

EN BANC

[G.R. No. 209287, February 03, 2015]

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[G.R. No. 209135]

AUGUSTO L. SYJUCO JR., PH.D., PETITIONER, VS. FLORENCIO B. ABAD, IN HIS CAPACITY AS THE SECRETARY OF DEPARTMENT OF BUDGET AND MANAGEMENT; AND HON. FRANKLIN MAGTUNAO DRILON, IN HIS CAPACITY AS THE SENATE PRESIDENT OF THE PHILIPPINES, RESPONDENTS.

[G.R. No. 209136]

MANUELITO R. LUNA, PETITIONER, VS. SECRETARY FLORENCIO ABAD, IN HIS OFFICIAL CAPACITY AS HEAD OF THE DEPARTMENT OF BUDGET AND MANAGEMENT; AND EXECUTIVE SECRETARY PAQUITO OCHOA, IN HIS OFFICIAL CAPACITY AS ALTER EGO OF THE PRESIDENT, RESPONDENTS.

[G.R. No. 209155]

ATTY. JOSE MALVAR VILLEGAS, JR., PETITIONER, VS. THE HONORABLE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY PAQUITO N. OCHOA, JR.; AND THE SECRETARY OF BUDGET AND MANAGEMENT FLORENCIO B. ABAD, RESPONDENTS.

[G.R. No. 209164]

PHILIPPINE CONSTITUTION ASSOCIATION (PHILCONSA), REPRESENTED BY DEAN FROILAN M. BACUNGAN, BENJAMIN E. DIOKNO AND LEONOR M. BRIONES, PETITIONERS, VS. DEPARTMENT OF BUDGET AND MANAGEMENT AND/OR HON. FLORENCIO B. ABAD, RESPONDENTS.

[G.R. No. 209260]

INTEGRATED BAR OF THE PHILIPPINES (IBP), PETITIONER, VS. SECRETARY FLORENCIO B. ABAD OF THE DEPARTMENT OF BUDGET AND MANAGEMENT (DBM), RESPONDENT.

[G.R. No. 209442]

GRECO ANTONIOUS BEDA B. BELGICA; BISHOP REUBEN M. ABANTE AND REV. JOSE L. GONZALEZ, PETITIONERS, VS. PRESIDENT BENIGNO SIMEON C. AQUINO III, THE SENATE OF THE PHILIPPINES, REPRESENTED BY SENATE PRESIDENT FRANKLIN M. DRILON; THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, REPRESENTED BY SPEAKER FELICIANO BELMONTE, JR.; THE EXECUTIVE OFFICE, REPRESENTED BY EXECUTIVE SECRETARY PAQUITO N. OCHOA, JR.; THE DEPARTMENT OF BUDGET AND MANAGEMENT, REPRESENTED BY SECRETARY FLORENCIO ABAD; THE DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE, REPRESENTED BY SECRETARY CESAR V. PURISIMA; AND THE BUREAU OF TREASURY, REPRESENTED BY ROSALIA V. DE LEON, RESPONDENTS.

[G.R. No. 209517]

CONFEDERATION FOR UNITY, RECOGNITION AND ADVANCEMENT OF GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES (COURAGE), REPRESENTED BY ITS 1ST VICE PRESIDENT, SANTIAGO DASMARINAS, JR.; ROSALINDA NARTATES, FOR HERSELF AND AS NATIONAL PRESIDENT OF THE CONSOLIDATED UNION OF EMPLOYEES NATIONAL HOUSING AUTHORITY (CUE-NHA); MANUEL BAFLAGON, FOR HIMSELF AND AS PRESIDENT OF THE SOCIAL WELFARE EMPLOYEES ASSOCIATION OF THE PHILIPPINES, DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WELFARE AND DEVELOPMENT CENTRAL OFFICE (SWEAP-DSWD CO); ANTONIA PASCUAL, FOR HERSELF AND AS NATIONAL PRESIDENT OF THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRARIAN REFORM EMPLOYEES ASSOCIATION (DAREA); ALBERT MAGALANG, FOR HIMSELF AND AS PRESIDENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT AND MANAGEMENT BUREAU EMPLOYEES UNION (EMBEU); AND MARCIAL ARABA, FOR HIMSELF AND AS PRESIDENT OF THE KAPISANAN PARA SA KAGALINGAN NG MGA KAWANI NG MMDA (KKK-MMDA), PETITIONERS, VS. BENIGNO SIMEON C. AQUINO III, PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES; PAQUITO OCHOA, JR., EXECUTIVE SECRETARY; AND HON. FLORENCIO B. ABAD, SECRETARY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF BUDGET AND MANAGEMENT, RESPONDENTS.

[G.R. No. 209569]

VOLUNTEERS AGAINST CRIME AND CORRUPTION (VACC), REPRESENTED BY DANTE L. JIMENEZ, PETITIONER, VS. PAQUITO N. OCHOA, EXECUTIVE SECRETARY, AND FLORENCIO B. ABAD, SECRETARY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF BUDGET AND MANAGEMENT, RESPONDENTS.

R E S O L U T I O N

BERSAMIN, J.:

The Constitution must ever remain supreme. All must bow to the mandate of this law. Expediency must not be allowed to sap its strength nor greed for power debase its rectitude.^[1]

Before the Court are the Motion for Reconsideration^[2] filed by the respondents, and the Motion for Partial Reconsideration^[3] filed by the petitioners in G.R. No. 209442.

In their Motion for Reconsideration, the respondents assail the decision^[4] promulgated on July 1 2014 upon the following procedural and substantive errors, viz:

PROCEDURAL

I

WITHOUT AN ACTUAL CASE OR CONTROVERSY, ALLEGATIONS OF GRAVE ABUSE OF DISCRETION ON THE PART OF ANY INSTRUMENTALITY OF THE GOVERNMENT CANNOT CONFER ON THIS HONORABLE COURT THE POWER TO DETERMINE THE CONSTITUTIONALITY OF THE DAP AND NBC NO. 541

II

PETITIONERS' ACTIONS DO NOT PRESENT AN ACTUAL CASE OR CONTROVERSY AND THEREFORE THIS HONORABLE COURT DID NOT ACQUIRE JURISDICTION

III

PETITIONERS HAVE NEITHER BEEN INJURED NOR THREATENED WITH INJURY AS A RESULT OF THE OPERATION OF THE DAP AND THEREFORE SHOULD HAVE BEEN HELD TO HAVE NO STANDING TO BRING THESE SUITS FOR CERTIORARI AND PROHIBITION

IV

NOR CAN PETITIONERS' STANDING BE SUSTAINED ON THE GROUND THAT THEY ARE BRINGING THESE SUITS AS CITIZENS AND AS TAXPAYERS

V

THE DECISION OF THIS HONORABLE COURT IS NOT BASED ON A CONSIDERATION OF THE ACTUAL APPLICATIONS OF THE DAP IN 116 CASES BUT SOLELY ON AN ABSTRACT CONSIDERATION OF NBC NO. 541^[5]

SUBSTANTIVE

I

THE EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT PROPERLY INTERPRETED "SAVINGS" UNDER THE RELEVANT PROVISIONS OF THE GAA

II

ALL DAP APPLICATIONS HAVE APPROPRIATION COVER

III

THE PRESIDENT HAS AUTHORITY TO TRANSFER SAVINGS TO OTHER DEPARTMENTS PURSUANT TO HIS CONSTITUTIONAL POWERS

IV

THE 2011, 2012 AND 2013 GAAS ONLY REQUIRE THAT REVENUE COLLECTIONS FROM EACH SOURCE OF REVENUE ENUMERATED IN THE BUDGET PROPOSAL MUST EXCEED THE CORRESPONDING REVENUE TARGET

V

THE OPERATIVE FACT DOCTRINE WAS WRONGLY APPLIED^[6]

The respondents maintain that the issues in these consolidated cases were mischaracterized and unnecessarily constitutionalized; that the Court's interpretation of *savings* can be overturned by legislation considering that savings is defined in the General Appropriations Act (GAA), hence making savings a statutory issue;^[7] that the withdrawn unobligated allotments and unreleased appropriations constitute savings and may be used for augmentation;^[8] and that the Court should apply legally recognized norms and principles, most especially the presumption of good faith, in resolving their motion.^[9]

On their part, the petitioners in G.R. No. 209442 pray for the partial reconsideration of the decision on the ground that the Court thereby:

FAILED TO DECLARE AS UNCONSTITUTIONAL AND ILLEGAL ALL MONEYS UNDER THE DISBURSEMENT ACCELERATION PROGRAM (DAP) USED FOR ALLEGED AUGMENTATION OF APPROPRIATION ITEMS THAT DID NOT HAVE ACTUAL DEFICIENCIES^[10]

They submit that augmentation of items beyond the maximum amounts recommended by the President for the programs, activities and projects (PAPs) contained in the budget submitted to Congress should be declared unconstitutional.

Ruling of the Court

We deny the motion for reconsideration of the petitioners in G.R. No. 209442, and partially grant the motion for reconsideration of the respondents.

The procedural challenges raised by the respondents, being a mere rehash of their earlier arguments herein, are dismissed for being already passed upon in the assailed decision.

As to the substantive challenges, the Court discerns that the grounds are also reiterations of the arguments that were already thoroughly discussed and passed upon in the assailed decision. However, certain declarations in our July 1, 2014 Decision are modified in order to clarify certain matters and dispel further uncertainty.

The Court's power of judicial review

The respondents argue that the Executive has not violated the GAA because *savings* as a concept is an ordinary species of interpretation that calls for legislative, instead of judicial, determination.^[11]

This argument cannot stand.

The consolidated petitions distinctly raised the question of the constitutionality of the acts and practices under the DAP, particularly their non-conformity with Section 25(5), Article VI of the Constitution and the principles of separation of power and equal protection. Hence, the matter is still entirely within the Court's competence, and its determination does not pertain to Congress to the exclusion of the Court. Indeed, the interpretation of the GAA and its definition of savings is a foremost judicial function. This is because the power of judicial review vested in the Court is exclusive. As clarified in *Endencia and Jugo v. David*:^[12]

Under our system of constitutional government, the Legislative department is assigned the power to make and enact laws. The Executive department is charged with the execution of carrying out of the provisions of said laws. **But the interpretation and application of said laws belong exclusively to the Judicial department. And this authority to interpret and apply the laws extends to the Constitution. Before the courts can determine whether a law is constitutional or not, it will have to interpret and ascertain the meaning not only of said law, but also of the pertinent portion of the Constitution in order to decide whether there is a conflict between the two, because if there is, then the law will have to give way and has to be declared invalid and unconstitutional.**

x x x x

We have already said that the Legislature under our form of government is assigned the task and the power to make and enact laws, but not to interpret them. This is more true with regard to the interpretation of the basic law, the Constitution, which is not within the sphere of the Legislative department. If the Legislature may declare what a law means, or what a specific portion of the Constitution means, especially after the courts have in actual case ascertain its meaning by interpretation and applied it in a decision, this would surely cause confusion and instability in judicial processes and court decisions. Under such a system, a final court determination of a case based on a judicial interpretation of the law of the Constitution may be undermined or even annulled by a subsequent and different interpretation of the law or of the Constitution by the Legislative department. That would be neither wise nor desirable, besides being clearly violative of the fundamental, principles of our constitutional system of government, particularly those governing the separation of powers.^[13]

The respondents cannot also ignore the glaring fact that the petitions primarily and significantly alleged grave abuse of discretion on the part of the Executive in the implementation of the DAP. The resolution of the petitions thus demanded the exercise by the Court of its aforescribed power of judicial review as mandated by the