2 solons back
PITC's program
for cheap drugs

Congressmen Ferjenel Biron (Iloilo), vice
chairman of the House committee on health,
and Florencio "Bem" Noel (AnWaray), a member
of the committee on trade, said they are support-
ive of the efforts of the state-owned Philippine
International Trading Corp. (PITC) to import
low-priced, but quality medicines.

Noel said the administration is trying its
best to look for solutions to the prohibitive cost
of medicines to ease the people's dependence
on branded drugs. This is particularly true to
people who have ailments or are on mainte-
nance medication.

One expensive anti-hypertensive drug which
the government is trying to import when its pat-
ent expires on June 13, 2007 is "amlodipine bes-
sylate," which is being marketed in the country
by a multinational drug company as Norvasc.

However, the drug company is blocking the
government's move to import the medicine,
filling a case against PITC and the Bureau of
Food and Drugs (BFAD) for alleged patent
infringement.

"If the intention of PITC is to find a way to
make amlodipine besylate affordable to every-
one, my support is 100 percent," Noel said.

Biron said PITC should be supported to check
the monopoly by multinational drug companies
(MNCs) and stop the practice of overpricing of
pharmaceutical products.

"PITC should be lauded for its effort to bring
down the cost of amlodipine besylate and other
life-saving drugs. It's about time to end the
sufferings of our people. It is a pity that some
of our poor countrymen have died not because
of their illness but due to their inability to buy
medicines because they cannot afford these,"
Biron said.

The solon is hopeful that the committee on
health would be able to come out soon with a
report on House Bill 3830 which he authored.
The bill is seeking the creation of a "drug regula-
tion board" whose main function is to regulate
and lower the prices of medicines.

He criticized the alleged collusion and mo-
nopolize the pricing of medicines.

Biron and Noel said it is in the national inter-
est that the government address the high cost of
medicines, which past congressional investiga-
tions showed are controlled by multinational
drug companies and are 400 percent higher than
those sold in India and Pakistan.