

## **PRIVILEGE SPEECH**

15<sup>TH</sup> City Council  
Sangguniang Panlungsod  
Davao City  
October 14, 2008

### **TEXT MASSAGING REVENUES TO FUND EDUCATION NEEDS**

By Councilor Pilar C. Braga, Ph.D

Madam President, our country is confronted by a multitude of problems but none as serious and encompassing as the grave condition of our educational system today: the shortage in classrooms, school facilities and educational materials, the shortage of teachers in public schools, and the mediocre performance of our students.

Last year (2007), there were 267 barangays without a public elementary school while four municipalities lacked public high schools. Yet in reality, the shortage is much bigger considering that public elementary and high schools now operate in double shifts, compromising standards of public school education.

Our schoolchildren are also undernourished – according to World Bank data collected from 2000-2006, 28 percent of under-fives are suffering from: underweight, moderate and severe, compared to 15 percent for the whole Asia-Pacific region. In the midst of a food crisis and skyrocketing prices of basic commodities, schoolchildren from the poorest families face the threat of hunger or malnutrition even as the government has resorted to allocating food subsidies.

These are roadblocks that keep us from moving forward. Given the scarce resources of the national government, there is a need to be innovative in our approach in harnessing investments for education and health modernization programs.

Only recently, the National Telecommunications Commission explored the possibility of lowering access charges between telecommunication companies for text messaging or short messaging service (SMS). A leading senator, on the other hand, has proposed to use part of the net revenues from text messaging of telecommunication companies to meet pressing education needs of the country.

Senate Bill 2402 introduced by Senator Richard Gordon seeks to create and fund the Health and Education Acceleration Program

(HEAP) to lead the rehabilitation and acceleration of the country's educational system and health programs. The senate bill proposes to require every commercial mobile service provider to remit to the HEAP fund half or 50 percent of its net revenues arising from text messages.

The senator noted that telecommunication companies earn multi-billion a year from text messages alone. National Telecommunications Commission figures show that the three telecommunication companies earned P77 billion from text messages alone in 2007.

Assuming that there are 400 million text messages sent per day at P1.00 for every text message, and half of the earnings, or P200 million a day, are given to the HEAP Corporation, it would be enough to address the country's backlogs in education and health infrastructures.

These funds shall be earmarked for the construction of classrooms, computer and science laboratories, clean cafeterias and school facilities for Filipino schoolchildren's holistic development; acquisition of books, desks, chairs and instruction materials; hiring of teachers, regular conduct of teacher-training programs, and augmentation of teachers' pay; provision of scholarship grants to deserving students; establishment of school clinics with dental equipment and a regular staff nurse; and school feeding and vaccination programs.

Using 2007 estimates, there are 53,958,000 mobile phone subscribers in the country. Assuming that every subscriber sends out an average of 10 text messages daily through the country's telecommunication networks at the cost of P1 peso per text message, the Fund's 50% share in revenues a day would amount to P269,790,000. This would translate to a disposable fund of P98,473,350,000 in one year.

Senator Richard J. Gordon, chairman of the Senate government corporations and public enterprise committee, said the three telecommunication giants—Smart Communications, Globe Telecom, and Sun Cellular—agreed to the proposal of sharing part their revenues from local text messages to fund the Health and Education Acceleration Program (HEAP).

Public hearings for this senate bill are currently conducted. The bill is generating support from various sectors, foremost are the

education parents and the telecommunication companies themselves.

Far from being perfect, the bill is undergoing refinements. But for the sole intention that education problems are sought to be alleviated and minimized, the bill needs to be supported.

Madam President, allow me to pass the necessary resolution to cover this matter at the appropriate time.

**PILAR C. BRAGA, PhD**  
City Councilor