

## RECORD OF THE SENATE

TUESDAY, MARCH 2, 1999

### OPENING OF THE SESSION

*At 3:14 p.m., the President Pro Tempore, called the session to order.*

**The President Pro Tempore.** The 69th session of the Senate of the First Regular Session of the Eleventh Congress is hereby called to order.

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

*Everybody rose for the prayer.*

**Senator Aquino-Oreta.** I would like to share this prayer that was given to me by my late mother when I won as Congresswoman in 1987.

### PRAYER

O Lord, as we begin this day, help us to speak the truth in the face of the strong. Help us never to lie just to gain the applause of the weak.

If You give us power, please do not take our happiness; if You give us insight, do not take our wits; if You give us success do not take our humility; and if You give us humility, do not take our dignity.

O God, help us always to see both sides of any problem, and do not let us accuse any opponents of treachery just because they may have a different point of view, especially with members of our own family.

Lord, help us to love people as we love ourselves and to keep a check on ourselves as we keep a check on others. Do not let us become boastful if we are successful and do not let us despair if we should fail. Just keep reminding us always that any failure we may experience is just an experiment before true success arrives.

Dear Lord, let us be gentle with others; teach us that forgiveness is the highest standard of power, and that revenge is the greatest indication of weakness.

If You take our health, leave our faith. If You take our serenity, leave our hope. And if You should take everything we have, then leave us Your love.

O Lord, if we have wronged others, give us the

opportunity and the desire to truly apologize; and if others have wronged us, then give us the power to forgive.

Oh God, we know You will never forget us, may we never forget You!

Amen.

### ROLL CALL

**The President Pro Tempore.** The Secretary will please call the roll.

**The Secretary, reading:**

Senator Teresa S. Aquino-Oreta .....	Present
Senator Robert Z. Barbers .....	Present
Senator Rodolfo G. Biazon .....	Present
Senator Renato L. <i>Compañero</i> Cayetano ....	Present
Senator Anna Dominique M. L. Coseteng ...	Present*
Senator Franklin M. Drilon .....	Present
Senator Juan Ponce Enrile .....	Present
Senator Juan M. Flavie .....	Present
Senator Teofisto T. Guingona Jr. ....	Present
Senator Gregorio B. Honasan .....	Present
Senator Robert S. Jaworski .....	Present
Senator Loren B. Legarda-Leviste .....	Present
Senator Ramon B. Magsaysay Jr. ....	Present
Senator Blas F. Ople .....	Present
Senator John 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 .....	**

**The President Pro Tempore.** With 20 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.

\* Arrived after the roll call

\*\* On official mission



CONDUCT, IN AID OF LEGISLATION, AN INQUIRY AND INVESTIGATION ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SECTION 20 OF THE 1998 GENERAL APPROPRIATIONS ACT (GAA) ON THE TEN PERCENT (10%) ALLOCATION FOR THE PURCHASE OF DESKS BY THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, CULTURE AND SPORTS (DECS) WITH THE END IN VIEW OF ENSURING THAT THE PRIME PURPOSE OF THE LAW IS SERVED, AND FOR OTHER APPROPRIATE MEASURES

Introduced by Senator Magsaysay Jr.

**The President Pro Tempore.** Referred to the Committees on Education, Arts and Culture; and Accountability of Public Officers and Investigations

**The Secretary.** Proposed Senate Resolution No. 381, entitled

RESOLUTION DIRECTING THE SENATE COMMITTEES ON ECONOMIC AFFAIRS; TRADE AND COMMERCE AND OTHER APPROPRIATE COMMITTEE/S TO CONDUCT AN INQUIRY, IN AID OF LEGISLATION, ON THE EXODUS OF MULTINATIONAL CORPORATIONS IN THE PHILIPPINES EMPHASIZING THE MOTIVATIONS FOR THEIR WITHDRAWALS, ITS EFFECTS TO FILIPINO LABOR AND UNEMPLOYMENT ISSUE AS A WHOLE, INVESTMENT CONCERNS, WITH THE END IN VIEW OF FORMULATING REMEDIAL MEASURES TO ADDRESS THE ISSUE, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

Introduced by Senator Magsaysay Jr.

**The President Pro Tempore.** Referred to the Committees on Economic Affairs; and Trade and Commerce

**Senator Drilon.** Mr. President.

**The President Pro Tempore.** The Majority Leader is recognized.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF THE OFFICIAL VISIT OF COUNCILORS OF GUIMARAS PROVINCE

**Senator Drilon.** Mr. President, before we proceed with our business for today, may I first acknowledge, for our record, the councilors from the Province of Guimaras, who are present in the hall today to observe our proceedings.

SUSPENSION OF SESSION

May I move for a one-minute suspension of the session.

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

*It was 3:21 p.m.*

RESUMPTION OF SESSION

*At 3:23 p.m., the session was resumed.*

**The President Pro Tempore.** The session is resumed. The Majority Leader is recognized.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF THE OFFICIAL VISIT OF PARLIAMENT MEMBER FROM NORTH IRELAND, RT. HON. BASIL MCIVOR

**Senator Drilon.** Likewise, may we acknowledge, for the record, the presence of a member of parliament from North Ireland, Rt. Hon. Basil McIvor, who is in the hall right now.

SUSPENSION OF SESSION

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

*It was 3:23 p.m.*

RESUMPTION OF SESSION

*At 3:24 p.m., the session was resumed.*

**The President Pro Tempore.** The session is resumed. The Majority Leader is recognized.

BILL ON SECOND READING

**S. No. 1271—Professional Regulation Commission**  
(Continuation)

**Senator Drilon.** Mr. President, I move that we resume consideration of Senate Bill No. 1271 as reported out under Committee Report No. 25.

**The President Pro Tempore.** Is there any objection?  
[Silence] There being none, resumption of consideration of Senate Bill No. 1271 is now in order.

**Senator Drilon.** We are now in the period of interpellations. May I ask the Chair to recognize Sen. Anna Dominique M. L.



Coseteng, the principal sponsor of the measure, and the Minority Leader, Sen. Teofisto T. Guingona Jr., for the interpellation.

**The President Pro Tempore.** Sen. Anna Dominique M. L. Coseteng is recognized and also to interpellate, the Minority Leader, Sen. Teofisto T. Guingona Jr.

**Senator Guingona.** Mr. President, will the distinguished lady sponsor yield for some questions?

**Senator Coseteng.** Yes, Mr. President.

**Senator Guingona.** May we know how many members of the Professional Regulation Commission are there.

**Senator Coseteng.** There are three members, Mr. President.

**Senator Guingona.** They have how many Regulatory Boards under them?

**Senator Coseteng.** There are 40 Regulatory Boards.

**Senator Guingona.** Are these administratively under the Regulatory Commission?

**Senator Coseteng.** Administratively, as well as for the supervision of these Boards.

**Senator Guingona.** Can they discipline?

**Senator Coseteng.** For now, they make the recommendations to the President.

**Senator Guingona.** Because these are regular members, for example, of the medical profession; they are members of the nursing associations. Under the proposed bill, they will be strictly under the Regulatory Commission. Would that be correct?

**Senator Coseteng.** Yes, Mr. President.

**Senator Guingona.** Would the members of that regulatory body be subject to suspension under the Professional Regulation Commission?

**Senator Coseteng.** Mr. President, it is the President who makes the suspension order.

**Senator Guingona.** Can they be subject to hearings and contempt?

**Senator Coseteng.** Yes, Mr. President. All of these are done with due process.

**Senator Guingona.** At present, they cannot be?

**Senator Coseteng.** May I beg the gentleman's pardon. May I have the question again, please.

**Senator Guingona.** At present, what is the nature of the power of the Professional Regulation Commission?

**Senator Coseteng.** They can be suspended or their license revoked if there is any violation of laws, code of ethics, and if the evidence is very strong. Also, they have to go through due process, Mr. President.

**Senator Guingona.** Since the members of the Professional Regulation Commission under the proposed bill of the distinguished sponsor will have more powers, may we know the qualifications of the members of the Professional Regulation Commission at present?

**Senator Coseteng.** They should be at least 40 years old, Mr. President.

**Senator Guingona.** At least 40 years old.

**Senator Coseteng.** That is correct, Mr. President.

**Senator Guingona.** May I beg the senator's pardon, please.

**Senator Coseteng.** At least 40 years old. At least he must have five years of management experience.

**Senator Guingona.** At least, he must have five years of management experience.

**Senator Coseteng.** And also, he must be a registered professional, Mr. President.

**Senator Guingona.** May I beg the pardon of the sponsor, Mr. President.

**Senator Coseteng.** He must be a registered professional, Mr. President.

**Senator Guingona.** Any profession?

**Senator Coseteng.** Yes, Mr. President.

**Senator Guingona.** He can be a mortician.

**Senator Coseteng.** It has to fall within the 40 specialty boards, Mr. President.

**Senator Guingona.** He can be a dentist.



**Senator Coseteng.** Yes, Mr. President.

**Senator Guingona.** Supposing he is a nurse, can he be a member of the Professional Regulation Commission?

**Senator Coseteng.** Yes, Mr. President.

**Senator Guingona.** But the influence he would have over the nursing examination might have a conflict of interest. How will this be resolved?

**Senator Coseteng.** Mr. President, the responsibility would be basically administrative in nature and they also perform quasi-judicial functions. They do not directly participate in the examinations that are given.

**Senator Guingona.** Yes. But supposing the wife has a nursing school, would this not disqualify him from being a member of the Professional Regulation Commission because that would conflict with his duties to ensure clean and credible examinations against the passage of the nurses in the school of the wife?

**Senator Coseteng.** Actually, Mr. President, the computerization thrust of the PRC seeks to precisely extinguish this kind of a situation because questions are chosen at random. And that, I suppose, if at all there are going to be leakages or any of these anomalies, even if the person concerned is not a member of the board, there may be other ways to circumvent what the actual practice should be. But as we know, the computerization process would eliminate the risk of this happening.

**Senator Guingona.** I would like to thank the sponsor for that but I am not talking about computerization yet. We are just on the qualifications of the members of the Professional Regulation Commission.

**Senator Coseteng.** Mr. President, if I may just be allowed to clarify. The fear of our Minority Leader is that if a school belongs to, for example, the wife of a member of the board, that opens that school or gives the school access to questions that perhaps would favor the students coming from that particular school. Is that what the Minority Leader was trying to drive at?

**Senator Guingona.** Yes. Because amongst the qualifications that were mentioned—40 years old, belonging to a profession—there is no disqualification of a member of the Professional Regulation Commission having a wife who possesses and runs a school.

**Senator Coseteng.** For now, Mr. President, this is not part of the qualifications. But if the Minority Leader sees it fit, I think it is quite valid. In the period of amendments, that can be

a prohibition or that can be a disqualification that may be incorporated in the final bill. However, the present situation is such that even the examiners themselves do not know what the questions are going to be because the questions are actually chosen at random. So there is no set of questions that may be known to everybody way before the examinations are given.

**Senator Guingona.** We will come to the question stage later on. What I am only asking for are the qualifications and the possible conflict of interests.

May we know the members of the Professional Regulation Commission now?

**Senator Coseteng.** The chairman is Mr. Hermogenes Pobre.

**Senator Guingona.** In what profession is he?

**Senator Coseteng.** He is a CPA-lawyer, Mr. President.

**Senator Guingona.** The members, please?

**Senator Coseteng.** Mr. Alfonso Abad, who is a lawyer, and Avelina de la Rea-Tan who is a CPA.

**Senator Guingona.** Therefore, if these members would continue, very good. But I would like to know if there had been instances in the past where there were conflicts of interests between a member of the Professional Regulation Commission and the conduct of examinations?

**Senator Coseteng.** So far, according to Chairman Pobre, there is none.

**Senator Guingona.** Was there not an instance where the wife of a commissioner was operating a school for nursing?

**Senator Coseteng.** I think the person concerned is Mr. Mendieta. According to Chairman Pobre, that was just an allegation, but it has not been proven. The gentleman concerned has been separated from the PRC.

**Senator Guingona.** Will the distinguished sponsor, at the proper time of amendment, agree?

**Senator Coseteng.** Yes, Mr. President. I think it is valid and I personally appreciate that input from the Minority Leader to avoid such suspicions or to avoid the spectacle of such an anomaly.

**Senator Guingona.** How are the members of the examination board chosen? Are they chosen upon recommendation of the associations concerned of their respective profession?



**Senator Coseteng.** The accredited organization nominates the members, and these are submitted to the President for approval.

**Senator Guingona.** In many instances, there are two or three organizations such as in architecture and engineering. Would their respective bodies be allowed to recommend under the present system?

**Senator Coseteng.** In the case of architecture, the accredited organization is the United Architects of the Philippines, which is the UAP. It is the only accredited organization at the moment that nominates these members.

**Senator Guingona.** Who gives the accreditation?

**Senator Coseteng.** The PRC, Mr. President.

**Senator Guingona.** Would this not be arbitrary?

**Senator Coseteng.** This has been a bone of contention. In fact, in the hearings, there have been very heated arguments for and against the issue of accreditation. This situation does not exist in other specialty boards. This conflict is more of a situation or a reality in the case of the architects.

This being the situation, we have asked them to get together and settle their differences themselves because in the other specialty boards, the accredited organization is sometimes the only one. In the case where there are many other organizations that are not accredited, they still recognize the accredited organization as the umbrella organization.

As a matter of fact, this representation has even brought up the idea to the Architecture Board and to the accredited organization, the UAP, for them to consider a situation where we can have an IBP-like situation (Integrated Bar of the Philippines) where the minute one becomes a licensed professional, then he automatically belongs to that organization. However, that is still open to debate, Mr. President.

**Senator Guingona.** That is like a company union.

**Senator Coseteng.** So far, I suppose that is the situation. It will be very difficult for this representation or the committee to just arbitrarily impose this situation on the professionals.

**Senator Guingona.** For example, in the school of medicine, how many members would be recommended by the Medical Association for appointment to the Regulatory Board?

**Senator Coseteng.** It nominates at least five for every vacancy.

**Senator Guingona.** How many will be chosen?

**Senator Coseteng.** For every vacancy, one.

**Senator Guingona.** Each Board has how many members?

**Senator Coseteng.** There are six members in the case of Medicine and five members in others.

**Senator Guingona.** So the six members would serve for how long?

**Senator Coseteng.** Each serves for a period of three years.

**Senator Guingona.** And they would all be recommended by the same association?

**Senator Coseteng.** The Philippine Medical Association.

**Senator Guingona.** Out of the six, how many would be recommended?

**Senator Coseteng.** For every vacancy, it would nominate five.

**Senator Guingona.** In the bill, the lady senator is considering giving broad powers to the Commission. But before I go into the broad powers, may I know if the foreign professionals will be allowed to come here and practice under the World Trade Organization Treaty? For example, can a doctor from the United States come and practice medicine here in the Philippines without going through the usual examination?

**Senator Coseteng.** At the moment, the provision under the GATT-WTO is not automatic. As a matter of fact, I think it is still under negotiation. There are, however, other instances where foreign professionals have in fact been practicing in the country. And this again has been brought up in almost all of our committee hearings precisely because the foreign professionals are able to skirt or to dodge the law prohibiting the practice here unless they are given a permit by the PRC and the Department of Labor.

If we ask the PRC, Mr. President—and I have asked this question several times as if I share the concern and, perhaps, the apprehension of the distinguished gentleman about what could happen—not a single foreign professional has actually been given a license to practice in the country. But if we go around the business areas, we will find that there are billboards for this or that particular architect or engineer, or engineering firm. They identify themselves as consultants.

So this is one of the problems that I hope the PRC will be able



to address the minute it is given a little more teeth in implementing the law. In fact, it has also made reports to law enforcement agents concerning this matter. We have also made representations with the Philippine National Police and the NBI, but so far these have not yielded concrete results, Mr. President.

**Senator Guingona.** That is the present status. But what I am asking is: Under the WTO Treaty that we have adhered to, can foreign professionals practice here in the Philippines without having to undergo an examination as required for Filipinos?

**Senator Coseteng.** At a later date, Mr. President, the mutual recognition arrangement would eventually be finalized and this can be a reciprocal situation. However, there are other details that have to be fleshed out. For example, the educational qualifications, licensing requirements, et cetera, will have to be fulfilled and technical standards will still have to be maintained. Precisely, we are now making these adjustments in the different professions so that our professionals would be at par with others, and that under the principle of reciprocity our professionals would also be given the same privilege, the license to practice in those countries after fulfilling these requirements.

**Senator Guingona.** So under the Treaty, it is not automatic?

**Senator Coseteng.** No, Mr. President.

**Senator Guingona.** There would still have to be rules and regulations. Is that a correct statement?

**Senator Coseteng.** Yes, Mr. President.

**Senator Guingona.** May we know the rules and regulations? Because that would be adding certain requirements, and we would like to know who would prescribe the rules and by what authority. If the trade treaty is not clear of itself, I do not know whether the Professional Regulation Commission could promulgate new rules requiring further qualifications for foreign professionals to practice here.

**Senator Coseteng.** There are international standards that have to be followed, Mr. President. It is not up to the PRC to determine what standards are to be set. I suppose in the discussions between the different countries that are involved, these international standards would prevail.

For example, in the case of marine officers, the IMO had set certain guidelines or criteria which have to be certified. If they meet these criteria, they will have to be certified, and in that situation they are eligible for hiring as crew members in oceangoing vessels.

So I believe that each of the 40 different specialty boards will now have to also do their homework and come up with standards that will make them up-to-date.

In line with this, Mr. President, we also have to solve the immediate problem of diplomas and certificates that are for sale, because, obviously, the public document today has lost some of its integrity. And if we would like to be competitive globally, this practice will have to be curbed so that each and every professional will certainly work hard for his license or for his diploma instead of going to Recto or Morayta to buy diploma for P200, as this is being the practice now.

So the PRC has been clamping down on this, Mr. President. I am very happy to report to the Chamber that the Chairman of the PRC has also been quite vigilant in policing these ranks.

Also, in line with the technical standards and the educational standards that are to be set by the international organizations, I would like to inform our honorable colleagues that the CHED has also been brought into the picture to ascertain that schools offering courses that lead to these degrees and eventually produce these professionals will upgrade their facilities.

In accountancy, for example, there are 400 schools of accountancy, and more than 100 of them have not produced a single accountant. This is really wasting tuition money of our citizens.

**Senator Guingona.** I would like to thank the distinguished lady senator for that. Who determines whether a profession becomes a profession?

**Senator Coseteng.** These are all determined by law, Mr. President. There are laws that cover each of these professions.

**Senator Guingona.** Is ballroom dancing a profession?

**Senator Coseteng.** Not that I know of, as a regulated profession. It is a profession.

**Senator Guingona.** It is an underground profession now.

**Senator Coseteng.** I suppose we can use other words to describe it, but it is not a regulated profession, Mr. President.

**Senator Guingona.** Is the Professional Regulation Commission thinking of making ballroom dancing a profession?

**Senator Coseteng.** It will depend on Congress, Mr. President. Because it is the law that determines whether a profession is to be regulated by the PRC or not.



I believe that all these professions that are regulated by the PRC have very clear educational criteria and technical standards that they have to adhere to, et cetera. I do not know if ballroom dancing qualifies under that.

**Senator Guingona.** Thank you, Mr. President. Is the distinguished lady Senator saying that the determination of a profession is to be decided upon by Congress only and not by the Professional Regulation Commission?

**Senator Coseteng.** The PRC officials certainly have a say on that, Mr. President. They attend all our hearings, and if they are going to object on valid grounds...

**Senator Guingona.** No, what I mean is, can they, on their own, decide whether an undertaking becomes a profession or does it have to pass through Congress?

**Senator Coseteng.** An association must necessarily be organized to govern the particular profession, Mr. President.

**Senator Guingona.** So it need not pass through Congress?

**Senator Coseteng.** We have to enact a law covering that particular profession if it has to be regulated by the PRC, Mr. President.

For example, in the case of landscape architecture, there is a bill pending on this, and it should be up, perhaps, for discussion on the floor pretty soon. That is one of the professions. The group of landscape architects have formed an organization. They have a particular curriculum where each and every one of them will have to finish. They have set a code of ethics. So, we deem it fit that the landscape architects should be one of the professions to be regulated by the PRC, Mr. President.

**Senator Guingona.** So the PRC cannot on its own declare an undertaking of a profession?

**Senator Coseteng.** No, Mr. President.

**Senator Guingona.** I see. How about the medical technology profession?

**Senator Coseteng.** It is a regulated profession, Mr. President.

**Senator Guingona.** How about radiology?

**Senator Coseteng.** Yes, Mr. President.

**Senator Guingona.** Have all of these undergone congressional approval?

**Senator Coseteng.** Yes, Mr. President.

**Senator Guingona.** Just to be clear before I leave the foreign professionals.

Let us take, for example, a doctor who is a foreign professional. He comes to the Philippines and wants to exercise his profession. Can he do so automatically invoking the World Trade Organization Treaty? He is a graduate of a good school abroad and has all the qualifications necessary in his country. He comes here and says, "We have an international treaty and I am coming here to exercise my profession." Can he do that without intervention from the PRC?

**Senator Coseteng.** The foreign professionals will have to apply, Mr. President. In this particular case, the reciprocity law applies and they will have to produce an authentic copy of the law allowing reciprocity.

**Senator Guingona.** So it is not automatic?

**Senator Coseteng.** No, Mr. President.

**Senator Guingona.** If there is no reciprocity, then they cannot practice?

**Senator Coseteng.** That is correct, but there is an exception, Mr. President. Except for medical missionaries, they are not to charge any fee. Their medical services are to be performed free of charge.

**Senator Guingona.** How about movie actors? Can movie actors come here and engage in movie production without the intervention of the PRC?

**Senator Coseteng.** Movie actors are not regulated, Mr. President. They do not fall under the PRC.

**Senator Guingona.** They just become presidents. *[Laughter]*

**Senator Coseteng.** Yes, Mr. President. There is no constitutional prohibition against actors becoming presidents.

**Senator Guingona.** I thank the lady senator for that answer, Mr. President.

**Senator Coseteng.** Sometimes they make better presidents, Mr. President. *[Laughter]*

**Senator Guingona.** In the past, there were leakages that took place in the examinations conducted by the PRC, particularly



in the medical board examination where almost all top examinees came from one college. Would that be a correct statement?

**Senator Coseteng.** That must have been the case of the Fatima College, Mr. President.

**Senator Guingona.** Yes. May we know what happened to this controversial case? Because the examinees almost got the same ratings.

**Senator Coseteng.** Right now, there are only three cases of students left. The case is still pending in the Supreme Court. The others had to retake the examination and they passed.

**Senator Guingona.** So the three are asking for a reconsideration. Is that correct?

**Senator Coseteng.** The case is now pending in the Supreme Court.

**Senator Guingona.** Does the sponsor mean that there is a protest against them?

**Senator Coseteng.** They would like to take their oath as professionals. However, the PRC is standing pat and is not allowing it, Mr. President.

**Senator Guingona.** May we know on what ground the PRC's objections are based upon?

**Senator Coseteng.** Mr. President, I believe it is because of the statistical improbability that they had attained such scores. The PRC seems to be holding its ground because it believes that there was dishonesty in that particular case.

*At 4:00 p.m., the President Pro Tempore relinquished the Chair to Sen. Juan M. Flavio.*

**Senator Guingona.** May we pause for a minute and acknowledge that there is a new president presiding.

**The Presiding Officer [Sen. Flavio].** In other words, the Minority has taken over. *[Laughter]* Please continue.

**Senator Guingona.** With that, thank you, Mr. President.

It is good that the PRC is standing pat on its ground to object because of statistical improbability, and I hope that the truth will come out in the end. The remedy of these leakages is in computerization. Would that be correct under this bill?

**Senator Coseteng.** Yes, Mr. President.

**Senator Guingona.** But computerization is also handled by men. Can the computerization not be computerized also for *dagdag-bawas* as in the case of Senators Biazon and Pimentel?

**Senator Coseteng.** According to the chairman, they have taken safety precautions every step of the way. The questions are—we can call it—raffled so that there is no clear set of questions that are disseminated or this information is not disseminated to any one person at any one time. As a matter of fact, even the examiners are not privy to the nature of these examinations.

**Senator Guingona.** What safeguards other than not knowing the questions.... Who would formulate the questions?

**Senator Coseteng.** The questions are formulated by the examiners, Mr. President. These are then deposited in a data bank, and these represent something like 2,000 test questions.

**Senator Guingona.** Who picks out the questions to be given on that particular examination?

**Senator Coseteng.** Through randomization, Mr. President. It is almost like lotto so that it is the computer that eventually picks out the test questions.

**Senator Guingona.** When the test questions are finally chosen, the same will be known to the examiners and their secretaries. Will they not?

**Senator Coseteng.** The questions are determined a few hours before the actual examination. They all gather in a small room. These where all these information remain confidential, Mr. President.

**Senator Guingona.** Will there be no way that the questions can be conveyed to outsiders?

**Senator Coseteng.** I doubt very much, Mr. President. Let us say that if there are a thousand examinees, the questions are given in less than two hours before the exams.

**Senator Guingona.** Two hours before the exam is good enough; but in two hours' time, if the questions are purchased at a very high degree considering that the argument of some is that, anyway, one can recover what he invested in the acquisition of questions as in the case of marine captains, officers, et cetera. Is there no other way out? Can we not insulate this further?

**Senator Coseteng.** Perhaps in the past, Mr. President. I think the PRC, especially under this administration, is quite certain that leakages are going to be impossible, unless someone can come up with a better idea of how to leak these questions out.



If at all, we trust the NBI, there are NBI agents inside and outside of the room. There are no windows in the room and there is no telephone. I do not know if they are allowed to carry cellular phones. There are no cellular phones either. What about the Morse code? There is no Morse code either.

**Senator Guingona.** I am glad to hear that those safety measures are being undertaken. The PRC has no jurisdiction over diploma mills, do they?

**Senator Coseteng.** No, Mr. President. It is the Commission on Higher Education. However, the PRC and our Committee on Civil Service and Government Reorganization have undertaken measures to ensure that pressure is placed on the shoulders of the CHED. In fact, last year, we were able to close down a number of schools—less than ten schools I believe were closed down. Several schools were given warnings, while others are now on probation. These schools stand to lose their licenses if they do not comply with the basic minimum requirements for equipment, faculty, training, upgrading, et cetera.

I would like to inform the Chamber that it is not without its own controversy; it is not without its own difficulties, but at least that was a step towards that direction because of the proliferation of schools that do not meet not just local standards, but even worse, international standards. Some of the so-called marine academies are just made of nipa huts and they can graduate hundreds of students. Other schools of accountancy have not produced any graduates that passed the licensure examinations. We have schools of education that have not produced even a single teacher, and it has become ridiculous, Mr. President.

Last year, something like 113,000 took the exam for teachers and only about 30,000 passed the exam. I think the CHED is now more vigilant because it knows that the PRC is breathing down its neck.

**Senator Guingona.** Yes, there are naval schools or merchant marine colleges like the one in Sta. Mesa which figured out in a controversy some years back. There was not only a heated debate but even some physical confrontations. Was this because of funding from abroad or grants from marine institutions abroad?

**Senator Coseteng.** The Lacson Foundation in Iloilo and a school in Cebu are recipients of foreign grants.

**Senator Guingona.** The one in Sta. Mesa that figured out in a physical healing I think of...

**Senator Coseteng.** Is that the Philippine Merchant Marine Academy, Mr. President?

**Senator Guingona.** Yes, something like that.

**Senator Coseteng.** It is no longer there. I believe it is in Zambales now. The PRC is not aware of the case in point, Mr. President.

**Senator Guingona.** So the jurisdiction of improving the quality of education belongs to CHED?

**Senator Coseteng.** That is correct, Mr. President.

**Senator Guingona.** And the role of the Philippine Regulation Commission is to point out the defects to monitor the performance of professionals, is that correct?

**Senator Coseteng.** To monitor the quality of graduates and to determine, through the actual test results, the performance or the fitness of these schools.

**Senator Guingona.** Are there many different grades of teachers?

**Senator Coseteng.** These are elementary and secondary only, Mr. President.

**Senator Guingona.** These are only elementary and secondary. In other words, there is only one examination for teachers?

**Senator Coseteng.** That is correct.

**Senator Guingona.** If one passes that examination then there is no need for further upgrading to principal, et cetera?

**Senator Coseteng.** To be able to teach in the secondary schools, the teachers must specialize on the subject. They must specialize in that particular subject that they would like to teach in the secondary school, Mr. President.

**Senator Guingona.** I am asking this because in many places in the country, there is a noted lack of qualified teachers and so they have temporary designations. Is that correct?

**Senator Coseteng.** That is correct.

**Senator Guingona.** By virtue of an examination?

**Senator Coseteng.** Mr. President, the problem of lack of teachers may be attributed to the fact that many teachers do not occupy teaching positions. What happens is, as we have observed in many cases, teachers are asked to do administrative work or nonteaching work. This is one of the reasons why there is lack of teachers. In other cases, teachers choose to go abroad because before the implementation of the Salary Standardization Law, the



salaries of teachers in government were very low. Today, salaries of teachers in government exceed that of the private schools.

The other issue that may be raised in connection with the lack of teachers is, some teachers do not want to go to far-flung areas because of the peace and order or difficult living conditions so that many of these schools have difficulty in attracting teachers to work in those areas.

**Senator Guingona.** So a temporary teacher who is duly designated cannot become a regular teacher just by the mere fact that he or she has been teaching for so many years?

**Senator Coseteng.** No, Mr. President. He or she must have at least passed the licensure examination for teachers.

**Senator Guingona.** Even in areas where there is a sharpened shortage of teachers?

**Senator Coseteng.** Yes, Mr. President, because there is really no permanency in the place where the teacher is assigned. He may be assigned in a particular school today and he may be reassigned in areas where conditions are not so harsh or not so severe.

In some situations, even nonteachers are asked to take on teaching jobs precisely because of this lack of teachers, Mr. President.

**Senator Guingona.** Yes, but the difference is, in the salary. The salary of a temporary teacher is much, much lower than that of a regular teacher.

**Senator Coseteng.** They have what we call parateachers, Mr. President. They are not regular teachers.

I think the Secretary of Education today has reviewed the regular plantilla positions in the Department of Education, Culture and Sports. It has been under the process of reorganization within the Department of Education, Culture and Sports, precisely, to address this need. With these moves of the DECS officials, this problem could be answered in the immediate term.

**Senator Guingona.** Thank you, Mr. President.

May we know how much the Professional Regulation Commission collects out of fees and charges at present?

**Senator Coseteng.** Mr. President, examination fees range from P400 to P600; registration fees range from P300 to P400; annual license fees range from P90 to P100; replacement fees range from P150 to P200; certification fees range from P50 to P60; docket fees range from P150 to P300; inspection fee is P1,000; and

accreditation fee is P2,000. From these fees and charges, the PRC was able to generate P205 million as of December 31, 1998.

**Senator Guingona.** Where do the funds go? Do these funds go to the general fund?

**Senator Coseteng.** Yes, Mr. President.

**Senator Guingona.** Under the proposed measure, would the Professional Regulation Commission receive a portion or the totality of the improved fees?

**Senator Coseteng.** Under the proposed measure, 75 percent of this fund would be left to the agency for its use, Mr. President.

**Senator Guingona.** The 75 percent. And it is estimated that this amount of P205 million will grow tremendously.

**Senator Coseteng.** That is correct, Mr. President.

**Senator Guingona.** What is the estimated amount that will be collected from these fees considering that there will be more professions, more regulated bodies, et cetera?

**Senator Coseteng.** The trend is to increase depending on the population, Mr. President. So far, the projection is, more or less, P320 million.

**Senator Guingona.** And 75 percent of that is a very substantial sum. First, we do not mind if the members of the Professional Regulation Commission are the present members, but there may be changes or there will be changes in the future.

Second, would this not violate the "one-fund concept" enshrined in our Constitution?

**Senator Coseteng.** A part of this fund will go to the decentralization effort of the PRC, Mr. President, because it is now going to decentralize and provide every region with a regional office. The purpose of this regionalization is to correct the present situation where persons in different regions have to go to city centers where the exams are held. In most cases, their licenses are issued in Manila.

The decentralization thrust will necessarily require more funds, Mr. President.

**Senator Guingona.** How much will go to the computerization program?

**Senator Coseteng.** This has not been determined yet. A presidential order has been released, I believe, two months ago,



identifying the National Computer Center as the agency that would be in a better position to determine how the computerization of each agency would go, Mr. President.

**Senator Guingona.** Can we have the benefit of a proposal from the Commission?

**Senator Coseteng.** Yes, Mr. President.

**Senator Guingona.** So that at the proper period, we can propose some changes.

**Senator Coseteng.** Yes, Mr. President.

**Senator Guingona.** May we know what additional powers are proposed under this measure to be given to the Commission?

**Senator Coseteng.** Previously, the Commission would just administer, implement and enforce the regulatory policies of the national government for regulation and licensing. This time, should this bill meet Congress' approval, it will prescribe, issue and promulgate the rules and regulations to govern the administration, implementation and enforcement of the regulatory policies of the government.

**Senator Guingona.** It will have the power of contempt.

**Senator Coseteng.** Yes, Mr. President, in administrative cases.

**Senator Guingona.** It will have the power to suspend.

**Senator Coseteng.** It is still recommendatory in that case.

**Senator Guingona.** It will have the power to impose fines.

**Senator Coseteng.** The fines to be imposed will have to be determined by the court.

**Senator Guingona.** So, it cannot impose fines.

**Senator Coseteng.** No, Mr. President.

**Senator Guingona.** How can it discipline the members of the regulatory body?

**Senator Coseteng.** It can actually suspend licenses or revoke licenses of the regular professionals, Mr. President.

**Senator Guingona.** It can suspend the licenses.

**Senator Coseteng.** Or revoke, Mr. President.

**Senator Guingona.** Subject to appeal, of course.

**Senator Coseteng.** Yes, Mr. President.

**Senator Guingona.** What other specific powers? Are those the only powers contemplated in this measure?

**Senator Coseteng.** Another feature of the measure pertains to the practice of any profession by a foreign national in the country. Foreign nationals who intend to practice in the country would have to be granted a license to practice by the PRC. They would have to apply to the PRC for a special permit.

**Senator Guingona.** In other words, the foreign professionals would still need a license from the Commission.

**Senator Coseteng.** Yes, Mr. President.

**Senator Guingona.** During the hearings, there was a complaint about the practice of some foreigners in the field of architecture. May we know what happened to that?

**Senator Coseteng.** For now, these foreigners are here as categorized under our other laws. Some of them are here as tourists; some of them come and are categorized as consultants; some of them follow the practice of having a Filipino understudy to legitimize their stay here. This is precisely what our professionals have been complaining about because it is a virtual circumvention of the existing laws.

**Senator Guingona.** Is consultancy not a profession?

**Senator Coseteng.** The profession of the person should be the licensed profession that he is engaged in. The word "consultancy" is a generic term. One can be a medical consultant, an architectural consultant, or an engineering consultant but as a professional, he is an engineer, an architect, or a doctor. These engineers, architects, or doctors, et cetera, should come to the PRC.

As a matter of fact, it is not confined to that. We have foreign teachers who are teaching in the country. By the statistics of the PRC, they have not issued a single license to practice to any foreigner. So we take that to mean that these teachers are teaching illegally in the country, Mr. President.

**Senator Guingona.** Does this rule apply to the ARMM region where foreign teachers teach foreign system of education?

**Senator Coseteng.** I would like to think that the ARMM falls under the sovereign region of the Philippines and it should be governed by these laws, Mr. President.



**Senator Guingona.** But what is the view of the Professional Regulation Commission? It seems that nothing has been done to stop the inflow of foreign teachers for our Muslim brothers.

**Senator Coseteng.** Yes, Mr. President. The PRC has, at best, tried to seek the help or the intervention of the NBI or the Philippine National Police. How successful that effort has been, we have to now get the statistics from the PNP and NBI. I have also personally endorsed many of these complaints, not just about foreign teachers or foreign professionals, practitioners in the country but also those who are not licensed, who have not passed the examinations, and are practicing as such under the guise of consultants or under the guise of maybe officers of certain companies or organizations.

**Senator Guingona.** I would like to thank the distinguished sponsor for the answers to our questions. Thank you, Mr. President.

**Senator Drilon.** Mr. President.

**The Presiding Officer [Sen. Flavio].** The Majority Leader is recognized.

**Senator Drilon.** Mr. President, may I ask that Sen. Renato L. Compañero Cayetano be recognized.

**The Presiding Officer [Sen. Flavio].** Sen. Renato L. Compañero Cayetano is recognized.

**Senator Cayetano.** Thank you, Mr. President. It is just a short note of the presence of the Presiding Officer in the rostrum. I know that the Presiding Officer came back from an official mission just to be able to preside in today's session of the Senate. I certainly appreciate it, and I hope that the Presiding Officer will not leave that office.

Will the distinguished sponsor clarify some questions?

**Senator Coseteng.** Yes, Mr. President.

**Senator Cayetano.** The PRC is responsible for almost 40 different professions. Aside from the professions that we are all very familiar with—engineering, medicine—what are the other unusual professions that probably we are not very much acquainted with which the PRC regulates?

**Senator Coseteng.** Accountancy, aeronautical engineering, agricultural engineering, architecture, chemical engineering, chemistry, civil engineering, criminology, customs brokers, dentistry, electrical engineering, electronics and communications engineering, environmental planning, foresters, geodetic engineering,

geology, interior design, librarians, marine deck officers, marine engineer officers, master plumbers, mechanical engineering, medical technology, medicine, metallurgical engineering, midwifery, mining engineering, naval architecture and marine engineering, nursing, nutrition and dietetics, optometry, pharmacy, physical and occupational therapy, professional teachers, radiologic technology, sanitary engineering, social workers, veterinary medicine, and the specialty board of landscape architecture, Mr. President.

**Senator Cayetano.** Thank you, Mr. President. Is the sponsor telling me, Mr. President, that with almost 40 different professions, the law, however, provides only for one commissioner and two deputy commissioners for PRC?

**Senator Coseteng.** Yes, Mr. President.

**Senator Cayetano.** Is it not rather humanly impossible to be able to regulate these 40 professions by three individuals no matter how competent and qualified these three individuals are?

**Senator Coseteng.** The proposal is to get assistant commissioners for the purpose.

**Senator Cayetano.** The point I am trying to make is, I am very familiar with the chairman and members of the Commission. But considering the number of regulatory boards under them, I am wondering if the distinguished sponsor will look into the distinct possibility of increasing the number of commissioners, perhaps from three to five or from three to seven, in view of the number of professions that are regulated by them without mentioning that as time passes by, there will probably be more professions that will be regulated by them like the barbers—I am not talking, of course, in the plural form like my colleague Senator Barbers—the *masahistas*, beauticians, professional drivers and pilots. Since we have master carpenter which we have already considered as a profession, time will come that these will also be considered as professions.

Will the distinguished sponsor be open to a suggestion that perhaps we ought to increase the number of commissioners?

**Senator Coseteng.** Yes, Mr. President.

**Senator Cayetano.** What is the exact relationship between the PRC and the regulatory boards, I mean, in terms of supervision and regulation of the regulatory boards?

For instance, we all know that there is a medical board now. That as an example, what is the power of the PRC over the medical board?

**Senator Coseteng.** The resolutions of the specialty boards are subject to approval by the PRC.



**Senator Cayetano.** How about the power of the medical board over doctors as well as those who are taking medicine? Are they also subject to review *vis-a-vis* the regulation being imposed by the medical boards?

**Senator Coseteng.** What the PRC exercises is supervision and control.

**Senator Cayetano.** Supervision and control of what, Mr. President?

**Senator Coseteng.** Of licensure examinations, the granting of licenses, and the conduct of examinations.

**Senator Cayetano.** How about the conduct of professionals themselves, who would be responsible for that? The conduct, let us say, of doctors.

**Senator Coseteng.** The complaints go to the regulatory board.

**Senator Cayetano.** To the medical board, in my example.

**Senator Coseteng.** Yes, Mr. President.

**Senator Cayetano.** The reason I am particularly interested there is, I discovered last week in a show that interns in some schools are allowed to examine some patients as well as to even diagnose their illness. These interns in some schools are called doctors. However, there are practices in some medical schools where interns are also authorized to examine and diagnose patients. But they could not be called doctors until after they have passed the internship.

Is the PRC familiar with this practice?

**Senator Coseteng.** The CHED should be the proper agency to exercise jurisdiction over cases such as these. The PRC does not cover interns because interns have not passed the board examinations and, thus, are not professionals at that point while they are interns in the hospitals. They are still students. So it should be the hospital administration whose attention should be called, or the Philippine Medical Association's attention should be called because it is the administration of the hospital that would allow or disallow this to happen.

**Senator Cayetano.** I can appreciate the reply especially since they have not received their license yet. But since the medical board allows this practice, should the PRC precisely, in regulating or controlling the powers of the different boards, not have a say on whether or not they should allow interns to examine and diagnose and, in fact, be called "doctors" without passing the board examinations?

**Senator Coseteng.** I cannot say for sure, I cannot guarantee that the Medical Board has approved this practice. It may be practiced in certain hospitals; it may be administrations of certain hospitals or individuals that allow this practice. So far many complaints have reached our office, but there is nothing of this nature.

If the gentleman can give the name of the hospital and perhaps even the administrator of the hospital, we can take up the issue with them. The PRC, as I mentioned, has no jurisdiction over this, unless a formal complaint is lodged in the Board concerned and that the Board elevates this to the PRC.

**Senator Pimentel.** Mr. President.

**The Presiding Officer** [Sen. Flavio]. Senator Aquilino Q. Pimentel Jr. is recognized.

**Senator Pimentel.** With the permission of the distinguished senators on the floor, I would like to raise a parliamentary inquiry at this point on that very issue that Senator Cayetano is raising.

Are graduates of medical schools not called "doctors" upon graduation, and are they not in effect entitled to use that honorific title, if at all—Doctor of Medicine?

**Senator Coseteng.** For regulatory purposes, Mr. President.

**Senator Pimentel.** My question is addressed to that Doctor only in the rostrum.

**Senator Cayetano.** I second the question, Mr. President.

**The Presiding Officer** [Sen. Flavio]. The word or the appellation of "doctor" is loosely applied. When one graduates from the four-year course, tradition already allows one to be called a doctor.

But the important issue is that when the intern begins to diagnose and treat, there is a qualification that he or she must be under the supervision of a regular doctor or a regular consultant. That is where the delineation is made.

**Senator Cayetano.** Thank you, Mr. President.

**Senator Coseteng.** As I mentioned earlier, I would appreciate the report or the input of Senator Cayetano regarding the particular hospital concerned, because it puts also at risk the patients that are treated by this particular hospital and their other patients. Then we can make the necessary representations with the medical board.



**Senator Cayetano.** In fact, Mr. President, there is already a case filed against this intern. This intern, unfortunately, is from my alma mater, UP-PGH. This was disclosed to us in a show last week where no less than the President of the PMA, Dr. Llamas, echoed the same statement made by the presiding officer that the intern should not have diagnosed without the assistance of or without the supervision of a licensed physician.

In fact, in this case, he has been accused of having written a prescription of medicine that turned out to be an incorrect one, resulting in the death of a child who suffered from dengue but was misdiagnosed as not suffering from that illness.

But the point I just want to bring out, Mr. President, is, among lawyers we could not be called an "attorney" until after we have passed the Bar.

So I was wondering, Mr. President, what is so special about the doctors who, after finishing four years and internship but without passing the examination, should be called doctors.

**Senator Coseteng.** I believe that the answer of the Presiding Officer, Senator Flavio, referred to "doctor" being used loosely and that the name "doctor" is more like a tradition. Noong magtapos sila sa medical school, ang tawag sa kanilang lahat ay "doktor." Pero hindi ibig sabihin na iyon ang legal title nila. It is only after they passed the board, the government licensure examination that they are regulated by the PRC. Before that, any criminal action that results in their illegal practice of medicine would be dealt with by the regular courts.

**Senator Cayetano.** Now, I am not trying to harp on this. But, Mr. President, when a medical student finishes his fourth year, he does not graduate until after he finishes his internship. Am I correct in this?

**Senator Coseteng.** Yes, Mr. President.

**Senator Cayetano.** But that internship itself, is that not really authorized by the medical board as part of the curriculum?

**Senator Coseteng.** Yes, that is part of the requirement for graduation, Mr. President.

**Senator Cayetano.** And the point is, if it is a requirement by the medical board and the medical board is under the supervision and regulation of the PRC, should the PRC not impose some kind of regulation?

**Senator Coseteng.** The internship period in the life of a student who wants to be a doctor is not considered the practice of his profession. It is part of the total learning process, part of the

education that will lead to a degree of Doctor of Medicine. After that, he has to take an exam, pass it, and that is the only time when he can be conferred the title "Doctor of Medicine."

**Senator Cayetano.** Thank you, Mr. President. Let me go to another subject—and this is a question that seeks an answer, if it were true. I understand that all those licensed by the PRC are required to take a validation exam every three years. Is that correct, Mr. President?

**Senator Coseteng.** It is called the continuing professional education, Mr. President.

**Senator Cayetano.** Yes, but are their licenses renewed once every three years?

**Senator Coseteng.** Yes, Mr. President.

**Senator Cayetano.** It is renewed?

**Senator Coseteng.** Yes, Mr. President.

**Senator Cayetano.** The reason is, it is quite an interesting provision that really, shall we say, tests once every three years the ability, competence and qualifications of the professional. Certainly, I think that is a good law.

But my question is: Has the PRC, in its existence since 1973, ever cancelled a license of a professional simply because this professional has flunked the validation examination?

**Senator Coseteng.** Just to make things clear, Mr. President. There is no exam that is given after every three years as a precondition for the renewal of a license. It is called a continuing professional education, and that refers to seminars, conventions, additional training for that particular field of specialization, et cetera, but there is no exam given.

**Senator Cayetano.** There is no exam?

**Senator Coseteng.** None, Mr. President.

**Senator Cayetano.** The distinguished lady Senator means it is like a seminar and after having attended it, one's license will be renewed?

**Senator Coseteng.** That is an existing practice, Mr. President, although that is not found in the new law. That is the condition today. However, that is not in the new law anymore.

**Senator Cayetano.** I notice that. Has the amendment taken out that requirement?



**Senator Coseteng.** Mr. President, the issue of continuing professional education has been debated and the committee has found it rather unfair for a professional to be stripped of his license simply because he did not attend a seminar or two.

Also in such cases, Mr. President, we have noticed that if a seminar, for example, for a particular field of specialization is being conducted, the participants register on registration day, then take off for the beach or go to the movies somewhere else and then come back to get their certificates.

We have observed that these seminars are really no guarantee that the particular professional has learned something. However, there are those who do not attend those particular seminars but diligently review or go through the journals that are issued to them by that particular field of specialization and, on their own, undertake or make an effort to learn. So that we have now left that open to the different boards. Should they decide to give refresher seminars, then that would be for the improvement of that particular profession, Mr. President.

**Senator Cayetano.** Mr. President, I spoke too soon. I already commended the PRC for having such a program, and now I understand that the amended portion of this bill has taken it away.

The reason I ask this question is, no less than the Chief Justice, aware precisely of the practice by the PRC of giving some kind of validation exam, is seriously considering the forming of a committee to also acquaint lawyers on the development of law in order to be able to competently handle their professional responsibilities. In that case, they are thinking of possibly having the PRC law as a model. But now, I understand that this has been taken out.

I hope the sponsor will certainly look again and review this and probably restore it.

## SUSPENSION OF SESSION

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

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

*It was 4:47 p.m.*

## RESUMPTION OF SESSION

*At 4:55 p.m., the session was resumed.*

**The Presiding Officer [Sen. Flavie].** The session is resumed. The Majority Leader is recognized.

## SUSPENSION OF CONSIDERATION OF S. NO. 1271

**Senator Drilon.** Mr. President, there are a few matters which need to be clarified. Therefore, Senator Cayetano has requested that his interpellation be suspended in the meantime.

So I move that we suspend consideration of Senate Bill No. 1271.

**The Presiding Officer [Sen. Flavie].** 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 three o'clock tomorrow afternoon.

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

*It was 4:56 p.m.*