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Congress and

The Best Interest of the Nation in a War-Threatened World is Greatly Served Through a Vast Understanding By Congress of the Problems of the Armed Forces of the Philippines



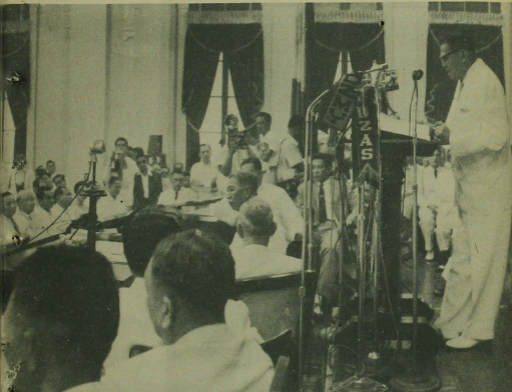
President Magsaysay is shown in photo above delivering his state of the nation address before members of the Senate and the House of Representatives during opening of third session of third Congress last week. The President dwelt mostly on the national economy, set 10 legislative guideposts, and stressed the happiness and the security of the common man as the basic philosophy of the administration.

CONGRESS is, in political science, one of the three great co-equal branches of our government; the executive department is another; and, the last, but not the least, is the judiciary. It is Congress that formulates the law. The executive department implements the law. And the judiciary interprets the law.

In formulating the law, Congress lays down governmental policy. That is exactly what Congress does when it approves an appropriation bill that becomes later on an appropriation law. How Congress goes about this duty is interesting to the Armed Forces since it is Congress, as the spokesman of the people, that de-

the AFP

by Lieutenant Colonel Ignacio Coloma



termine the size, activity or role of the military, naval and air arms of the Republic.

Appropriations Committee

A few days after the opening of each regular session of Congress, the President submits his budget for the next fiscal year. Proposed appropriations for the Armed Forces are included in the budget submitted.

The budget message of the President, together with the budget

itself, is referred right away to the Committee on Appropriations of the House of Representatives. The budget is not submitted to the Senate because all money bills, by provision of the constitution, must emanate from the lower house of the Legislature.

The Committee on Appropriations is composed of a chairman and 16 members. The chairman and a majority of the members belong to the majority party which

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is the Nacionalista Party at this writing. However, the Democratic Party and the Liberal Party are represented in accordance with the applicable rules and regulations of the House of Representatives.

The Committee on Appropriations then conducts hearings on the budget. Usually, these hearings are scheduled after the Technical Staff of the Committee has sufficiently studied the budget proposals of the President. The purpose of these hearings is to clear some doubts which the members of the committee may have about certain allocations in the budget. As the chairman of the committee usually puts it, the hearings are for the purpose of understanding each other.

When the time of the Armed Forces comes for such hearings, all the brass are there: The Secretary of National Defense, the Chief of Staff, the Assistant Chiefs of Staff at the GHQ level, and the commanders of all major services with their respective staffs.

All the comptrollers together with their respective specialists, who are principally concerned in the hearings, are always around during the hearings. All sorts of data are brought with them so as to be ready when called for.

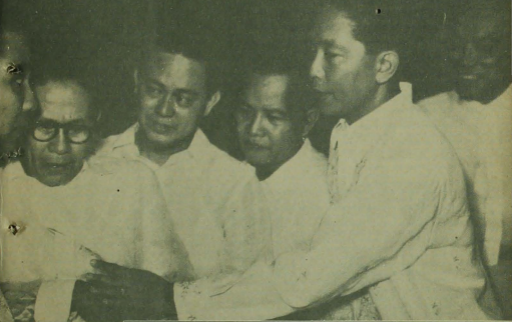
Committee Hearings

The questions asked during the hearings vary: sometimes, they affect the general features of the budget proposals; on other occasions, they refer to minor details



that may not have been expected at all.

Usually, a majority of the inquiries comes from the minority party members. However, when Congress is not in good terms with the executive branch of the government, it is the other way around. Hence, when the budget proposal of the President is having a rough sailing in Congress, it is either because the fiscalizing



Congress holds the government purse and thereby determines, among others, the size and activity of the defense forces. The President's budget proposals are studied during hearings by Appropriations Committee composed of representatives of both the majority and the minority parties in Congress, from which money bills emanate.

efforts of the minority is effective or the majority is also fiscalizing the administration. The hardest situation of all is when the latter happens, because, if it is only the minority that is objecting, the President's budget will nevertheless be approved.

The budget hearings sometimes become difficult for those who operate the government agencies. This is because almost all the

agencies in the government ask for as much funds as they can. This is a natural tendency, as the agencies have to be adequately financed in all their activities in order to have satisfactory performance.

Every year, the revenue of the government is always less than the total amount asked for by the different agencies for expenditure. Congress has either to impose additional taxes on the people or re-

duce the budgetary requests of the agencies. The policy of the present administration, as announced last year, is to avoid imposing additional taxes on the people. Because of this, the tendency of Congress is to trim the budgets. When a slashing of the budget is unavoidable, the big agencies are the ones whose budgetary requests are reduced. The Armed Forces of the Philippines is one of them. And experience has shown that the Armed Forces is always vulnerable.

the floor is also an invitation for discussion and comment from other members of Congress.

The usual method of approving the budget is the approval of the budget bill on a page-to-page basis. Objectionable items are subjected to all sorts of scrutiny and attack as they are reached.

There is not much that can be done during the floor discussions by budget experts from the Armed Forces. They can only give data from the sides of the session hall. These data or information mate-



Budget proposals of the AFP are prepared through combined efforts of comptrollers and fiscal specialists, with an eye on defense and economic projects and programs. Slashes of budget by Congress, however, do not spare outlay for AFP. Fund shortage had always been AFP's biggest problem.

Floor Discussions

The floor discussions on the budget are held after the Appropriations Committee has made its report to the Speaker. It is during the rendition of the committee report that the Chairman of the committee makes of record his recommendation that the budget, including that of the Armed Forces, be approved. The report made on

materials are usually given to members of the majority party for use in the defense of the recommended budget against attacks from the minority. The attacks are general in nature so that the counter-attacks are also in general terms.

Working for the restoration of items cut by the committee is difficult. Experience has shown that members of the Armed Forces are

greatly handicapped when it comes to working for restoration of items cut. A legislator sympathetic to the Armed Forces may sponsor the move for the restoration, and a group of army officers conversant with the budget may be designated by the AFP to assist the sponsor. Such was the recent assignment of some AFP officers, of which this writer was one. The AFP officers have already planned their moves, made arrangements, and walked with the sponsoring legislator up to

Mutual Acquaintance

There has been mentioned now and then of the so called "Malacañang breakfast" during sessions of Congress. These and similar devices are believed intended to promote good relationship between the Chief Executive and Congress. They are also designed to enable the individual members of Congress or the President to learn the facts about any given problem and arrive at a common understanding.

On the AFP level, the clamour



Year-round program of acquainting Congressmen with AFP — what it has, lacks, and needs — is always necessary. Sympathetic members of Congress have often taken up cudgels for Armed Forces. Experience had shown the AFP is vulnerable to upset of budget and projects. Among others, AFP's participation, in economic development which is a major concern of the President entails finances.

the session hall, together with the members of the technical staff of the Committee on Appropriations in the Senate, when a member boomed: "Mr. President, I request that all persons not members of the Senate clear the floor." Non-legislators, the army officers included, scampered to the sides of the session hall, and the plans were altered

from some quarters is for a year-round program to acquaint our Senators and Congressmen about the Armed Forces: what it has and what it lacks. Mutual acquaintance between Congress and the other agencies of the government is necessary for a better insight into the needs of one another. The military does not engage in politics merely because it develops an



Regular session of Congress is of special interest to those who operate agencies, because the agencies have to be adequately financed in all their activities to have satisfactory performance. Photo above shows members of the Cabinet during opening of third session of third Congress last week.

acquaintance with Congress. Acquaintanceship is proper up to the point where interference in the work of each does not result. The effort is for mutual benefit, for the legislators to know what the Armed Forces needs; and, for the Armed Forces officers and men to have an opportunity to inform their law-makers about their difficulties, which the former will be glad to solve whenever they can for the general welfare.

It is the duty of the Armed Forces to advise Congress through the President. It is to Congress' advantage, in turn, to seek that advice. Like any other advice, however, the recommendation of the Armed Forces may be accepted or rejected.

What is necessary is a better understanding by Congress of the

problems of the Armed Forces. The main thing is not that of getting a bigger appropriation this year, or next year. The primordial thing is the best interest of the nation in a war-threatened world.



Lt. Col. Ignacio Coloma