

## 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 supportive 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 maintenance medication.

One expensive anti-hypertensive drug which the government is trying to import when its patent expires on June 13, 2007 is "amlodipine besylate," 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, filing 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 everyone, 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 regulation board" whose main function is to regulate and lower the prices of medicines.

He criticized the alleged collusion and monopolize the pricing of medicines.

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