

Senate OKs use of unprogrammed funds for rehabilitation

THE Senate unanimously approved Joint Resolution 48 authorizing the use of unprogrammed funds for rehabilitation and reconstruction of areas affected by typhoons.

Those who voted in favor of the resolution were Senators Edgardo Angara, Benigno Aquino III, Joker Arroyo, Alan Peter Cayetano, Pia Cayetano, Miriam Defensor-Santiago, Jinggoy Estrada, Francis Escudero, Gregorio Honasan, Panfilo Lacson, Lito Lapid, Loren Legarda, Jamby Madrigal, Aquilino Pimentel Jr., Bong Revilla, Manuel Villar, Richard Gordon, and Senate President Juan Ponce Enrile.

Enrile lauded the passage of the "bipartisan measure" after it was debated extensively by senators.

Angara reported the passage of the measure, which "expresses the empathy and sympathy of our colleagues to the plight of our people."

In a massive show of support, all the senators held a press conference after the passage of the measure.

"The amount budgeted is P12 billion. In order to dispel any doubt that this money will be dissipated by those who will use it, the Senate has created an oversight (committee) to ensure that the fund will be spent wisely by the people who need it most," Enrile said.

Angara said the P12 billion would not entirely cover the damage wrought by the past three typhoons, noting that the agriculture sector alone suffered losses of P18 billion.

"There is no amount of money to compensate for the loss of lives, property and agricultural production," Angara said, adding "this will be a very valuable help to the Filipino people."

About seven million Filipinos were adversely affected by the three typhoons, which Angara described as nothing compared to the super typhoon that happened in August 1971 before martial law.

Angara said the joint resolution becomes effective upon concurrence of both houses.

The main source of the P12 billion will be from the proceeds of the Malampaya natural gas project.

Enrile and Angara explained that before the budget is released to a department, a formal request for funding should be submitted where the details of the project are provided.

Since the National Disaster Coordinating Council (NDCC) is tasked as the major implementer of the fund, the request will first come from line agencies to be submitted to the NDCC, which will bring the request to the Department of Budget and Management.

Teodoro urged to resign

During the period of amendments, Senate Minority Leader Pimentel urged Defense Secretary Gilbert Teodoro to resign as chairman of the NDCC once the P12-billion appropriation is approved.

But Pimentel withdrew his call to include in the amendments the need for Teodoro to resign after his concerns were addressed.

During the break, Teodoro assured Pimentel that he would be out of the NDCC even before the funds are released.

"We want to make sure that the head of the NDCC is not a presidential... otherwise, we are endorsing him already to the highest position in the land," Pimentel said during the debates.

Angara noted that Teodoro has expressed intention to leave his post after he announced his bid.

The finance committee chairman noted that Teodoro still has up to Nov. 30 to file his candidacy.

"We just want to send a neutral message to our people that this worthy bill will be executed and implemented by somebody who is not entertaining (presidential ambition) like Mr. Teodoro," Pimentel said.

Safeguards

The Senate also approved the amendment proposed by Sen. Francis Pangilinan to provide a monthly report to the oversight committee for every amount, including the details of the allocation.

The senators agreed that the project and its status would also be included in the report to be covered by the guidelines formulated by the Oversight Committee.

They also directed all line agencies involved in the use and implementation of the funds to post in their websites their projects and expenses.

Before this, Aquino asked why the damages in 2007 and 2008 were not covered by the calamity fund in 2009.

"You have the standby called the calamity fund meant to address the needs of the people once a calamity comes... (now) we have a situation where the fund was depleted," Aquino said.

Angara explained that the fund was used in rehabilitation of areas damaged by previous typhoons. "We need to act like we are doing now," Angara said.

"That's the question of management of public funds, not wise to keep P2 billion in the treasury and not employ it," Angara said, adding that otherwise the funds become "meaningless." (Philstar.com)

Enrile, Jinggoy head UNO senatorial cast

SENATE President Juan Ponce Enrile and Senate Pro Tempore Jinggoy Estrada lead the initial senatorial roster of the United Opposition (UNO) for the 2010 elections.

UNO, comprised of ousted President Joseph Estrada's Pwersa ng Masang Pilipino (PMP) and Partido Demokratikong Pili-

pino-Lakas ng Bayan (PDP-Laban), bared its initial 11-member senatorial lineup in a statement released to the media.

Aside from Enrile and Estrada, Reps. Teddy Boy Locsin of Makati, Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. of Ilocos Norte and Rodolfo "Ongpong" Plaza of Agusan del Sur, Grace Poe-Llamanzares — daughter of actor Fernando Poe Jr. — and NBN-ZTE whistleblower Joey de Venecia — son of Congressman and former House Speaker

Jose de Venecia—are among the party's senatorial bets.

Also included are Brig. Gen. Danny Lim, actor Edu Manzano, and Aquilino "Koko" Pimentel III, son of Sen. Aquilino "Nene" Pimentel Jr.

UNO said it would adopt the younger Pimentel "if he decides to drop his case in the Supreme Court for having been (allegedly) cheated in the 2007 elections."

Sen. Miriam Defensor Santiago will also be tapped a guest candidate. (Philstar.com)



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