



Increased tobacco, alcohol taxes to generate P137.2b

By Julito G. Rada

FINANCE Secretary Carlos Dominguez III said Congress' ratification of the bill increasing excise taxes on alcohol, heated tobacco and vapor products will raise an additional P137.2 billion over a five-year period to augment funding for the Universal Health Care Program.

Dominguez said Friday the reconciled version of the bill, which was ratified Wednesday by the Senate and the House of Representatives, would increase funds for the UHC, and deter binge drinking and the use of harmful vaping and heated tobacco products, especially among the youth and low-income consumers who are sensitive to price increases.

"We thank the Senate and the House of Representatives for ratifying the bill, which is an investment in the future of our people, and will help President

Duterte deliver on his administration's goal of providing a safe, comfortable, and healthy life for every law-abiding Filipino," Dominguez said.

He thanked Senator Pia Cayetano, who chairs the Senate ways and means committee, and Albay Representative Joey Salceda, the chairperson of the House ways and means committee, for "painstakingly studying the measure and holding extensive consultations with concerned stakeholders, and spearheading efforts that led to the swift approval of the

bill in their respective chambers."

He said Sen. Cayetano and Rep. Salceda both demonstrated their strong advocacy to push for better health care for the people by committing to align the proposals of the Senate and the House to ensure that the ratified version would get approved before the Congress adjourned for the holidays. This gives the President enough time to review the measure and sign it into law, in time for its implementation at the start of 2020.

President Duterte earlier certified the Senate version of this sin tax reform bill as an urgent measure. The House of Representatives approved its version of the measure in August.

Finance Undersecretary Karl Kendrick Chua said under the reconciled bill approved by the bicameral conference committee, 60 percent of revenues collected from the excise taxes on alcohol products and e-cigarettes, such as heated tobacco and vapor (vaping) products, would go to the UHC, while 20 percent would be spent for medical assistance and health facilities.