

# Envisioning a relevant, responsive, reliable House of the people

**MANILA** -- The House of Representatives for the 18th Congress has set its vision to become a real "House of the people" that is bent on prioritizing key measures that would help provide Filipinos with a safe and comfortable life.

Upon taking the chamber's helm, Speaker Alan Peter Cayetano vowed to make the House "relevant, responsive, and reliable" by changing negative perceptions and restoring the waning trust of the public.

"Let us do what is right. People love their congressmen, but they love to hate Congress. This is something I ask all of you: In unison, let us change that because this is the 'House of the People'," he said in his speech after being sworn in as the nation's 22nd Speaker.

Cayetano emerged victorious in a tight speakership battle with major contenders, such as Marinduque Rep. Lord Allan Velasco, Leyte Rep. Martin Romualdez, Davao del Norte Rep. and former Speaker Pantaleon Alvarez, and even Davao City Rep. and presidential son Paolo Duterte.

However, the top position of power in the House comes with a price as Cayetano must honor a 15-21 term-sharing deal with Velasco.

Under the term-sharing agreement brokered by President Rodrigo Duterte on July 22, Cayetano would hold the post for 15 months, or up to October next year, after which Velasco takes over for the final 21 months.

With already five months in, the incumbent Speaker has so far displayed stellar performance as made evident in his high trust and approval ratings that reflect restoring public trust in Congress.

House Majority Leader Martin Romualdez noted that for the first time ever, a Speaker of the House received an 80-percent trust rating and 76-percent ap-

proval rating in the latest survey of Pulse Asia conducted in December.

"I share the belief of the majority of our people that the House of Representatives did a marvelous job in its First Regular Session. Our people have spoken. They are in approval of and satisfied with the performance of their congressmen under the leadership of Speaker Alan Peter Cayetano," Romualdez said. "I am elated that Filipinos are now appreciative of the hard work exerted by their representatives in Congress. They have seen how congressmen rolled up their sleeves and buckled down to work from the first day of the 18th Congress."

Romualdez, who chairs the House Committee on Rules, said the chamber processed a total of 900 measures in 32 session days -- or an average of 28 measures per day -- as a commitment to deliver the legislative agenda of President Duterte.

Among the priority measures were the postponement of the May 2020 barangay and Sangguniang Kabataan elections to December 2020 and the establishment of Malasakit Centers as one-stop shops for financial and medical assistance, both of which had been signed into law.

Romualdez highlighted that the record time approval of the proposed 2020 PHP4.1-trillion national budget was one of the major achievements of the House for the first regular session of the 18th Congress.

"We were able to steer the approval of the 2020 national budget in record time through creative initiatives never before experienced in the House of Representatives," he said. "Committee hearings for the budgets of various departments and offices were held simultaneously, from day to night, Monday to Friday."

To avert another scenario of a reenacted budget, senators and congressmen comprising the bicameral conference committee approved on December 11 the final version of the 2020 national budget.

The national government was forced to operate under a reenacted 2018 budget from January to mid-April this year because of the Senate and the House's squabble over supposed insertions and realignments made by some lawmakers in the PHP3.757-trillion budget for 2019.

Vital tax measures were also approved on final reading by the lower chamber, such as the bill amending the Foreign Investment Act of 1991, the Passive Income and Financial Intermediary Taxation Act (PIFITA), and the Corporate Income Tax and Incentive Rationalization Act (CITIRA).

Meanwhile, another tax proposal that seeks to increase the tax on electronic cigarettes and impose higher duties as contained in the Package 2 Plus B of the Comprehensive Tax Reform Program, is up for the President's signature.

"These bills are important parcels of the Comprehensive Tax Reform Program that is required to help reach the Acredit Rating goal of the Duterte administration," Romualdez said.

He attributed the House's productivity to both the majority and the minority's "tough work ethic in doing their jobs creditably," underscoring that "democracy" is at work in the chamber.

"Your congressmen, both from the majority and the minority, worked feverishly in the committee and plenary levels just to get the job done on time. The minority congressmen were given almost 80 percent of the total time allotted in plenary for interpellation," Romualdez said. "With democracy at work in the House, we manage to craft a national budget that is truly a collaborative product of hard-working

legislators. No pork, no parking, and no delay. With the swift approval of the 2020 budget, we are confident that we will meet the country's economic target of 6.5 percent to 7.5 percent growth for this year up to 2020."

Other bills approved on third and final reading include proposals that would benefit public sector workers, particularly the proposed Salary Standardization Law 5 and the lowering of the optional retirement age of government employees to 56 years old.

Perfect vision for 2020  
Cayetano noted that the year ahead represents a "perfect vision" towards the House's goal of uplifting the lives of Filipinos, which is the core of most of the priority legislative measures.

"What we can do is focus on things that matter. Arts, sports, culture are always part of education. (These) teach us hard work, discipline, teamwork, so there are things that we can really do," Cayetano said. "Kung ano man ang ilagay natin sa edukasyon, sa health, sa peace and order, sa defense, hindi naman masasayang yun (Whatever we put and allocate for education, health, peace and order, defense, would not be wasted)."

Romualdez said for 2020, the House would pass important measures, such as the creation of new departments - a Department of Filipinos Overseas and Foreign Employment and a Department of Disaster and Resilience -- as well as the bill allowing the Department of Health to set and approve the bed capacity of its retained hospitals nationwide.

"Our focus right now is to work hard in legislation and pass all the measures needed to improve the living condition of our people. That is the marching order from the President," he said. "We are busy with our work, and we intend to keep it that way. We all have roles to play, and we are just glad to be given the opportunity to serve." (PNA)

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### Prayer for Healing

**JESUS**, may Your pure and healthy blood circulate in my ailing organism, and may Your pure and healthy body transform my weak body, and may a healthy and vigorous life throb within me, if it is truly Your holy will. Amen.

O BLOOD AND WATER WHICH FLOWED OUT FROM THE HEART OF JESUS AS A FOUNTAIN OF MERCY FOR US, I TRUST IN YOU!



*Holy God, Holy Mighty One, Holy Immortal One, Have Mercy on us and on the whole world. Amen.*

### 3 O'CLOCK PRAYER

"You died Jesus, but the source of life flowed out for souls and the ocean of mercy opened up for the whole world. O Fountain of Life immeasurable Divine Mercy, cover the whole world and empty Yourself out upon us."

"O Blood and Water which flowed out from the heart of Jesus as a Fountain of Mercy for us, I trust in you!"

"Holy God, Holy Mighty One, Holy Immortal One have mercy on us and on the whole world." (3x) Amen.

Jesus, King of Mercy, I trust in you!

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