

Transcription details

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Note: Draft version, for corrections please email us at mail@rasmitmug.com.

Sen. Miguel Zubiri: Moving forward, I move that we resume consideration to Senate Bill 2214 Committee Report No. 258, so move.

Sen. Vicente Sotto III: Any objection? Hearing none. The consideration of 2214 is in order.

Sen. Zubiri: May we recognize the sponsor, Senator Francis "Tol" Tolentino and to interpellate or is continuing interpellation is Senator Panfilo "Ping" Lacson, the birthday boy, Mr. President.

Sen. Sotto: Senator Francis Tolentino is recognized to sponsor the measure and to interpellate, the gentleman from Cavite, Senator Ping Lacson, the birthday celebrant.

Sen. Ping Lacson: Thank you, Mr. President. This is a continuation of my interpellation last week. If the good sponsor, who I admire and respect for his diligence and earnest desire to learn fast the rigors of lawmaking. In fact, without taking anyway from his fellow neophyte senators who joined the 18th congress, easily in my book, he's the rookie of the year.

Sen. Tolentino: I take that as a compliment from the birthday celebrant and I wish him many more years as a public servant and as a good Caviteño, Mr. President.

Sen. Ping: Hindi pa ako tapos. Of course, it helps that he is a fellow Caviteño. Anyway, will the gentleman continue to yield the floor for some clarificatory questions?

Sen. Tolentino: Willingly, Mr. President. Although I'm a bit exhausted today, Mr. President because of the heat coming from Cavite.

Sen. Ping: What is the status of the counterpart measure in the House of Representatives? If there is any counterpart measure being deliberated in the House?

Sen. Tolentino: Mr. President, to my knowledge, I think they're still wrapping up the deliberation at the committee level. It has yet to reach the floor, to my knowledge, Mr. President.

Sen. Ping: So it's still in the committee level?

Sen. Tolentino: Yes, Mr. President.

Sen. Ping: And is it a certified measure?

Sen. Tolentino: I am not aware, Mr. President. This is an administrative matter internal to this chamber but I have yet to be informed by the majority leader. I have no knowledge at this moment, Mr. President.

Sen. Ping: We checked that earlier. This is not a certified measure. In fact, in today's order of business, two messages of the President of the Philippines were read by the Senate secretary. Both certifying urgent 2 bills: Senate Bill 2232 or the POGO Bill and Senate Bill 2234 or the Creation of the department of migrant workers and overseas Filipinos. So no mention of SBN 2214. So my question is what does that tell us, Mr. President? What is the message that we are getting here?

Sen. Tolentino: Mr. President, I cannot decide for the message that can be gleaned from the non-certification. If I can probably read the mind of the chief executive but I do not have that powers, Mr. President. So I leave it at that, Mr. President.

Sen. Ping: I said that Mr. President because we know more or less the workings in the House. Pag tinawag ng presidente at pinakiusap 'yung bill, maski walang certification siguradong papasa. But since in the conversation of the Senate President no less and the Speaker of the House Lord Allan Velasco, mukhang walang sa priority nila, mukhang walang pakiusap galing sa Malacañang. So again mukhang may mensaheng binibigay sa atin so I'm just wondering why we are spending sleepless nights. Last night we adjourned at 9:30 yata. Ako, I went home before ten o'clock, eh. Na-curfew ako eh. And tonight, it's already 7:11, we're still interpellating. So why the rush when there is no certification as urgent yung measure and wala namang galaw sa House. So, what are we doing here, Mr. President?

Sen. Tolentino: I think the forthright answer to that this chamber is just doing the proper legislative function mandated by the constitution. This chamber is doing the right legislative mode, this chamber is not remiss. Even without a certification, this chamber is performing and as mentioned by the birthday celebrant, this chamber is functioning even beyond the call of duty. It is a mirror image of what is expected of us by the Filipino nation, that we work. We work not just because certain measures are prioritized or certified by the chief executive. We work because we believe that certain measures will benefit not just a sector of society but the entire nation, Mr. President.

Sen. Ping: Thank you. Very good answer. Spoken like a true statesman, Mr. President. Hindi ako nagkamali, rookie of the year talaga. The point that I'm trying to drive at, Mr. President, there could probably no necessity or at least any urgency to skip a more thorough study on the possible legal challenges that this legislation could be facing once passed into law, as I will explain later.

In fact, when I was monitoring the interpellations last night from my senate office, particularly the discussions between the good sponsor and the minority leader, what concerned me was the manifestation of the sponsor that if even in the event that Congress does not pass the measure postponing the May 2022 BARMM regional election, the same still could not proceed. Because first, according to you, the electoral code has not been passed by the regional parliament and therefore no election laws will govern the conduct of such election and consequently, the parliamentary districts are not designated or determined. Is that an accurate statement, Mr. President?

Sen. Tolentino: Partly correct, Mr. President. Among other things that the transcript would show, perhaps the records of the proceedings last night and the previous proceedings, I gave a mouthful of reasons, the three pathways... if the good birthday celebrant would allow me to continue, there are three pathways which I offered last night and they would end up with the same result: dead end, end game, finish. As of the legal situation we have right now. One, if I can be allowed to repeat, if we do not act there can be no elections; if we disapprove, there can be no elections; if we approve, no elections but with a measure of certainty who will take position in a hold over capacity, when will be the next elections be scheduled, what will be the rules of the game, past May 2022. So I have explained that and partly the gentleman is correct, but there is an absence of a Bangsamoro electoral code, there is an absence of apportioning the carving out the parliamentary districts pursuant to section 10, article 7 of the BOL and this is very paramount, Mr. President. Corollary to this there is the absence of a book of voters needed for the conduct of elections needed in each parliamentary districts and a lot of other legal implications, Mr. President, similar to what I mentioned last night. Because under the law, before being a candidate you should be a resident of the place where you intend to file a certificate of candidacy, the office whom you seek to represent; so this is no longer applicable, Mr. President, we are fast approaching October, the one year residency will not apply if I reside in Sulu, for instance, and I intend to transfer my residence to Tawi-tawi to run in Tawi-tawi, it will no longer apply, Mr. President, because when I was seated, I counted the days. The Commission on Elections issued last February COMELEC resolution 10695 setting the date for the filing of the certificate of candidacy October 1 to October 8 this year and that is exactly 122 days from now, Mr. President.

Within a 122 days, a lot of the provisions provided by law will no longer be applicable because of the shortened period, because of the lesser number of dates. A lot of the requirements will not be complied with not because of the negligence or mission of a party but because of that impossibility, Mr. President. And I refer back to the reasoning given by the BARMM leadership, the pandemic really hit hard, Mr. President. Not just on their mobility but their ability to conduct sessions: in islands wherein there is no connectivity to speak of. It really constrained them. Not to mention the fact that for the first six months they were unable to work, Mr. President. And now we are approaching that 122 days starting today. The question is, can they still do a lot of things? I doubt, Mr. President. Not to fault them, not to blame them but perhaps because of these circumstances beyond their control, [unintelligible] these events perhaps led them, led us to this situation, which last night I called as a legal impossibility, Mr. President. I

even quoted a Latin phrase: *lex non cojit ad impossibilia*, the law does not require the performance of the impossible. This a very long answer, Mr. President, thank you for allowing to state that for the record, Mr. President. So I hope I have answered the query of the good gentleman.

Sen. Ping: Thank you, Mr. President. That is correct and I agree that the basic premise without any electoral code, there will be no election. That's a given. What happens if in May 2025, there is still no electoral code passed by the regional parliament or in May 2028 wala pa ring electoral code, or in May 2031, wala pa ring electoral code? So what happens, Mr. President? So there will forever be appointive members of the Bangsamoro Region, Mr. President? Ganoon ang situation?

Sen. Tolentino: No, Mr. President. I think...

Sen. Ping: The basic premise, without any electoral code, and as a matter of fact that is the reason given for postponing the regional election to May 2025. We'll go to that point later but unahin muna natin, since walang electoral code and consequently there will be no designation of parliamentary districts so hindi magkakaroon ng elections. Yun ang premise. But supposed wala pa ring electoral code na nai-craft at nai-pass ng May 2025, May 2028, May 2031, May 2034, what happens, Mr. President?

Sen. Tolentino: I'm sure Mr. President that COVID-19 will not exist past May 2025 or 2028. And Mr. President, the law and this chamber will not permit that to happen. Because there are, as I have read, re-read, and have proposed in the measure 2214, there has got to be a working Congress-Bangsamoro Parliamentary Forum, which has never been constituted, sad to say. And I even suggested the creation, notwithstanding the existence of that forum, an oversight, just to force the Bangsamoro Parliament to enact the measures. But as explained by our other colleagues last night, there is no need to do that, we have to rely on the Congress-Bangsamoro Parliamentary Forum and I agreed, we really have to assist them. Especially in the enactment of the internal revenue code which is a very difficult measure to craft. It took the US Congress several years and commissioning several groups to enact the federal internal revenue code and it was easy for the Philippines to have a national internal revenue code because we just adopted most of the provisions in the federal internal revenue code of the United States. But in this instance, there is no template, Mr. President. So we really have to assist. It is incumbent upon us to assist, to force, to nudge, and through the budgetary perhaps, Mr. President, to remind the BTA that number one priority would be the enactment of the electoral code, second would be the internal revenue code as your source of income because it's now enshrined that you should have a fiscal autonomy, among others, Mr. President. So it will not be an ad nauseam argument, Mr. President, that our tolerance or would be tolerance should mean or should be equated to mean that it would go on and on and on. No, Mr. President, it has to stop. And I agree with the birthday celebrant, election suffrage is important. But at this moment, coming from the situation engulfed in the region, with the COVID-19, the legal impossibility is there, Mr. President. Tomorrow it will now be 121 days. Day after tomorrow it would be 120 days. And they're still in Manila. They're all here behind me. How can they craft the

Bangsamoro Electoral Code which would mean the involvement of the local government units? How can they do that, Mr. President? And the national census has yet to be out, Mr. President.

Sen. Ping: I'm sorry, Mr. President. But first, yeah, how could they craft the electoral code if they are here? So, the solution is for them to go back to their parliament and craft the electoral code. And another point, I hate to say this, but you know, we're treading on a very dangerous ground or precedent here. Because if the pandemic is the reason for the postponement of the BARMM election next year, it could open the floodgates to a [?] situation in the national and local elections next year. Medyo delikado 'yun, Mr. President. So I'd like to correct the distinguished sponsor not to mention COVID-19 as a reason or major reason, primary reason for postponing the BARMM elections because it could establish a very dangerous precedent, Mr. President.

Imagine, well, sabi mo nga, calamity, force majeure, but you know, life goes on even without COVID-19. In fact, we're here, we're working, Mr. President. Yung House naipasa 'yung Bayanihan 3, of course walang counterpart sa Senate. But you know, I'm sorry to mention this but making COVID-19 as a reason is a very dangerous precedent, Mr. President.

Sen. Tolentino: Mr. President, I would like to disagree because the setting of the dates for national and local elections, all of these dates are enshrined in the Philippine Constitution. The second Monday of May, Mr. President. So it's there. COVID-19 cannot delete that provision, Mr. President. Unlike the Bangsamoro, it's not in the constitution, Mr. President. **[4:30:26/ 12:25]** And precisely the reason, Mr. President, is that we have an existing omnibus election code to guide the elections. We have an existing constitutional commission, the Commission on Elections. But unlike the Bangsamoro government, a nescient organization, created just two years ago, there is no Bangsamoro electoral code, there is no Bangsamoro COMELEC in existence, and the most important thing, Mr. President, there is no office to aspire for. There are no parliamentary districts, as we speak, that have been created, Mr. President. So where will you run? Where is the district located? Who will be the representatives representing whom? How can you determine the heterogeneity of a place? The diverse inclusion of the people, the people you're supposed to represent? The districts are. Not just geographical locations. The districts are made of people, Mr. President. It is composed of the different tribes of the Bangsamoro, Muslims, non-Muslims. And as far as the law is concerned, it is nonexistent, Mr. President, unlike the existing congressional districts. We have the congressional districts of Cavite, almost 23 congressional districts in Metro Manila. They are in existence, Mr. President. And this is mandated by the constitution, as I mentioned a while ago. As contrasted with the Bangsamoro, we're starting with a blank wall. There are candidates who would want to run but there are no positions to aspire for. There are places that should be represented but there are no parliamentary districts crafted. So that is the dilemma, Mr. President, if I refer back to the three pathways I mentioned last night, and which I just reiterated: this is a legal impossibility, Mr. President. Exacerbated by the current pandemic, Mr. President.

Sen. Ping: Well, I agree that the national and local elections, constitutional requirement yan, ano? It's in the constitution. But again, the BARMM elections are ratified in a plebiscite last

January 19. So constitution, and the ratification of the people of the Bangsamoro region in a plebiscite, what is the difference, Mr. President? Both are will of the people, hindi ba? Kasi democratic tayo, republican state. The authority emanate from the people.

Anyway, Mr. President, why are the parliamentary districts not designated? Ano bang naging reason? Kasi it's been two years. We passed the BARMM Organic Law in 2018, hindi ba? So it's been two years. Yeah, 2019 yung plebiscite, so 2 years. 2019 January. So ngayon June of 2021, so two years na. Anong reason bakit hindi nakapag designate ng parliamentary districts?

Sen. Tolentino: That's a very good question, Mr. President. It just highlights that Republic Act 11054 or the Bangsamoro Organic Law is not self-executing. Even if we pass that, there are a lot of steps that would have to be done. One, administratively. Two, through legislation through the BTA. There probably have been lapses. There probably have been constraints, again, we refer back to the current situation. It took them six months, almost a year, before they finally organized themselves, before the appointments came out, before they received their first paychecks, amongst others, Mr. President. And then comes the pandemic. And then comes a situation not intended, not part of the law wherein a lot of the mandates required of them would be hard to comply with. But, Mr. President, in fairness to them, out of the 6 difficult mandates bestowed upon them by the law, they complied with 3. They were able to pass the education code, I guess them deemed that as very important. They were able to pass the administrative code, and since they were filling up thousands of positions coming from the defunct ARMM, they were able to pass, and we should congratulate them, the civil service code. And they're now in the process and finishing the local government code. All of these, hand in hand with a normalization track— decommissioning the warriors, surrendering the firearms, trying to learn the ropes of governance through their interactions with various LGUs and their relationship with the national government agencies. These are difficult even without a pandemic. But the pandemic made it very difficult for them. Even to have what we're doing right now, the Zoom, the virtual meetings, because they don't have connectivity in island provinces. So how can the members of the BTA during the lockdown meet and decide and deliberate on the basic mandates when they were prevented by the IATF from even going out of their households? So these are new. Not just to us but even to them. On the early days of governance, they would now be constrained to adjust to a high-tech situation, which they are not capable of. Not because they are not able to utilize gadgets but because there is simply no connectivity in their areas, Mr. President.

All of these, again, if we aggregate would lead to the legal impossibility, which this representation has been mouthing since day 1. At no fault of them, at no fault on the part of the national government, no fault on the part of congress. This is an act of God, Mr. President. Nobody would want to place us, even them, in this very difficult situation. Performance by them of the mandates expected of them is rendered impossible by the situation. An act of god not through their own doing, Mr. President.

Sen. Ping: Act of god, referring to COVID-19, to the pandemic, Mr. President?

Sen. Tolentino: All of these Mr. President.

Sen. Ping: But other acts of god?

Sen. Tolentino: Perhaps, Mr. President, their inability to...

Sen. Ping: I won't accept that as a reason, Mr. President. Lapses, inability to craft laws, because Metro Manila is the epicenter of the pandemic and here we are, we have passed how many laws, Mr. President, or majority leader. We have passed a number. Quite a number, as a matter of fact. And the pandemic has not deterred us from continuously working in the Senate. In fact, at this late hour, we're still here, trying to pass this measure.

Now, I'm sorry, but with all due respect I am not getting the answer to my question. What could have been the reason why the parliamentary districts have not been designated? I just want to know the answer to that kasi that's essential. The passage of the electoral code, the designation of the parliamentary districts, ito yung mga essential na kailangan para magkaroon ng eleksyon, which they failed to accomplish. So may I know the reason why the parliamentary districts have not been designated up to this very moment, Mr. President?

Sen. Tolentino: Mr. President, the reasons probably would have to come from them. I'm just second-guessing...

Sen. Ping: You can ask them, Mr. President. So we can put it on the record kung ano talaga ang reason why... yes, please.

Sen. Zubiri: With the permission, Mr. President, of the two gentlemen. Yeah, I'd also, actually, I'd ask the same question. When we had this problem and they asked for an extension, the first thing I asked my staff, "bakit hindi nila natapos itong trabaho nila?" And it would be good to put on record the reasons because if you talk to one group, they will blame the other group. Kasi dalawang group yan eh: majority, minority. If you talk to the majority, sabi nila, yung minority daw nanggugulo, hindi natatapos. Pag tinanong mo naman yung minority, sasabihin nila "e minority kami,"

Sen. Ping: Parang senate of the old. Before the time of the Majority Leader Zubiri and Senate President Sotto and Minority Leader Drilon. Ganyan ang situation but it's not the case in the senate now.

Sen. Zubiri: Yes. It will also be good because I believe the point of the good gentleman from Cavite is also valid. You know, I am in favor, to be honest, I am supporting this measure but I think the good point of the gentleman from Cavite is what will stop the next batch from doing the same? They will not pass the electoral code pagdating ng 2025, am I correct, sir? Pagdating delay na naman, meeting na naman kasi hindi na natapos. And you know, that is the prerogative again of the next congress to extend. Kaya siguro tinatanong ng kapatid natin na si Senator Lacson, who is the birthday celebrant today, which is a valid point: when will this end?

When will they pass that code, electoral code, and there will actually be elections in the area? What assurance can we give the people of the Bangsamoro that there will be elections in the area at least of 2025? Kasi mahirap nga, baka maging excuse na naman yan, buti sana kung makabalik ako in the next election, in shallah.

Sen. Ping: You will surely come back.

Sen. Zubiri: Hopefully tayong dalawa, sir. Or higher office for you and the Senate President. But definitely, I will put my foot down, I will no longer agree for an extension because they have to come up with the electoral code, Mr. President. I share the position on this particular issue. Maybe it's good to clarify why they were not able to pass the electoral code. In fairness to us, we passed Bayanihan One. We passed Bayanihan Two. We passed CREATE. We passed so many bills, I already forgot so many of them. So maybe we can ask that the honest to goodness answer. Sana honest to goodness na po.

Sen. Ping: I don't want to rub it in, Mr. President. Their being here is not an excuse not to craft the electoral code. They should be there, not here. If that's the reason why they cannot pass the electoral code, they should be there.

Sen. Tolentino: Mr. President, before I ask for a minute suspension and I see behind me, two ministers here of the BARMM, may I just place this on the record: the difficulty of crafting a legislative district. Mr. President, when you craft a legislative district, it is not your mere attendance and presence in a legislative session hall that would do the work, Mr. President. There are a lot of things to consider. One, you have to consult with the various LGUs because you are now talking of bailiwicks, Mr. President. Ang tawag sa Tagalog, balwarte. Hindi mo pwedeng hatiin at pagsama-samahin lang 'yung isang munisipyo into a contiguous, compact geographical aggrupation to comply, Mr. President. No, the purpose of a districting is to achieve a fair representation. To protect the aggregate minority of the people, and I'm not talking of the minority tribes within the Bangsamoro, to be protected so as not to be wholly overpowered by the combined action of the numerical majority and vice versa, Mr. President. The redistricting which should reflect the heterogeneity, Mr. President, of interests of the BARMM and would ensure local interests and the representatives. If you represent the Sama tribe in the BARMM, you must be connected to the Sama tribe, you must come from the Sama tribe. And the Sama tribe should be in a compact, contiguous geographical location and it cannot be subdivided Mr. President. So all of this, Mr. President, cannot be done in a mere committee hearing, Mr. President. These are done through consultations with the LGUs, the political warlords, Mr. President. And all of these would take time. And probably, Mr. President, the BARMM leadership, not so much familiar with the intricacies of politics, of subdividing. Alam nyo, Mr. President, katatapos ko lang... tayo, katatapos lang natin nung pag subdivide nung another congressional district ng Caloocan. Eh yung boundary po nung isang barangay, ang tagal po naming pinagtalunan yun, behind the scenes. Kasi yung isang pamilya nung barangay captain, mahahati. Malilipat doon sa first district of Caloocan City. So these all have to be considered and in a vast area with different temper, different traditions, different culture, different historical backgrounds, we have to, they have to consolidate all of these.

These are fundamental precepts of what you call equipopulation. We cannot have an exact mathematical exactitude of the number of voters. But we can strive to achieve a common interest so that the person who will represent the people would be the rightful representative of the interest of the voters. And it is very difficult to start from scratch because this is an area besieged with violence, tribal wars, rido, among other things. So Mr. President, that has to be taken into consideration.

I will be asking for a minute suspension to talk to the Bangsamoro leadership behind me. I see the presence of two ministers.

Sen. Ping: Before we suspend, Mr. President, may I just respond, ano? With all due respect to my fellow Caviteño, I don't think these are valid. I don't know about you, Mr. Senate President, but to me, those reasons cited are not valid reasons. Sa atin nga, may mga nagka-covid. Nagka-covid si majority leader, nagka-covid si Senator Bong Revilla, nagka-covid si Senator Bato, and still we were able to perform. We have continuously performed our mandate as legislators. So kung gagawin natin yung reason na may tribal wars, may COVID, and by the way, kalian ba nag-start yung COVID sa Pilipinas? March of 2020. And the Bangsamoro Organic Law was ratified in January 19 of 2019 so they had one good year. In fact, one year and two months to have accomplished all these important measures. Ngayon kung ang problema sa designation ng districts, mentioned earlier not on the floor but mentioned earlier by the sponsor, dahil walang census. We checked with PSA, Mr. President. The latest census available was done in 2015. So kung wala pang later census na nagawa, why did they not use the 2015 census to designate the parliamentary districts and proceed with the crafting of the electoral code.

By the way, Mr. President. I have it on good information that they indeed crafted the electoral code, submitted it to COMELEC, and there were some modifications made by the COMELEC and transmitted it back to them and yet still they have not crafted the electoral code. So had they done that, dapat meron nang electoral code, meron nang designated districts. And we're not discussing anymore, not deliberating anymore, to postpone or not to postpone the May 2022 regional elections. That's always the precedent so I support the motion to suspend for one or two minutes, Mr. President.

Sen. Tolentino: Mr. President, before we postpone, I am privy to what was discussed by the BARMM leadership. Ito po yung tungkol doon sa electoral code. Totoo po, Mr. President. Nagbigay po sila ng draft electoral code sa COMELEC kasi po yung usapan that the COMELEC would review the electoral code. They submitted the draft. I agree, I confirm as confirmed to me. But there is a big difference, Mr. President, between the electoral code and the parliamentary districts. If you look at the constitution, there is a big difference between the Philippine Constitution and the seats for the representatives of Congress, Mr. President. The seats for congress and as probably would be done in the BARMM is just an appendix, Mr. President, subject to the carving out, subject to the foundational homework that has to be done, which I mentioned a while ago. So there's a big difference between the electoral code, which they indeed attempted to draft and is still in an evolving stage, Mr. President, subject to

consultation with the COMELEC. But the parliamentary districts would be an appendix, an addendum so to speak. If you look at the Philippine constitution, it is the same. There is a Philippine Constitution but the seats— 6 seats for the first district of Manila, et cetera, et cetera— this is an appendix. This was done separately, Mr. President. And the same quandary that the BARMM people are having right now. At the same time they're doing the electoral code but the parliamentary district has yet to commence, the drafting I mean, Mr. President. So these are different things, Mr. President. The designation of the parliamentary district or the districting, the designation of the geographical areas, the representation, would just be attached to the electoral code for submission to the parliament for approval, in the same manner as the Philippine Constitution was crafted and the seats for congress were just considered as an addendum. With that, Mr. President, I just want to have that on record, I now ask for a minute suspension to consult with the BARMM leadership behind me.

Sen. Sotto: Before the suspension, may I please be refreshed. If you reset the elections, what happens to the incumbent or current officials of BARMM?

Sen. Tolentino: Mr. President, under existing law, the BTA would have to be dissolved if a new set of elected members of parliament are elected, Mr. President.

Sen. Sotto: No, no. Postponed nga eh. So walang election.

Sen. Tolentino: So if it is postponed, that provision would not be triggered, Mr. President.

Sen. Sotto: Alright, so what happens to the officials?

Sen. Tolentino: If you gleaned from the discussion last night, they would be on a hold over capacity until after the president appoints a successor for the extended parliament. We are not extending their term, Mr. President.

Sen. Sotto: Where does the holdover mandate come from?

Sen. Tolentino: Mr. President, it has to be, as agreed upon last night, it has to be clarified in a separate provision in the measure that we are crafting. That's why it's so important, Mr. President, to have that provision. To achieve certainty, avoid chaos who would hold over, among others.

Sen. Sotto: Anyway, you'll be consulting the officials of the BARMM. I suggest that you do. They have been here for quite a number of days already. But the not so good news that I have to tell them is that I had a meeting with the speaker this morning and Speaker Velasco said, the BARMM Bill in the House is stalled in the committee. So it is best that they also go there and talk to the people there. Because here, it's just a matter of time. We might be able to pass this on second reading on the next few days or probably in the first week of August but we cannot do this time. It has to be after the break. But the House of Representatives has not even started. So it's better, you should talk to them. Inform them of the lobby that is necessary. And

perhaps later on I could give a trivia on what we mean when we say 'lobby.' It emanated from the House of Lords and the House of Commons in Great Britain during the time of Lord Cromwell. They stood among the lobby of the parliament and waited for the ministers to arrive. So they started calling it lobby, because they hang around the lobby. Alright, thank you.

Sen. Tolentino: Thank you, Mr. President. They heard you loud and clear, Mr. President.

Sen. Sotto:Session suspended.

[session suspended from 4:55:22 to 5:13:05]

Sen. Zubiri: Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, the good gentleman from Cavite requested to suspend the interpellations while we're still trying to get some more answers from the Bangsamoro Transition Authority. Therefore, we move to suspend. It's his birthday today, Mr. President. And he has a birthday wish and so we will grant his birthday wish so he can go home to his family.

Sen. Sotto:And besides, we have already informed the officials of BARMM of the situation. Alright, there is nothing to worry about as far as the senate is concerned.

Sen. Zubiri: Yes. So we move to suspend.

Sen. Sotto:So you move to suspend? You do not want any more trivia about lobby or what?

Sen. Zubiri: Yes, Mr. President. If you can give us some trivia.

Sen. Sotto:I can give you some trivia. If you're interested, you just read the Genesis 24.

Sen. Zubiri: Is that where the word testify had come from, Mr. President? The root word of testify.

Sen. Sotto:Yes. Thank you. Any objection? Hearing none. Consideration of the measure is suspended.

Sen. Tolentino: Thank you, Mr. President.

Sen. Zubiri: Thank you very much. Thank you very much to the sponsor and to our colleagues from the Bangsamoro.

[end of transcript]