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Hontiveros urges Senate to finish strong, pass bill on increasing excise tax on tobacco

By Mario Casayuran

Opposition Senator Risa Hontiveros urged Monday the Senate leadership to finish strong on health reforms in the closing stretch of the 17th Congress.



Senator Risa Hontiveros
(Czar Dancel / MANILA BULLETIN)

Hontiveros made the call as the Senate prepared itself Monday for floor debate on a bill increasing excise taxes for tobacco products to finance key services under the country's Universal Health Care (UHC) program.

She said that the passage of the measure would reduce the incidence of smoking among Filipinos and at the same time fund accessible and effective health programs for all.

"Let us not miss this opportunity to save Filipino lives, as well as ensure our good health and well-being. One of the best parting gifts from the Senate this 17th Congress would be the passage of a law that will reduce incidence of smoking among Pinoys and at the same time fund accessible and effective health programs for all," she said.

As vice-chairperson of the Senate Committee on Health and Demography, Hontiveros said that revenues from higher taxes on tobacco products would provide much-needed funding for the full implementation cost of the Universal Health Care Act (RA 11233) pegged at P 258 billion.

"We need this increase in excise taxes if we ever hope to provide proper funding and resources for the Universal Health Care Act and fulfill its promise of affordable and efficient healthcare in every part of the country," she stressed.

Hontiveros also said that the higher taxes on available tobacco products would be crucial to bringing down the number of Filipinos who may suffer from smoking-related complications in the following years.

Citing data from the Department of Health (DOH), she said that increasing the prices of cigarettes may lead to as many as 3.2 million Filipinos quitting tobacco use, thus averting at least 713,000 deaths.

She cited that a World Health Organization (WHO) report has noted the effectiveness of higher taxes on tobacco in discouraging tobacco use particularly among the youth and impoverished sectors, saving them from cancer, heart disease, and other tobacco-related risks.