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Senate to push higher cigarette taxes, ROTC

MANILA, Philippines — The Senate wants to pass measures on higher taxes for cigarettes and the reimposition of the mandatory military training for high school students this week.

Sen. Sherwin Gatchalian noted that this week would be “critical” for most bills, as there are only six session days left before the 17th Congress adjourns.

“This week is very critical—in fact, very critical to most of the bills. If any of the bills does not reach third reading by Wednesday, it would be hard to have these approved and become a law,” he said in a radio interview.

He said the priority measures to be tackled included the increase in sin taxes on tobacco products.

Gatchalian is the author of Senate Bill No. 2177, which seeks to raise tobacco excise to P70 per pack by 2020, followed by a 9-percent annual increase.

“The commitment of the senators is to prioritize the sin tax. So the other bills are secondary for now. We will focus time on this sin tax bill. We can make it before the 17th Congress adjourns,” Gatchalian said.

The Senate, which resumed its session on May 20, will adjourn on June 7, which means there are only six session days left—three this week, and three next week.

Universal health care

The sin tax measure seeks to generate more funds for the universal health care law recently signed by President Duterte.

Around P258 million is needed to fund its first year of implementation.

He said a sponsorship of the bill was needed by Monday so that interpellation may begin by Tuesday, to be followed by a period of amendments on Wednesday.

This will lead to a bicameral conference and ratification by next week.

Gatchalian said he would also push for the passage of the mandatory Reserve Officers’ Training Corps (ROTC) program for senior high school students.

This was after the House of Representatives approved its own version on third and final reading last week.

Gatchalian said he would sponsor the Senate’s version of the bill as this was his commitment to defense officials.