. Who are covered? They are the teachers and also the caregivers. Right now, we have the day-care workers, the health workers, and also the teachers of the preschools that we have.

Senator Pimentel. That is why, Mr. President, I think there is a need to enumerate just exactly who are covered. I think a law will have to be very clear just exactly who are these people--1, 2, 3, 4, 5--so that the public is not misled. But, as I said, this can be remedied, I suppose, by a proper amendment later on.

Senator Oreta. Mr. President, if the gentleman will look at Section 4.2, we have indicated there who are ECCD service providers.

Senator Pimentel. Yes, Mr. President. However, I also

notice that the enumeration is, more or less, generic in the sense that it says "various professionals." Who are exactly these various professionals, paraprofessionals and volunteer caregivers? We probably have to be more definite about the enumeration so that the public will not be confused as to who are exactly included in this term "service providers."

Senator Oreta. Mr. President, if I may continue. The service providers will include day-care workers, teachers, teacher-aides, rural health midwives, community health volunteers, barangay nutrition scholars, and the parents themselves.

Senator Pimentel. Therefore, Mr. President, there are several people embraced in this term "service providers." From the looks of it, probably, for every province, city or municipality, where there will be ECCD service providers, the number will vary. Is that the idea?

Senator Oreta. Yes, that is the reason, Mr. President. That is why before this program is implemented, there will be a series of advocacy work between the National ECCD Coordinating Council and the local government unit. The local government executive will have to have the knowledge on what this program is all about.

Senator Pimentel. How long will this period of advocacy be, Mr. President?

Senator Oreta. We have given this program five years. In the first year, the national government will come in. In the succeeding years, slowly, the national government will be getting out. When the fifth year comes, the local government units will now take care of the program based on their capabilities.

At this juncture, the Senate President relinquished the Chair to Sen. Juan Ponce Enrile.

Senator Pimentel. Which therefore means, Mr. President, that we ought to have some definite idea just exactly how much this program will cost for the first five years and the succeeding years. Because it would be difficult to saddle the local governments with additional cost, unless it is clear where the money is going to come from.

Senator Oreta. On a five-year plan, Mr. President, we are looking at a total program of P2 billion. Right now, the DOH has a total amount of P590 million for its early childhood program; the DSWD has P492 million; and the DECS has P272 million, amounting to about P1.3 billion. But this is not enough.

Based on the program of the World Bank--because the World Bank gave us a loan for this kind of a program which is being done in Regions VI, VII and XII--the Asian target of a very good

early childhood program is about P285 per child. Right now, we are spending something like P180 per child. So we need about P105 difference to fill in the gap. To get that money, we have talked to the Pagcor. We asked the officials if, in their projection, they can give money for this program. We were given an affirmative answer. I think their program for the National Power Corporation, which is about P500 million, will now be finalized. And Pagcor told us that it just needs legislation. If we pass this bill, then Pagcor will be able to support this program. What we will be needing is only about P430 million a year, P400 million of which will be used in three regions. The cost per region is about P133 million. The excess of P30 million will be used for the maintenance of the coordinating council, that will see to it that this program is being carried out.

Mr. President, we foresee a program that will be initiated in three regions in the first year; the next three regions in the second year; the next three regions in the third year; and finally, the whole country will be covered by this program.

Senator Fimentel. The amount of P2 billion that the sponsor mentioned, Mr. President, is for what?

Senator Oreta. For five years, Mr. President.

Senator Fimentel. The amount of P2 billion for five years.

Senator Oreta. Yes, Mr. President. We will divide it. This will be in the form of grants that we will give the local government units to start them up. Eventually, as we said, as years pass by, let us say, before the fifth year is over, we are hoping that the local government units will be able to stand on their own and continue the program.

Senator Fimentel. That is exactly where the problem lies. Because if we saddle the local government units with additional funding requirements, it becomes very difficult to implement any kind of legislation which is imposed by the central government to be shouldered by local governments. That has always been the problem with many kinds of programs which the central government saddles upon the shoulders of local government units.

Senator Oreta. Mr. President, we will not saddle the local government units with these expenses. To start with, we will be helping them. The expenses that they will incur in themselves will just be the recurring expenses which, right now, they are partly doing.

The initial grant that we will give the local government units will help them to start up. But, eventually, I am sure, they will be able to handle the recurring cost of this program.

Senator Fimentel. That is exactly what I am worried about. Unless we are really certain where the money is going to come from, we will be flooded by complaints coming from the local

government units.

Mr. President, addressing myself to the lady Senator, under Section 6.2.3 of the proposed bill, there is a requirement that the remuneration of ECCD service providers under their supervision, such as day-care workers, child development workers, community health workers, rural health midwives, and the barangay nutrition scholars, shall be covered with local government funds and that they are justly compensated, and that their working conditions are conducive to fulfill national quality standards.

Senator Oreta. Mr. President, right now, some of the local government units are already doing this. What we are saying is, we would like to give the service providers the proper remuneration in carrying out the program at the local level. As I said, the DOH, the DSWD and the DECS will continue to provide these services to the local government units. The local government unit will now monitor that this program is being carried in its locality.

To give the gentleman an example: Right now, in Camarines Sur, this program is already being done through a local government effort. Since the local government cannot afford to do it province-wide, the governor has about 24 centers which provide this Early Childhood Care and Development Program. I was just told that there is a clamor from the parents of other children in the other barangays to put up this program.

In Bataan also, Governor Roman has already started this program and he is doing it on a province-wide basis. What he is just asking us are the latest teaching techniques and processes to be given to his service providers.

Mr. President, before this program goes to the local government unit, there will be a series of consultation, meetings and coordination with the local government executives to find out if they can really avail themselves of the program when it is time for the national government to step out and they will be on their own.

Senator Pimentel. Mr. President, the example given of Governor Roman may be all right on the assumption that his province can afford it. I am not sure if we can legislate a general law that will bind all local government units regardless of their capacity. That is a big problem.

Senator Oreta. Actually from the start, we were thinking of this program as part of the educational ladder. We found out it will be very difficult for the DECS to assume such a thing and make it a national policy because, as we said, early childhood care and development does not only mean education but the totality of the child, his health needs and learning development, and everything that will make the child more productive in later years.

When we were thinking of making it a part of the educational ladder and making it a national policy, our study went to as high as Pi2 billion, and I do not think we can afford it. So we said, "Why do we not start it as a program first?" Because in this program, a new thing will come in--there will be complete parent involvement. It will be very difficult for the service providers to be teaching the young children something that cannot be followed up by their parents at home. The involvement of parents will surely come in and will be an integral part of the program.

We are hoping that after five years, there will be a national clamor. By then, the national government will see it as a wise move to think of it in terms of a national program.

In the United States, the Americans have started it about 30 years ago, and their program is called Headstart. But up to now, it is not yet a federal program. It is still a State program being carried on by the different States and different local units which have the capabilities of continuing the program.

Our studies have shown that once they have started the program and seen the good results, then the local governments themselves will be looking for ways and means to continue the program.

Senator Pimentel. Which actually supports my theory, Mr. President. This bill is good in theory. The aspirations are good; the intentions are good. Nonetheless, if we get down to brass tacks, we need money to carry it through. If the sponsor wants the local governments to shoulder the cost of this program, then we will come across certain local government units--most of them--and find out that they cannot afford this additional program that is being placed upon their shoulders.

Senator Oreta. Mr. President, the local government will come in only after the third year. For the first two years, more or less, the national government will support the local governments that cannot afford it.

This program is now being done in Regions VI, VII, and XII. The local governments that have come in contact with this program--and they are very excited about it--are hoping that the national government will come in to help them out and see to it that this program will be implemented in their localities.

Senator Pimentel. That is exactly what I am...

Senator Oreta. We are just basing this on the testimonies of the local government units that have already come across this program, Mr. President.

Senator Pimentel. That is correct, Mr. President. But, as the lady Senator said, they want the national government to help them implement this program. Because obviously, for example, if we use Region XII, I suppose, if I am not mistaken, the lady

Senator is talking here of Sulu, Tawi-Tawi.

Senator Oreta. Yes, Mr. President.

Senator Pimentel. I do not find in all honesty any basis--

Senator Oreta. Mr. President, we are talking of Cotabato.

Senator Pimentel. --or Cotabato, for that matter, I do not see these provinces capable of sustaining a program of this kind. They are already complaining that so many impositions are added to their burden by the central government. If our optimism is based on the expected clamor that is going to arise, in the first place, who is going to determine whether there is a clamor or not? How will that clamor be measured to justify the coming in of local governments for this program?

Actually, Mr. President, what I am trying to say is, I do not think it is wise to pass a law, the implementation of which is so iffy, full of "ifs," depending on the clamor. So who is going to make that clamor? How will that clamor be measured, if at all, to justify that on the third year, it should be implemented by this or that local government?

Senator Oreta. Mr. President, again, based on the testimonies of the local government units that we have approached and talked to, they are very excited about the program. They themselves would want to see this program push through because they are seeing the good effects of this program. They themselves are looking for means on how to cover this program. So we were encouraged by the excitement coming from the local government executives. It is the other way around.

We have also discussed with them that in the event the national government pulls out, if they can carry on the program, they said that they will be able to carry on the program. This is based on their testimonies. They realize that a comprehensive delivery of learning and health care to children from zero to 6 years old of their constituency is proving to be a correct step.

Senator Pimentel. Mr. President, if the lady Senator is relying on what she said, conversations with certain local government units, I would like to find out how many of the 78 provinces have been consulted.

Senator Oreta. Mr. President, these are not conversations. These are written documents. They were also invited to a series of meetings for us to really find out if there will really be a clamor for this program. Based on their experiences, which are written and documented, they would want this program to push through. But we are putting it in a very slow pace because we know that it will be difficult for the national government to implement this on a nationwide basis. That is why this program will only start on a three-region basis.

Senator Pimentel. The question has not been answered, but let us go to the cities. There are 82 cities. How many cities have indicated their clamor for this program?

Senator Oreta. Right now, there are 10 cities that are already doing this program, Mr. President.

Senator Pimentel. Yes, but there is no showing that they can do it on their own, Mr. President.

Senator Oreta. No, on their own, meaning, they approved the counterpart portion and they are very happy. They know for a fact that at some given time, they will have to be doing this program on their own. They are very well-conscious of that, Mr. President.

Senator Pimentel. What are the 10 cities, Mr. President?

Senator Oreta. I will give them to the gentleman. [Pause] Mr. President, we will give the distinguished gentleman the list of the regions. Right now, we do not have the listing of the cities. But the 13 provinces in three regions are: Iloilo, Negros Occidental, Antique, Capiiz, Guimaras, Aklan; Cebu, Negros Oriental, Bohol, Siquijor; North Cotabato, Lanao and Sultan Kudarat. These are the provinces where the ECCD project has been implemented through the World Bank facility.

Senator Pimentel. Even assuming, Mr. President, that the data would be correct, there is no showing whatsoever that these local government units in the region are able and capable to assume the burdens of this program once the national subsidies are removed from their operations.

Senator Oreta. Mr. President, we also have a study here made by Mr. Alonzo and Fenny Bautista. The studies have shown us that it is the local government unit on the other hand that is looking for ways and means on how to maintain and continue this program.

Senator Pimentel. Which is all to the good if this is done voluntarily. But if it is imposed as a matter of law, I think it is foolhardy to pass a law that is based on a very chancy situation as to whether it can be implemented by the municipality, city or province concerned.

Now, Mr. President, I started this interpellation hoping that it would be a *pro forma* one, but it looks like there are certain deeper issues that have to be tackled more thoroughly.

And so for the moment, I move that we adjourn the session because there is no quorum anyway, so that we continue this interpellation at some other day.

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

SUSPENSION OF CONSIDERATION OF S. NO. 1438

Senator Drilon. Mr. President, I move that we suspend consideration of Senate Bill No. 1438.

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

ADJOURNMENT OF SESSION

Senator Drilon. Mr. President, I move that we adjourn the session until tomorrow at three o'clock in the afternoon.

The Presiding Officer [Sen. Enrile]. Is there any objection? [Silence] There being none, the session is adjourned until tomorrow at three o'clock in the afternoon.

It was 5:59 p.m.