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No. 5

CALL TO ORDER

At 4:00 p.m., Deputy Speaker Pablo P. Garcia called the session to order.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Garcia, P.). The session is called to order.

NATIONAL ANTHEM

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Garcia, P.). Everybody is requested to rise for the singing of the Philippine National Anthem.

Everybody rose to sing the Philippine National Anthem.

PRAYER

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Garcia, P.). Please remain standing for a minute of silent prayer or meditation.

Everybody remained standing for the silent prayer.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Garcia, P.). The Members may take their seats.

The Dep. Majority Leader is recognized.

REP. ANGARA. Mr. Speaker, before we suspend the session, with the indulgence of the Members, may we recognize some guests in the gallery. We have here students and teachers from the Learning Path School. They are guests of the Hon. Rodolfo "Ompong" Plaza.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Garcia, P.). The guests of the Hon. Plaza will please rise. *(Applause)* Welcome to the House and the House is pleased for the guests' visit.

REP. ANGARA. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

May we also recognize the guests of the Hon. Cesar Jalosjos. They are officers of the SK or the Sangguniang Kabataan National Executive Board. I move for their recognition, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Garcia, P.). The guests of the Hon. Cesar Jalosjos will please rise. Welcome to the House.

SUSPENSION OF SESSION

REP. ANGARA. Mr. Speaker, I move that we suspend the session for a few minutes.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Garcia, P.). The session is suspended.

It was 4:03 p.m.

RESUMPTION OF SESSION

At 4:57 p.m., the session was resumed with Speaker Prospero C. Nograles presiding.

THE SPEAKER. The session is resumed. The Majority Leader is recognized.

REP. DEFENSOR (A.). Mr. Speaker, I move that we defer the calling of the roll.

THE SPEAKER. Is there any objection? *(Silence)* The Chair hears none; the roll call is deferred.

REP. DEFENSOR (A.). Mr. Speaker, pursuant to NBC Resolution No. 09-015, dated July 28, 2009, implementing the decision of the Supreme Court in G.R. Nos. 179271 and 179295, dated April 24, 2009, I move that we allow Hon. Acmad M. Tomawis, Representative from the Party-List ALIF, our recently proclaimed colleague, to take his oath in open session.

THE SPEAKER. Is there any objection? *(Silence)* The Chair hears none; the motion is approved.

The Secretary General is hereby directed to read the name of the Representative of the Party-List ALIF who will take his oath of office in the rostrum.

THE SECRETARY GENERAL. May we call on the Hon. Acmad M. Tomawis, representing the Party-List ALIF, to proceed to the Speaker's rostrum.

THE SPEAKER. May we also request the relatives of our new colleague, Congressman Tomawis, to join the Party-List Representative and to witness the oath-taking. The Secretary General is requested to escort the members of the family of our new colleague.

Rep. Acmad M. Tomawis ascended the rostrum with the members of his family and took his oath of office as Representative of the Party-List ALIF in the House of Representatives before the Speaker, the Hon. Prospero C. Nograles.

THE SPEAKER. Before we administer the oath, we would like to request our colleagues in the plenary and all

the guests in the gallery to please rise as we administer the oath of office of our new Member of this Chamber.

OATH-TAKING

THE SPEAKER. Please raise your right hand and repeat after me.

I, ACMAD M. TOMAWIS, having been elected to the position of Representative of Party-List ALIF, hereby solemnly swear that I will well and faithfully discharge to the best of my ability the duties of my present position and of all others I may hereafter hold under the Republic of the Philippines; that I will support and defend the Constitution of the Philippines; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; and that I will obey the laws, legal orders, and decrees promulgated by the duly constituted authorities of the Republic of the Philippines; and that I impose this obligation upon myself voluntarily, without mental reservation or purpose of evasion.

So help me God.

THE SPEAKER. Congratulations! (*Applause*)

SUSPENSION OF SESSION

THE SPEAKER. We will now suspend the session to allow our distinguished colleagues to congratulate our “balikbayan,” Honorable Tomawis. (*Applause*)

The session is suspended.

It was 5:03 p.m.

RESUMPTION OF SESSION

At 5:06 p.m., the session was resumed with Deputy Speaker Pablo P. Garcia presiding.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Garcia, P.). The session is resumed.

The Dep. Majority Leader is recognized.

REP. ANGARA. Mr. Speaker, I move that we defer the approval of the Journal and the Reference of Business.

I so move.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Garcia, P.). Is there any objection? (*Silence*) The Chair hears none; the motion is approved.

REP. ANGARA. Mr. Speaker, before we begin the Privilege Hour, with the indulgence of the Members, may we recognize some guests in the gallery. From the municipality of Las Nieves, province of Agusan del Norte, we have the guests of Congressman Jose Aquino II and Congressman Edelmiro Amante. They are Mr. Alfonso Yong, Mr. Inecito Siega, SB members Rosita Casido, Melchor Pasquito, Armando Pedrosa, Melchisedec Balacuit and Delio Rañin.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Garcia, P.). The guests of Congressman Edelmiro Amante and Congressman Joel Aquino will please rise. Welcome to the House. (*Applause*)

REP. ANGARA. Mr. Speaker, we move to recognize the guests of the Hon. Trinidad “Ebbie” Apostol and the Hon. Florencio “Bem” Noel and Hon. Neil Benedict Montejo, both of An Waray Party-List. They are officials of the local government unit of Mayorga, Leyte, headed by Mayor Valente Adolfo, and 16 barangay captains of the municipality of Mayorga.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Garcia, P.). The guests of the Hon. Apostol, Hon. Noel and Hon. Montejo will please rise.

Welcome to the House and we are pleased by your visit. (*Applause*)

REP. ANGARA. Mr. Speaker, I move that we recognize the guests of the Hon. Cajes of Bohol, his daughter and President of the National Federation of the Sangguniang Kabataan, Miss Jane Sinsorya-Cajes, as well as members of the national executive board of the Sangguniang Kabataan.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Garcia, P.). The guests of Congressman Cajes will please rise. (*Applause*) There you are. Welcome to the House.

REP. ANGARA. Mr. Speaker, with them is Ms. Marinel Formentera, SK President of Parañaque who is a guest of the honorable Sr. Dep. Minority Leader, Roilo Golez. I move for her recognition as well.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Garcia, P.). Will the guest of honorable Sr. Dep. Minority Leader Roilo Golez please rise to be acknowledged.

Welcome to the House. (*Applause*)

REP. ANGARA. And lastly, Mr. Speaker, may we recognize the guests of Deputy Speaker Datumanong of Maguindanao. They are the members of the Regional Assembly of the ARMM: the Hon. Assemblyman Abdel Anni, Hon. Assemblyman Benshar Estino, Hon. Assemblyman Ziaur-Rahman Adiong...

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Garcia, P.). Will the guests of the Honorable Deputy Speaker Datumanong please rise to be acknowledged. (*Applause*)

REP. ANGARA. ...Hon. Assemblyman Alexander B.M. Menor, Hon. Assemblyman Cahar Ibay, Hon. Assemblyman Abdulradzak D. Tomawis, Hon. Assemblyman Datu Khadafeh G. Mangudadatu and members of the ARMM Regional Assembly staff, Aladdin M. Ambia, Suharto Abas and a former colleague, Mr. Mario “Mayong” Aguja.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Garcia, P.). Welcome to the House and thank you for your visit. (*Applause*)

REP. ANGARA. Mr. Speaker, today, being a Monday, I move that we declare open the Privilege Hour.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Garcia, P.). Is there any objection? (*Silence*) The Chair hears none; the motion is approved.

The Chair declares a Privilege Hour.

REP. ANGARA. Mr. Speaker, the first to avail of the Privilege Hour is the Gentleman from the Lone District of Agusan del Sur, the Hon. Plaza.

I move for his recognition.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Garcia, P.). The Hon. Plaza is recognized.

PRIVILEGE SPEECH OF REP. PLAZA

REP. PLAZA. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on a question of personal and collective privilege. This is with regard to House Resolution No. 41.

Mr. Speaker, my colleagues, ladies and gentlemen: In life, she restored the freedom of democracy; in death, she restored the dignity of the Filipino.

Corazon Cojuangco Aquino, a woman of exceptional grace and nobility, offered her life for the nation, from the declaration of Martial Law to the imprisonment of her husband, Ninoy, and from his assassination to her ascent to the presidency, until the last painful days of her earthly life.

She believed that freedom, justice and democracy can be attained even by the example of one's own life and that we are worth dying for.

And when her life was not enough, she offered her last days of pain for the redemption of our people. So that by her leadership, her sacrifices, and her agony, we may learn to internalize the ideal that she embodies, love of God, and of one another.

No greater act of heroism could there have been than that by which the totality of both her public and private days were dedicated for a cause greater than herself, the cause of a people she once liberated from dictatorship.

Truly, Corazon Cojuangco Aquino deserves to be proclaimed the hero of our present time.

She was a recipient of the Eleanor Roosevelt Human Rights Award, the Martin Luther King Jr. Non-Violent Peace Prize, the International Leadership Living Legend Award from the Women's International Center, some 23 Honoris Causa Degree conferments from prestigious foreign schools, among other recognitions bestowed upon her. All these served notice to the world of the presence and potential of the Filipino.

In 2006, came a distinction that I believe should awaken us as Filipinos. She was listed by the *Time Magazine* as one of Asia's heroes for helping chart the course and shape the times during the most difficult decades in Asia. She was in excellent company, noteworthy of which was Mahatma Gandhi, an extraordinary and deeply spiritual leader of the world's first successful non-violent movement for independence from colonial rule, and Jawaharlal Nehru, Gandhi's passionate partner in building a democratic India; in the mold of anti-apartheid activists that the first South African President elected in a fully representative democratic election, Nelson Mandela, Corazon Aquino thus belongs. If Mandela helped to stamped out the policy of racial segregation and led the transition towards multi-racial democracy, in this country, Corazon Aquino was the fuse that ignited public fervor in dismantling authoritarian rule ending years of repression and violence and restoring democracy in the Philippines. There may have been others in different battlefields for independence and democracy all throughout the world whose accomplishments may be likened to what

Corazon Cojuangco Aquino had fought for. But what distinguished her from the rest is that, even in the face of death, she continued to be in the frontlines to protect and sustain our gains at EDSA and help us understand that we can be a great nation again if only each one of us will together pick the broken pieces of our country, rebuild our foundations and institutions and love one another.

It is understandable for those who stood by her to give tribute to her many exceptional traits. But coming from this Representation, as one of those who vigorously campaigned for the late Ferdinand Marcos in the snap elections of 1986, the highest tribute I now bestow on President Cojuangco Aquino can only come from the sincerity and seriousness of my intent to recognize and name her as a truly outstanding Filipino, deserving the nation's honor, respect and adulation.

For what is a hero, except someone who offers oneself for the redemption of the people. And that is exactly what she did. Mythologically, she slew the dragon that was threatening our lives. But when that dragon was slain, the tentacles began to spawn into the mutations that erode our lives today: greed, deceit, corruption, injustice, poverty and despair.

It will take another lifetime, perhaps even more, to have another Corazon Cojuangco Aquino again. And so, before our time is up, on behalf of a grateful people, I urge you, my colleagues in this Chamber, to join me in proclaiming Corazon Cojuangco Aquino as a national hero as contained in House Joint Resolution No. 41.

Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleagues, it is not enough that we recognize the qualities of heroism in others. It is equally as important to recognize the hero that is within each and every one of us.

The life and death of Corazon Cojuangco Aquino, while given importance by an admiring nation, can have greater value and significance by internalizing the virtues and the values by which she lived. Only then can the path to heroism be relevant and beneficial to all.

When we face the electorate in the national elections of 2010, do we face our people as leaders or as heroes?

May the life and times of the hero we proclaim today be our guide and inspiration.

Distinguished colleagues, again I invite you to join me as coauthor of this joint resolution. It may be noteworthy that no less than the Honorable Speaker Nograles and Deputy Speaker Raul del Mar have already signed as coauthors of this joint resolution and I would sincerely appreciate if you will and we will act as one collective body in approving this resolution.

May the life and times of the hero we proclaim today be our guide and inspiration.

Thank you and Mabuhay ang Pilipinas!

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

REP. ANTONINO. Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Garcia, P.). The Dep. Majority Leader is recognized.

REP. ANGARA. Mr. Speaker, may we recognize the honorable Gentleman from Nueva Ecija, the Hon. Antonino, for an interpellation.

REP. ANTONINO. Mr. Speaker, I was wondering if my esteemed colleague would be open to some clarificatory questions.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Garcia, P.). He may if he so desires.

REP. PLAZA. Certainly, Mr. Speaker, I would be more than willing to be interpellated.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Garcia, P.). Well, the Gentleman may proceed.

REP. ANTONINO. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I would like to commend my esteemed colleague, Mr. Speaker, in his proposal for a joint resolution in which our beloved past President Cory Aquino would be proclaimed a national hero. However, I just have one question, Mr. Speaker.

While I am cognizant of the contributions of our ex-President to the reestablishment of our democracy in our country, I would like to know, Mr. Speaker, what he would do about Ninoy Aquino because I believe that Ninoy Aquino played as great a role as Mrs. Aquino did in as far as the reestablishment of democracy in our country was concerned. So, may I please get a response, Mr. Speaker, as to what we would do about the Hon. Ninoy Aquino who gave his life for our country?

REP. PLAZA. Yes, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, Senator Ninoy Aquino, likewise, is considered a national hero, except that there was no Act in Congress to proclaim him as a national hero. To my mind, Mr. Speaker, that is totally a separate issue altogether. Maybe we can, or if somebody will file a bill or a joint resolution to proclaim Ninoy as a national hero. At that time when democracy was restored, I was still young and I did not have the chance to serve as a Member of Congress, so proper recommendations and resolutions could have also been passed or filed. But nonetheless, setting aside the inside joke, Mr. Speaker, to my mind, the mere fact that Cory Aquino restored democracy—while it is true that Ninoy was the spark of that movement which grew and turned over the tide—nonetheless, it was Cory Aquino who finished the fight of Ninoy.

REP. ANTONINO. Yes, Mr. Speaker, I fully agree. But I do disagree with the fact that Ninoy Aquino was the spark—he was the birth of the movement. As my esteemed colleague admits, perhaps he was still very young then, but my father, the late Senator Gaudencio Antonino, was a colleague of Senator Aquino. Although he died at a very early age in 1967, I was witness to many of the actions of Senator Aquino, especially at the time before martial law and during martial law. And so, I think the Senator played a very big role in as far as the movement to restore democracy in our country was concerned.

I only point this out, Mr. Speaker, because I think we should give honor to those who, indeed, have contributed. And although the death of President Cory Aquino is a recent event which has triggered this move which I repeat, I agree with, however, I am saddened by the fact that as far as Ninoy Aquino is concerned, all we have achieved for him is to rename our international airport in his name. So, if my

honorable colleague would agree, I suggest that perhaps, in this joint resolution, we should include Senator Ninoy Aquino—together with his wife, Corazon Aquino—to be jointly proclaimed national heroes of our country. Then, I think, we give justice to both of them who have equally contributed to the achievements and the freedoms that we enjoy today.

So, with that, Mr. Speaker, I end my interpellation only with the suggestion that if, indeed, the good Senator, late Senator Ninoy Aquino, were to be included in the resolution, I would certainly be willing to also be a cosponsor of that resolution.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

REP. PLAZA. Mr. Speaker, from my understanding, this resolution will be referred to the Committee on Basic Education. Perhaps if there will be some amendments, then that would be, to my mind, the proper forum and venue where we can make some amendments to suit our suggestions. But certainly, I have no disagreement with your proposal personally. Yes, it is true that Ninoy was the one in the forefront in fighting for the restoration of democracy, but Cory nonetheless finished the fight. Just like in all other battles, Mr. Speaker, in all other struggles, somebody will have to sacrifice, and many of them have already indeed sacrificed their lives in the frontline. Cory, to my mind, symbolizes or has become the epitome of the return of democracy to our country. But nonetheless, Mr. Speaker, I have no disagreement with the proposed amendments of my distinguished colleague, Congressman Antonino.

REP. ANTONINO. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for that comment. And perhaps as a solution to this, I will file a joint resolution also for the late Senator Ninoy Aquino. So, perhaps, both resolutions can be heard in the committee to which this will be referred. That way, I think we can give recognition to those who I believe need to be recognized. As far as Bangko Sentral is concerned, they are considering putting them both jointly in the P500 bill. They will not create a new P500 bill, but what they will do is, instead of dropping Ninoy and just putting her image on the bill, they will be putting their images together. And since they are husband and wife, it would be fitting that, perhaps, we can work together in one resolution that would recognize both of them as national heroes of our country.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Garcia, P.). The Dep. Majority Leader is recognized.

REP. ANGARA. Mr. Speaker, there being no other Member who wishes to interpellate the Hon. Plaza, I move that we refer his speech and the interpellation to the appropriate committee.

REP. PLAZA. Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Garcia, P.). Yes.

REP. PLAZA. In fact, there is another resolution, Resolution No. 42, which was filed by Congresswoman Chato on the matter of proclaiming, I understand, Mrs. Aquino as a

national hero. I think, rather than filing another resolution coming from the Gentleman of Nueva Ecija, like what I said, I have no objection if this will be incorporated in the joint resolution. So, I do not know if this is the proper venue as this is not the period of amendments, but nonetheless, like what I said, I have no objection if his proposal to include Ninoy as a national hero will be incorporated into Joint Resolution No. 41.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Garcia, P.). The Dep. Majority Leader is recognized.

REP. ANGARA. Mr. Speaker, I reiterate the earlier motion to refer the speech and the interpellation to the appropriate committee.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Garcia, P.). Is there any objection? (*Silence*) The Chair hears none; the motion is approved.

The Dep. Majority Leader may proceed.

REP. ANGARA. Mr. Speaker, the next Member to avail of the Privilege Hour is the Lady from the Lone District of Camarines Norte, the Hon. Vinzons-Chato. I move that she be recognized, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Garcia, P.). The Hon. Vinzons-Chato is recognized.

PRIVILEGE SPEECH OF REP. VINZONS-CHATO

REP. VINZONS-CHATO. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise on a matter of personal and collective privilege to bring to the attention of this august Body a surprising discovery that no law, executive order or proclamation has ever been enacted or issued officially proclaiming any Filipino historical figure as a national hero. In other words, we do not have any guidelines and procedure in recognizing and declaring our national heroes.

In the light of the death of former President Corazon C. Aquino, I filed last August 3, 2009 Joint Resolution No. 42, which seeks to declare her as one of our national heroes. In pursuing this, I discovered that the heroes which we extol as our national heroes were not declared as such by any branch of government or any of its agencies and instrumentalities. At most, they have only declared holidays to commemorate them. And from this practice, we have considered those to have national holidays declared for them as national heroes.

Even our premier national hero, Jose P. Rizal, considered as among the Filipino heroes, was not explicitly claimed as a national hero. He was "canonized" as a national hero by Emilio Aguinaldo's act of merely decreeing our first national holiday, December 30, as Rizal Day.

Aside from Rizal, the only other heroes given implied recognition as national heroes are Andres Bonifacio (by Act No. 2946, enacted by the Philippine Legislature on February 16, 1921 declaring his date of birth on November 30 as a national holiday) and Benigno "Ninoy" Aquino (by Republic Act 9256, enacted by this Body on February 25, 2004 declaring his day of death on August 21 as a national holiday).

In fact, the closest that we have ever had to having an official list of national heroes was when a National Heroes Committee was formed by then President Fidel V. Ramos on March 28, 1993 through Executive Order No. 75. The said National Heroes Committee developed a definition and criteria for national heroes. These criteria are:

1. Heroes are those who have a concept of nation and thereafter aspire and struggle for the nation's freedom.
2. Heroes are those who define and contribute to a system or life of freedom and order for a nation.
3. Heroes are those who contribute to the quality of life and destiny of a nation.
4. A hero is part of the people's expression. But the process of a people's internalization of a hero's life and works takes time, with the youth forming a part of the internalization.
5. A hero thinks of the future, especially the future generations.
6. The choice of a hero involves not only the recounting of an episode or events in history, but of the entire process that made this particular person a hero.

Based on these criteria, on November 15, 1995 the technical committee, after deliberation and careful study, selected only nine Filipino historical figures to be recommended as national heroes, and these are the following:

1. Jose Rizal
2. Andres Bonifacio
3. Emilio Aguinaldo
4. Apolinario Mabini
5. Marcelo H. del Pilar
6. Sultan Dipatuan Kudarat
7. Juan Luna
8. Melchora Aquino
9. Gabriela Silang

Sadly though, since the submission of the report and recommendation by the said National Heroes Committee to then Secretary Ricardo T. Gloria of the Department of Education, Culture and Sports on November 22, 1995, no action has ever been taken. Even President Fidel V. Ramos did not proclaim any of these nine as national heroes, or all of the nine as national heroes.

Trying to get to the bottom of it, I found out that the National Historical Institute does not have the power to decide and screen those who should be national heroes. It merely has the power to declare historical sites and monuments and to study and promote Philippine history. At most, the National Historical Institute, as well as the National Heroes Committee, referred to us the criteria for considering national heroes, which was actually adopted from the set already developed by the now-defunct National Heroes Committee.

As a people, we should now ask, "To whom does the power to declare historical figures as national heroes reside?" My position is that this power resides in this august Body, absent any law delegating such power to another body, agency or instrumentality. Since the power of the Legislative Branch is plenary, this necessarily includes the determination and official declaration of the country's national heroes. Even in the United States, from which we patterned our Constitution and most of our laws, it is their Congress that declares their national heroes. The latest congressional declaration of a U.S. national hero is that of Martin Luther King, Jr., who initially was just given a national holiday and, subsequently, through congressional action, was declared a national hero.

But then again, many historians and academicians would argue against this. Heroes, for them, should not be legislated. Augusto Viana, in his article on August 25, 2002, entitled: "In Search of National Heroes," said that their appreciation should be better left to academics and acclamation should naturally come from the people themselves through time. They think that the declaration of national heroes should not be subject to politics and political whims.

I agree that the determination of our national heroes should, as much as possible, be insulated from politics. This is the very reason why we, as a Body, elected by the people to be their Representatives, should not allow such power to be exercised by the Executive Branch. If the recent brouhaha in the selection and declaration of national artists would be any indication, the Executive Branch could not be trusted to act apolitically in the declaration of national heroes. With the pending Joint Resolution No. 42, which I filed, if the President would be tasked to decide on the matter, I highly doubt that she would be able to proclaim a person who was politically against her as a national hero. It is like vindicating everything that her political rival stood for. Since historians would rather let the people decide who their heroes should be, and since each of us here were elected as their Representatives, our imprimatur is also consequently that of the people whom we represent. However, I must admit that historically, as a Body, we sometimes act according to the political weather.

Thus, while I suggest that we retain the power to declare our national heroes, the task of studying, determining and recommending those who have met the criteria should be with the historians and academicians. In my mind, the National Historical Institute, together with our historians and academicians, are best qualified to do so. To further ensure that this process is not influenced by those in power, I suggest that this honor and recognition be given only to dead persons, just like the process of beatification or sainthood. There should be no heroes while they are alive.

Joint Resolution No. 44, which I filed today, declares Ninoy Aquino as national hero. I also filed Joint Resolution No. 43 now, number 43, adopting the recommendation of the National Heroes Committee to declare the nine historical figures I mentioned earlier as national heroes with Jose P. Rizal, being declared as the premiere national hero. This is the perfect timing for an official declaration of these people as our national heroes since the Ninoy Aquino Day and National Heroes Day are just around the corner. I ask this August chamber to support these joint resolutions. For future declarations of national heroes, however, I shall file a bill which would formalize the study, screening and declaration of historical figures to be included in our list of national heroes.

I find it appalling that Congress has granted recognition to certain alien individuals by granting them citizenship through congressional action but have not formally recognized any of our nationals as heroes through a congressional act.

In this time and age when we as a people are in turmoil over our leaders' and our nation's future, remembering our national heroes' lives and sacrifices should awaken our consciousness, again to the greatness of our nation and our people. Why should we then not give recognition to those Filipinos who have sacrificed their lives for our country and have become icons of freedom and democracy by declaring

them as national heroes through congressional action? This is not so much for the persons we recognize as heroes, who are already dead by the way and can no longer appreciate the honor we give them, but for us, the living. We need our heroes to emulate and to follow in our continuing struggle as a nation against those conditions like tyranny, corruption, abuse of power and similar conditions that undermine our freedom and democracy.

I therefore urge all of you my dear colleagues to affirm and affix your signature to these resolutions I filed for the declaration as national heroes of former President Corazon C. Aquino, former Senator Benigno "Ninoy" Aquino and the nine other Filipinos that I have proposed in my other joint resolution. These resolutions are numbered 42, 43 and 44.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I move that this matter be referred to the proper committee.

Thank you and mabuhay to all of us!

REP. ESCUDERO. Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Garcia, P.). The Hon. Escudero is recognized.

REP. ESCUDERO. Just a very short manifestation, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Garcia, P.). Please proceed.

REP. ESCUDERO. Anent the speech of my kababayan, the Lady from Camarines Norte, may I make the observation that heroes are made in the hearts and minds of people. Senator Aquino is a hero to many Filipinos, similarly with Mrs. Corazon C. Aquino, Ferdinand Marcos, Sultan Kudarat and many more. For the record, Jose P. Rizal, the person considered as a national hero, was never ordained as a national hero even by the governor-general then. The order of the governor-general then was to simply to make a monument on the spot where Jose Rizal was shot. Let us pity the Filipino people if we legislate heroes. There are only 365 days in a year. We will reach the point where everyday is a holiday because we will be having more national heroes than the 365 days. Let us keep it that way. The personalities mentioned are already heroes in our hearts and minds. That is genuine acknowledgment of a genuine national hero.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Garcia, P.). The manifestation of the Hon. Escudero is noted.

REP. VINZONS-CHATO. May I be allowed to comment on that manifestation.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Garcia, P.). Please proceed.

REP. VINZONS-CHATO. Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Garcia, P.). Yes.

REP. VINZONS-CHATO. I find it correct to say that heroes live in the hearts of the Filipino people and there is

truth to that. However, I did not propose that we declare a holiday specifically for every hero that we recognize because if we are even recognizing national artists, we are giving awards to, as I mentioned already, aliens, who, because of the work that they have done for the Filipinos, are recognized by a declaration of citizenship through a congressional act, I do not see why we cannot name our national heroes. I still believe that Congress should legislate and name our national heroes and include them in one national heroes day. We do not have to legislate a national day of celebration for each national hero that we proclaimed or declared in this Congress.

REP. LAGMAN. Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Garcia, P.). The manifestation of the Hon. Vinzons-Chatto is noted.

REP. LAGMAN. Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Garcia, P.). The Hon. Edcel Lagman is recognized.

REP. LAGMAN. Will the distinguished Lady yield to very few questions, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Garcia, P.). She may, if she so desires.

REP. VINZONS-CHATTO. Yes, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Garcia, P.). Please proceed Hon. Lagman.

REP. LAGMAN. Distinguished Lady from Camarines Norte, is the proposition correct from the distinguished Lady that a declaration of national heroes should solely be the act of Congress?

REP. VINZONS-CHATTO. No, Mr. Speaker. In fact, there was a move by then Pres. Fidel V. Ramos to have a committee to declare national heroes, but I think that was absent any authority through a law that would grant a special body to declare such—to act accordingly in the declaration of national heroes. So, I am proposing that this august Body does not have to name each and every hero, but I am just proposing that we consider the three resolutions that I filed, House Joint Resolutions No. 42, 43, and 44. Subsequently, we should look at the establishment of a commission, a national heroes commission, that should look at this and be the one to come up with the selection of who should be national heroes.

REP. LAGMAN. In the declaration of the first knight and additional two national heroes, totaling 11 national heroes, is it the submission of the distinguished Lady that they should be insulated from the participation of the executive?

REP. VINZONS-CHATTO. No, Mr. Speaker, but I am saying that the executive cannot act without a congressional act specifically declaring a national hero or granting authority to the executive to come up with the list of these national heroes, which I believe should come back to Congress and get them declared as national heroes as well.

REP. LAGMAN. In other words, just to make it very clear. The declaration of the first 11 national heroes proposed by the distinguished Lady will be the joint declaration by the Congress of the Philippines and the President of the Republic.

REP. VINZONS-CHATTO. Yes.

REP. LAGMAN. Is that a correct interpretation?

REP. VINZONS-CHATTO. Yes, Mr. Speaker.

REP. LAGMAN. And that is truly correct because the vehicle in making the declaration of the first 11 is a joint resolution.

REP. VINZONS-CHATTO. Yes, Mr. speaker.

REP. LAGMAN. And all joint resolutions as contrasted to a simple or concurrent resolution, in order to be comparable to a law, should be acted upon favorably, both by Congress and by the President.

REP. VINZONS-CHATTO. That is correct, Mr. Speaker.

REP. LAGMAN. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Garcia, P.). The Dep. Majority Leader is recognized.

REP. ANGARA. Mr. Speaker, there being no other Member who wishes to interpellate, I move that we refer the speech and the interpellations of Hon. Vinzons-Chatto to the appropriate committee.

I so move, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Garcia, P.). Is there any objection? (*Silence*) The Chair hears none; the motion is approved.

REP. ANGARA. Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Garcia, P.). The Dep. Majority Leader is recognized.

REP. ANGARA. The next Member to avail himself of the Privilege Hour is the Gentleman from the Party-List Anakpawis, the Hon. Maglunsod.

I move for his recognition.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Garcia, P.). The Hon. Joel Maglunsod from Party-List Anakpawis is recognized.

PRIVILEGE SPEECH OF REP. MAGLUNSOD

REP. MAGLUNSOD. Thank you, Dep. Majority Leader. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I rise on a matter of personal and collective privilege upang ipahayag sa inyo ang aking mga saloobin kaugnay sa naging State of the Nation Address ni Pangulong Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo at ang aktwal na kalagayan ng mga masang anakpawis lalo na ang manggagawang Pilipino.

Ang sabi sa talumpati, "the economy remains resilient and strong" subalit iba ang nararanasan ng ating mga kababayan. Isang milyong trabaho kada taon o walong milyong bagong trabaho umano ang nalikha simula 2001. Pero sa ilalim din ng administrasyong ito, naitala ang pinakamataas na tantos ng kawalang trabaho o unemployment.

Noong 2004, umabot sa 11.4 porsiyento ang mga Pilipinong walang trabaho. Pinakamataas sa kasaysayan. Combined unemployment and underemployment increased by 2.5 million between January 2001 and April 2009 to 10.8 million.

Mr. Speaker, the Philippines' record-high unemployment is considered among the greatest failures of the Arroyo administration and is seen to even worsen because of the global economic crisis also affecting and damaging our domestic economy.

The International Labor Organization, in its recent International Labor Conference, has projected that unemployment is expected to continue rising at least until the end 2010, probably 2011. In 2008, global unemployment increased by 14 million and current trends point to ongoing severe deterioration of jobs. Current global forecasts point to persistent high unemployment and poverty.

Despite claims of economic success, job creation under the Arroyo administration since 2001 has been moderate and its policies have not been able to create enough jobs for Filipinos. The average real employment rate of over 11 percent since 2001 is the worst period of unemployment in the country's history. The persistence of high unemployment despite supposedly sustained economic growth is also unprecedented.

Mr. Speaker, ang 1.3 milyong trabahong nalikha umano noong 2008 ay mga trabahong walang kasiguruhan, part-time at mababa ang sahod. In April 2009, 540,000 of the jobs created were either unpaid family work, 394,000 or domestic household help 146,000. There are jobs that notoriously earn far below minimum wage.

There has also been a drastic 2.4 million increase in part-time work which at 14.3 million out of total employment of 35 million, now accounts for a massive 41 percent of jobs. The number of those in full-time work in turn fell by 925,000. This reflects how workers are facing greater work flexibilization arrangements alongside lower wages, salaries and benefits.

Marami pa ring kababayan natin ang wala o kulang ang trabaho. Dahil dito, marami ang nangingibang bayan na lamang upang humanap ng kabuhayan kahit sa mga lugar na lubhang mapanganib gaya ng Afghanistan. Simula 2001, halos isang milyong Pilipino ang umalis sa bansa bawat taon upang maging overseas Filipino workers. Ang pangunahing paglikha ng trabaho ay dapat sa loob ng bansa, mula sa mga sariling industriya at maunlad na agrikultura at hindi nakaasa sa pagpapadala ng murang lakas-paggawa sa ibang bayan.

Kahit ang Business Process Outsourcing o BPO sektor na sinasabing nag-akyat ng maraming trabaho at kita sa ating ekonomiya ay hindi ligtas sa epekto ng pandaigdigang krisis.

Mr. Speaker, kung bumubuti man ang ekonomiya ayon sa palagay ng ating Pangulo, hindi ganito ang palagay at kalagayan ng mas marami nating mga kababayan at mahihirap na mga constituents natin.

Tumaas ang tantos ng mga Pilipinong nagugutom. Kahit walang mga survey, maliwanag na nakararanas ng matinding

hirap at gutom ang mga Pilipino dahil sa mataas na presyo ng mga bilihin, kawalan ng kabuhayan at kakulangan ng tulong suporta mula sa gobyerno.

Mr. Speaker, mula 2004 ay dumoble ang bilang ng mga pamilyang nagugutom at nito lamang Hulyo, umabot sa higit 20 porsiyento ang nagugutom. Umabot ng 309 milyon ang mga Pilipino nating mga mamamayan ang walang nakakain. Paano masasabi na nagtagumpay ang administrasyon sa pagpapabuti ng kalagayan ng bansa kung higit kalahati ng sambayanan ay gutom at walang makitang magandang kinabukasan?

Sa nakalipas na siyam na taon, nakita natin ang walang kapantay na kawalang trabaho, pagbagsak ng uri ng trabaho at kita ng mga manggagawa, lumolobong kahirapan, krisis sa pinansya, malaking utang panlabas at mabagal na pag-unlad.

Dahil sa mga sariling kahinaan ng lokal na ekonomiya, mas vulnerable sa epekto ng krisis ang kabuhayan ng buong bansa.

Kahit ganoon magmalaki si Pangulong Arroyo sa kaniyang State of the Nation Address, hindi pa rin naabot at malayo sa target ang mga aktwal na datos at katotohanan.

Patuloy ang paglaki ng agwat ng sahod at kinakailangang gastos. Ipinapako sa P382 ang arawang sahod sa Metro Manila, kulang mahigit P600,000 para maabot ang kailangang daily cost of living. Naging bingi at manhid ang gobyerno sa panawagan ng mga manggagawa para sa signipikanteng legislated wage increase, iyong sinasabi nating P125 wage increase across the board nationwide.

Umabot sa P1.29 trilyon ang pambansang deposito mula 2001 hanggang Mayo 2009. Triple ng pinagsamang deposito ng mga administrasyong Aquino, Ramos at Estrada.

Habang kapos o walang badyet para sa mga batayang social services gaya ng kalusugan na mayroon lamang 1.8 porsiyento alokasyon sa pambansang badyet, edukasyon na may 15 porsiyento, pabahay na may .04 porsiyento, nagbayad ang gobyernong Arroyo ng umabot ng P4.8 trilyon sa utang panlabas. Umutang pa ito ng dagdag na P256.8 milyon kada taon mula 2001.

Mr. Speaker, sa kabila ng matinding kahirapan at diskontento ng mga mamamayan, buong pagmamalaki pang nasabi ng Pangulo na mas matatag ang ekonomiya sa Pilipinas kumpara sa ibang bansang sinalanta ng krisis pampinansya at mag-iwan umano ng legasiya dahil sa mga repormang ginawang ito.

Hindi binibitawan ng administrasyong Arroyo ang pagtutalak sa pagbabago ng Konstitusyon para umano sa good governance at pagbabago ng mga institusyon sa bansa na pumipigil sa national harmony, peace at sustainable development.

Mr. Speaker, aside from the incumbent president's more obvious motive of self-preservation and clinging on to power beyond 2010, what is also evident is that there is a large agenda behind Charter-change that goes beyond the immediate self-serving interests of those in power.

The strategic agenda of Charter-change is to further align the country with the needs of imperialist globalization. All attempts of Charter-change essentially seek to purge the country's charter of any provision that might pose as legal obstacles or nuisance to further opening up the economy to foreign monopoly capitalist penetration and control.

If Arroyo succeeds in pushing Charter change where previous administrations failed, she stands to consolidate

political authority to perpetuate herself in power and be spared of the numerous issues of legal and ethical accountability under her administration. GMA and her loyal administration party mates are trying, by all means, to move for a Charter change to get the invigorated backing of the US as well as local big business by further opening the plunder of our economy for US and other foreign direct investors to the detriment of our national goal of economic development.

Mr. Speaker, we have seen the people's massive opposition to Charter change. The same people who mourned and cried the death of President Cory Aquino—known for her strong opposition to dictatorships, greed and to self-perpetuation in power, and recognized as one of the heroes of democracy in our country—are ready to take to the streets to protest any attempts at Charter change by this administration. The ongoing rabid drive to further liberalize the economy under the receivership of the foreign multilateral agencies and banks merely deepens our backward neo-colonial condition. The current moves to amend the Constitution are meant to expedite this process even further.

Beneath all this, the two fundamental requisites to genuine economic development in the Philippines remain unmet. First, that we break the land monopoly and free the broad masses in the countryside from the exploitative and the repressive grip of landlords, traders and usurers through a genuine and thoroughgoing land reform. This would raise the income of the vast majority, expand the demand for manufactures, unleash farmers' productivity and generate surplus for reinvestment in industry.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, the extension of CARP for the next five years will never address the fundamental flaws nurtured in its 20 years of failures.

With the failures and weaknesses of the neo-liberal policies espoused by the government that led to the dwindling manufacturing sectors, absence of light and heavy industries and continued import-dependent, export-oriented nature of our economy, our program for national industrialization must be clearly defined. We must set priority projects to be actively promoted, expanded and deepened, with the necessary provisions to determine the necessary upgrade of science and technology and capital goods production corrected.

This must be seen in the context of a country wanting to assert self-reliance in economy and be liberated from the grip of foreign monopoly capital and the local landed, trading and financial elite. This would allow us to redefine our foreign and domestic economic and trade relations according to the genuine national interest and social goals, instead of a blind adherence to neo-liberal dogma. Only then can we develop an economy that caters to the needs of the population, generates mass employment, provides adequate income for the mass of the population and ensures the sustainable improvement in the quality of life of the people.

Mr. Speaker, wala nang mawawalang kayamanan at pag-aari sa mamamayang api at mahirap kundi ang natitira nilang dangal at respeto sa sarili. Dahil dito at sa patuloy na kabulukan at kasakiman na kanilang nakikita sa ilalim ng administrasyong ito, lagi silang nakahandang kumilos para baguhin ang kanilang kalagayan. Sana ay makinig sa mamamayan ang Kongresong ito.

Ito lamang. Marami pong salamat, Mr. Speaker. Mabuhay po kayo.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Garcia, P.). The Dep. Majority Leader is recognized.

REP. ANGARA. Mr. Speaker, there being no Member who wishes to interpellate the Hon. Maglunsod, I move that we refer his speech to the appropriate committee.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Garcia, P.). Is there any objection? (*Silence*) The Chair hears none; the motion is approved.

REP. ANGARA. Mr. Speaker, I move that we reconsider the earlier motion to refer the privilege speeches of the Hon. Plaza and the Hon. Vinzons-Chato to the appropriate committee.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Garcia, P.). Is there any objection? (*Silence*) The Chair hears none; the motion is approved.

REP. ANGARA. Mr. Speaker, instead, I move that we refer the privilege speeches of the Hon. Plaza and the Hon. Vinzons-Chato to the Committee on Basic Education and Culture.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Garcia, P.). Is there any objection? (*Silence*) The Chair hears none; the motion is approved.

REP. ANGARA. Mr. Speaker, the next Member to avail of the Privilege Hour is the honorable Gentleman from Oriental Mindoro, the Hon. Valencia. I move that he be recognized.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Garcia, P.). The honorable Gentleman from Oriental Mindoro, the Hon. Valencia, is recognized.

PRIVILEGE SPEECH OF REP. VALENCIA

REP. VALENCIA. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Good afternoon.

Mr. Speaker, honorable colleagues, I rise on a matter of personal and collective privilege, as the Chairman of the Committee on Housing and Urban Development, to bring forth to the attention of this honorable Chamber the Local Housing Program or Local Housing Fund designed to provide equitable distribution of housing benefits throughout the whole country through all the congressional districts, as stipulated in Republic Act 7835, the Comprehensive Integrated Shelter Financial Act (CISFA). This will also clarify and give a reply to many questions of our colleagues regarding the program.

Housing has always been recognized as one of man's most basic needs, among food, clothing and shelter. In fact it is so vital that even the Constitution mandates that the government should undertake, in cooperation with the private sector, a continuing urban land reform and housing program which will make available at affordable costs decent housing and basic services to underprivileged and homeless citizens of our country.

In fact, today housing is no longer just a social responsibility, but has now been recognized as a very viable investment alternative that could propel significant economic growth. Several studies revealed that housing exerts considerable influence in the various movements of a country's economy. Even NEDA, in the Medium-Term Philippine Development Plan of 2005-2010, has categorized housing as one of the sectors that contributes to the country's economic growth and creates job opportunities. Housing has been lumped with other economic tools such as trade and investment, agribusiness, tourism and infrastructure.

The 16.61 multiplier effect of housing confirms its massive potential to actually become the catalyst for significant economic growth. It could be a major instrument in effecting the rapid economic development of our country. In effect, for every one peso that you put in housing, an additional of P16.61 is infused into the local economy.

As a program background, let me just discuss the Local Housing Program or LHP. LHP is one of the housing programs institutionalized by Republic Act 7835 to equally spread housing privilege among all congressional districts. Section 4(d) of Republic Act No. 7835 states:

Local Housing – To ensure the equitable distribution of housing benefits across the country, the NHA is hereby tasked to implement cost-recoverable socialized housing projects in selected urban and urbanizable areas in all congressional districts. Criteria for the selection of sites shall be formulated by the HUDCC and NHA pursuant to Republic Act No. 7279.

To effectively carry out the task, the law created a trust fund to be managed and administered by the NHA, and appropriated P3 billion to subsidize the program. Considering that the fund is meant for the congressional districts, all project proposals must be endorsed by the Representative of the congressional district concerned. Per the program guidelines, as adopted and circulated by the NHA, the financing assistance may be utilized through various housing options/schemes: slum upgrading, sites and services development, core housing, medium rise housing, land acquisition and house construction. It may also be availed of to finance survey works, install or repair project facilities such as power and/or water supply facilities and repair project components of existing government projects, provided that the land is owned by target beneficiaries.

Housing assistance, through the Local Housing Fund, shall bear an interest of six percent per annum, payable in a maximum repayment period of 30 years. In case the district representative opts to appoint a project implementor other than the National Housing Authority, the Local Housing Fund shall be a loan of the project implementor, but the interest rate shall be borne by the project beneficiaries. In effect, the loan of the project implementor shall be interest-free.

Now, let us talk of what is happening, or the program situation today. I would like to speak about availment and utilization, Mr. Speaker. Records show that after 15 years of program implementation, DBM has only released a total of P639.664 million or 21 percent of the P3-billion budget appropriation for the program. The last release of which was nine years ago, in 2000, for only P300 million.

Since then, the NHA has reported a total availment of only P557.548 million, leaving an unutilized balance of

roughly P82.116 million and putting the total fund balance to P203.432 million, including the interest earnings of the fund and monthly amortizations paid by the program beneficiaries.

Simple pencil pushing would show that, theoretically, the NHA released only P46.46-million financial assistance to roughly 15 Congressional Districts a year since DBM's first fund release in 1997. This is bearing in mind that each district allocation is supposedly only P3 million, as declared by the NHA.

If we to take into account the remaining P2.556 billion fund balance of the program with DBM, plus the P203.432 million balance with the NHA, the 216 Congressional districts would technically have an allotment of P12.77-million housing budget assistance each.

If released to the respective Congressional districts, this will mean an additional boost to the local economy, based on the distribution of the 16.61 multiplier effect of housing.

Mr. Speaker, there are problems and obstacles that I have personally met because in order to have firsthand knowledge of the program implementation, this Representation decided to personally avail of the allotment for my district. Prior to the actual filing of application, my office conferred with the Pag-IBIG Fund and the Habitat for Humanity—or Habitat—as the project implementor.

The housing units shall be constructed by Habitat and, eventually, will be turned-over to the project beneficiaries who are active members of the Pag-IBIG Fund. The total Local Housing Fund shall then be settled in full to NHA by the HDMF based on the approved loan of the program beneficiaries or HDMF members. The amount corresponding to the loan of the Pag-IBIG members shall be released by Pag-IBIG to NHA, basically paying-off the total Local Housing Fund. The same amount shall then be rolled-over by the NHA and released to the project implementor for the construction of the next batch of housing units. The same process shall then be repeated until the completion of the project.

Despite of what we believe would have been a very workable scheme, my office experienced a lot of hurdles before NHA finally released the Local Housing Fund allotment for my district.

These are the problems:

1. Non-compliance of the provisions of the program guidelines. I will not anymore elaborate on that, Mr. Speaker, but non-compliance of the provisions in the program guidelines was one of the reasons;
2. Imposition of stringent guidelines making it too difficult to access the fund;
3. Voluminous documentary requirements;
4. Too much red tape;
5. Absence of a specific group that should handle the program implementation; and
6. Internal problems within the agency and even within the group assigned to handle the Program for South Luzon and Bicol Area.

I now have recommendations and courses of action, Mr. Speaker. Considering my personal experience of the program, I recommend the adoption of the following courses of action:

- First, revisit the guidelines and institute reforms that would ensure compliance with the law and facilitate processing rather than impede it. Republic Act 7835 mandates NHA to implement cost-recoverable socialized housing project in all congressional districts. There is no mention of

imputing interest rates on the financial assistance that would be released through the Local Housing Fund.

- Next, the law is very clear that the fund should be used to finance socialized housing projects. Why then did NHA expand the provisions of the law and included water and power facilities, repair of existing government projects such as riprapping, et cetera? In such cases, how can the National Housing Authority recover the fund?

- Next, instead of putting the burden on the project implementor, the NHA should adopt a scheme wherein projects implemented through a project implementor should either be turned-over to Pag-IBIG through its take-out facility or Social Housing Fund, or the Social Housing Finance Corporation through CMP or the Community Mortgage Program. In other words, this fund can also be used to help our informal sector. That way, the cost-recoverability of the fund is assured without imposing that the fund released shall be a loan of the project implementor.

- Next, create a Special Project Division or Department primarily to handle the Local Housing Fund.

- Undertake a comprehensive information dissemination on the program to guide the Members of the House of Representatives on availment procedures.

- Reduce the number of documentary requirements; and

- Strictly impose maximum processing time of program application.

By way of quoting statements, Mr. Speaker, considering the magnitude of the country's need for housing, it is imperative for all of us to really work together to ensure that housing services are, indeed, equitably distributed and that the benefits therefrom are felt all throughout nation. For this reason, this Representation, being the Chairman of the Committee on Housing, filed House Resolution No. 783, which was even co-authored by no less than our honorable Speaker Prospero Nograles, precisely urging the HUDCC and the NHA to institute reforms on the guidelines of the Local Housing Fund and adopt schemes that would ensure the effective, efficient and expeditious utilization of the program by the Members of the House of Representatives as envisioned in CISFA.

Reforms should be instituted to facilitate processing rather than impede it. We have the social responsibility to deliver our commitments to our people. We ought to be proactive and not cling to old procedures which have been proven to be ineffective. Let us innovate, adopt change, be open to new ideas, and amend and correct what hinders the fulfillment of our mandate. Government housing agencies should not merely provide shelter, but should also develop a real community worth to be called homes by our people.

Finally, after almost a year since the filing of the Resolution in September 2008, the Committee is scheduled to hear the result of the several Committee and Technical Working Group meetings. The Housing Committee will definitely welcome everyone who wishes to attend the scheduled final hearing on the Local Housing Fund guidelines on Wednesday at 1:30 p.m. I am sure the proceedings will help us all have a better comprehension on the program and how we could avail of its benefits for our constituency.

Thank you very much.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Garcia, P). The Dep. Majority Leader is recognized.

REP. ANGARA. Mr. Speaker, there being no Members who wish to interpellate the Hon. Valencia, I move that we refer his speech to the appropriate committee.

I so move.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Garcia, P.). Is there any objection? (*Silence*) The Chair hears none; the motion is approved.

REP. VALENCIA. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the next Member to avail of the Privilege Hour is the Hon. Montemayor. I move that he be recognized.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Garcia, P.). The Honorable Leonardo Montemayor is recognized.

PRIVILEGE SPEECH OF REP. MONTEMAYOR

REP. MONTEMAYOR. Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleagues, I would like to rise on behalf of a much maligned and much misunderstood industry, specifically the tobacco industry in the Philippines.

Mr. Speaker, the tobacco industry is an important subsector in Philippine agriculture as well as industry as a whole. It provides income and sustenance to almost two million individuals.

To give a short breakdown, at the production level, meaning the farmers' level, we have 655,380 individuals directly depending on tobacco as their source or main source of livelihood. At the trading and buying level, we have approximately 40,000 individuals involved. And at the local cigarette manufacturing and cigar marketing level, we have close to 150,000 individuals depending on the industry plus some 1,000,000 persons involved at the local marketing level. So that all in all, if we add all the other layers involved in the industry, we have close to 1.9 million Filipinos that depend on the industry for their livelihood and for their sustenance.

Mr. Speaker, distinguished colleagues, during the President's State of the Nation Address, she said that one of the priority measures she would like the Congress to approve would be additional excise taxes on cigarette, cigar and other tobacco products. Apparently, this is in response to the growing budgetary deficit which the Department of Finance is hard-pressed to reduce in order to maintain, if not improve the financial standing of our government.

But what is very striking also is that in a recent issue of *Business Mirror* last July 31 and let me quote just the two very short sentences from that news item: "Tobacco products were particularly problematic with excise collection falling by 15.4 percent short of goal to P10.22 billion instead of P12.08 billion. Tobacco excise collection also contracted sharply against last year's fall totaling P13.50 billion or a decrease of 24 percent."

In other words, Mr. Speaker, on a year-to-year basis, if we compare the collection during the first six months of 2009, there was a drop of 24 percent compared to the collection of the excise tax on tobacco in 2008. And in terms of the actual

collection this year versus the targets of the Bureau of Internal Revenue, the collection fell by 15 percent.

So in other words, if we raise additional excise taxes on the tobacco industry this year, hopefully to address the burgeoning budgetary deficit of our government, given these figures, are we not actually going to reduce further our tax collection rather than increase the same and address the budget deficit?

But an even more critical issue with respect to our tobacco farmers themselves, Mr. Speaker, is that there are existing excise tax laws affecting our tobacco farmers, under which they have been promised a share in those tax collections in order that they can improve their own farming and farm-related activities, and I refer in particular to Republic Act No. 8240 which the Tenth Congress enacted and which took effect in 1997. It is now 2009 or 20 years have passed. Under that law, 15 percent of the incremental revenue from the excise taxes on native and burley tobacco is supposed to be distributed to those areas that grow this particular types of tobacco so that, number one, they can assist cooperatives in improving the quality of agricultural products as well as increasing the income and productivity of our tobacco farmers; number two, in order to promote funds for the undertaking of livelihood projects, particularly helping tobacco farmers to go into alternative farming systems; and, number three, to enable our tobacco farmers and their organizations to come up with agro industrial activities that will allow them to become managers and owners of post-harvest and secondary processing facilities, et cetera.

Mr. Speaker, the estimated share of our native- and burley tobacco-producing areas, and I am talking here of roughly 15 or 20 provinces that produce these types of tobacco, from 1997 to 2007, the estimated share out of Republic Act No. 8240 is close to P6.4 billion during that 10-year period. So, we are not yet counting 2008 and 2009. It looks like a very big amount, but if you compare that to the share going to the Virginia tobacco producing provinces under Republic Act No. 7171, the latter is much bigger. Because on a yearly basis, the share of the Virginia tobacco producing provinces of Ilocos Sur, Ilocos Norte, Abra and La Union is roughly P2 billion. So, over a 10-year period, the total would be something like P20 billion as opposed the share of the burley and native tobacco producing areas which would be around P6.4 billion over the same 10-year period. But unlike in the case of the Virginia tobacco growing provinces which have been getting, not necessarily the entire share, but a significant part of their yearly share under Republic Act No. 7171, not a single centavo until today has been released to these provinces that are producing burley and native. And just to cite very quickly these provinces, they would include Pangasinan, Tarlac, Nueva Ecija, Occidental Mindoro, Cagayan, Isabela, Nueva Vizcaya, Quirino, Ifugao, Mountain Province, Iloilo, Leyte, Negros Oriental, Capiz, Cebu, Misamis Oriental, Zamboanga del Sur, North Cotabato, South Cotabato, Maguindanao, Sarangani, Bukidnon and Davao del Sur.

So, why are we now thinking of imposing new taxes when under the existing law we are already collecting taxes and we have yet to give to our native-and burley tobacco-growing farmers and their areas their due share under Republic Act No. 8240? In particular, I would like to also point out that in the case of Pangasinan, it is estimated by the National Tobacco Administration that over a five-year period, from 2000 to

2004, the share of Pangasinan should be something like P1.5 billion under RA 8240. Not a single centavo has been released until today. In the case of Tarlac, its estimated share from 2000 to 2004 is P232 million. The share of Nueva Ecija, in comparison, is about P1.5 million. But surprisingly, in the case of Misamis Oriental, its estimated share for a five-year period is P154 million. So this is something that is very significant and it is much needed by our tobacco farmers in their tobacco areas for so many types of livelihood and infrastructure activities that will certainly be of great value and benefit to these areas. But unfortunately, it seems, until now the Secretary of the Department of Finance has not yet promulgated the necessary implementing rules and regulations. The Secretary of the Department of Budget and Management has yet to issue the implementing rules and regulations on the allocation and disbursement of these funds.

Why, after 12 years until today, not a single centavo has been released and yet people are saying these are sin taxes because probably tobacco is a sinful commodity? So, we want them to shift, for health reasons, to other products but we are not giving them the financial resources in order to do the proper shifting to other commodities. So if we cannot afford to implement existing laws, let us think twice before coming up with additional taxes especially on burley and native tobacco.

And, Mr. Speaker, if we cannot afford to implement existing laws, let us not call these taxes "sin taxes" nor imply that our farmers are sinful farmers because they are producing a sinful commodity. So, kung hindi naman po natin maibigay iyong karapat-dapat mapasakanila, huwag naman po nating insultuhin na iyong ating mga magsasaka dahil sobra na po. Parang doble na po ang magiging sakit ng kanilang nararamdaman.

So again, Mr. Speaker, our farmers, our local governments, in all of these provinces, municipalities and barangays are waiting for us to respond. I understand that, for example, the municipal mayors of Pangasinan have passed a resolution calling on us to make sure that once and for all this Republic Act No. 8240 is implemented.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and thank you my dear colleagues.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Garcia, P.). The Deputy Majority Leader is recognized.

REP. ANGARA.. Mr. Speaker, there being no Member who wishes to interpellate the Hon. Montemayor, I move that we refer his speech to the appropriate committee.

I so move.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Garcia, P.). Is there any objection? (*Silence*) The Chair hears none; the motion is approved.

REP. ANGARA. Mr. Speaker, before we close the Privilege Hour, there is a written request by the Hon. Emil Ong, Congressman for the Second District of Northern Samar, that we read into the records his speech entitled: My Tribute to Madam Cory Aquino.

I so move that the speech of the Hon. Ong be read into the record.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Garcia, P.). Is there any objection? (*Silence*) The Chair hears none; the motion is approved.

The following is the text of Rep. Ong's speech submitted for insertion into the Congressional Record:

TRIBUTE TO MADAM CORY AQUINO

When President Maria Corazon Cojuangco Aquino assumed office under the Freedom Constitution, she was vested as the shining star among Filipinos, the star that shines in giving new hope for our country.

The entire Philippines was rejoicing when for the first time in the history of mankind the people became victorious in their quest for freedom from a dictatorial regime.

She was the only President that in just two months into office, constituted a commission that enacted a new Constitution within four months. Thus, came the 1987 Constitution and summed up her as a true democrat of the first order.

She was defined as a person with a steel core within her because from 1986-1992, her administration was confronted by nine coup attempts, all of which failed although some at great cost of lives and blood.

With all these politico-military conspiracies to overthrow her, she was steadfast as a Commander-in-Chief, inspite of her lack of political experience.

Serving under her, I perceived her to be honest, to have no pretensions, and a natural stateswoman.

It is still fresh in my mind when she was invited to speak before the session of the Joint Congress in the United States of America, and this humble representation was one of the delegates. I witnessed with my own two eyes when she was given homage of a standing ovation by the Congressmen and Senators of the United States of America for almost 20 minutes, recognizing her as the only person instrumental for a perfect bloodless revolution. I also noticed that there were a couple of legislators who were teary-eyed during that momentous event. Never in my life I had been so proud of being a Filipino.

She may not be visible anymore but she will always be present in our hearts and in our minds.

Thank you very much Madam President Corazon C. Aquino. We owe you our democracy.

REP. ANGARA. Mr. Speaker, there being no other Members who wish to avail of the Privilege Hour, I move that we close the Privilege Hour.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Garcia, P.). Is there any objection? (*Silence*) The Chair hears none; the Privilege Hour is hereby terminated.

REP. ANGARA. Mr. Speaker, I move that we call the roll of Members.

ROLL CALL

REP. ANGARA. Mr. Speaker, I move that we call the roll.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Garcia, P.). Is there any objection? (*Silence*) The Chair hears none; the motion is approved.

The Secretary General will please call the roll.

The Secretary General called the roll, and the result is as follows, per Journal No. 4:

PRESENT

Abante	Gatchalian
Abaya	Gatlabayan
Abayon	Go
Agbayani	Golez
Aggabao	Gonzalez
Alcover	Guanlao
Angara	Guingona
Angping	Hontiveros
Antonino-Custodio	Jaafar
Apostol	Javier
Aquino	Jikiri
Arago	Joson
Arbison	Labadlabad
Arnaiz	Lagman
Arquiza	Lapus
Arroyo (D.)	Maglunsod
Arroyo (M.L.)	Magsaysay
Bagatsing	Malapitan
Barzaga	Mandanas
Bello	Marcoleta
Binay	Mariano
Briones	Maza
Cabilao	Miraflores
Cagas	Montejo
Cajes	Montemayor
Canonigo	Noel
Cayetano	Nogralas
Chatto	Ocampo
Chipeco	Ong
Chong	Ortega (F.)
Chungalao	Osabel
Clarete	Paez
Climaco	Palatino
Codilla	Palparan
Cojuangco	Pancho
Colmenares	Piamonte
Coquilla	Piñol
Cruz-Gonzales	Ramiro
De Guzman	Remulla
De Venecia	Rodriguez
Defensor (A.)	Roman
Defensor (M.)	Romualdo
Dela Cruz	Romulo
Del Mar	Roxas
Del Rosario	Salimbangon
Domogan	Salvacion
Dueñas	San Luis
Enverga	Sandoval
Fernandez	Santos
Francisco	Sarmiento III
Garcia (P.)	Silverio
Garcia (P.J.)	Singson (E.)

Solis	Valdez	Leonen-Pizarro	Puentevella
Sy-Alvarado	Valencia	Limkaichong	Puno
Teves	Velarde	Lopez (C.)	Reyes (C.)
Tomawis	Villarosa	Lopez (J.)	Robes
Tupas	Yap	Macapagal Arroyo	Rodriguez-Zaldarriaga
Umali (A.)	Yu	Mangudadatu	Santiago (J.)
Uy (R.A.)	Zubiri	Marañon	Santiago (N.)
		Marcos	Solis

APPEARED BEFORE AND/OR AFTER THE ROLL CALL

Agyao	Dimaporo	Matugas	Suarez
Albano	Dumpit	Mendoza (M.)	Susano
Alcala	Dy	Mendoza (R.)	Syjuco
Almario	Ecleo	Mendoza (V.)	Taliño-Mendoza
Alvarez (G.)	Emano	Mitra	Teodoro
Amante	Ermita-Buhain	Nava	Tieng
Antonino	Escudero	Nicolas	Umali (C.)
Arenas	Estrella (C.)	Olaño	Ungab
Balindong	Estrella (R.)	Omar	Uy (R.S.)
Bautista	Fabian	Ortega (V.)	Vargas
Bondoc	Ferrer	Pancrudo	Villafuerte
Bonoan-David	Fua	Pichay	Villanueva
Bravo	Fuentebella	Plaza	Vinzons-Chato
Britanico	Garay	Prieto-Teodoro	Violago
Cajayon	Garcia (A.)		
Cari	Gonzales (A.)		
Castro	Gonzales (N.)		
Celeste	Gullas		
Cerilles	Gunigundo		
Coscolluela	Hataman		
Cua	Hofer		
Cuenco	Ilagan		
Dangwa	Jala		
Datumanong	Jalosjos		
Daza	Kho		
Diaz	Lacson		
Dilangalen	Lagdameo		

The House, through the Secretariat, is in receipt of the official notice of absence of the following Members: Representatives Ablan, Belmonte, Biron, Castelo-Daza, Crisologo, De Venecia, Lim, Madrona, Padilla, Pingoy and Uy (E.).

The Speaker is present.

Mr. Speaker, the roll call shows that 118 Members responded to the call.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Rep. Garcia, P.). One, one-eight?

There being no Members sufficient to form a quorum to do business, the session is adjourned until tomorrow, August 11, 2009, at four o'clock in the afternoon.

It was 6:50 p.m.