

INSIGHT FROM A DBM JUNIOR LEADER

The Struggle to Pass a Salary Hike

In April 2015, the DBM spearheaded the review of the government's compensation system, three years after the full implementation of the Salary Standardization Law (SSL) III in 2012. The review aimed to benchmark government compensation against the private sector, and to identify a proper strategy to make government pay competitive.

Some months after the review had begun, I was transferred from the Systems and Productivity Improvement Bureau to the Office of Asec. Myrna Chua. My new boss' first assignment for me was to work on the proposal on compensation adjustment, dubbed SSL 2015. However, I was still in college when SSL III was passed in 2009, so I barely understood how it was crafted. At the same time, I also had little background in compensation-related matters.

Nonetheless, the potential of our SSL 2015 proposal, which my boss said would feature many improvements compared to its predecessor, encouraged me to take on the task. The proposal would be based on a more comprehensive study, which covered comparable positions in the private sector. Moreover, it would aim to increase not only the salaries of government workers, but also ensure higher take-home pay.

Finalizing the proposal was both challenging and inspiring. It meant late nights and weekends in the office, working to make sure that our figures tallied and that all our information was correct. We dealt with follow-ups and queries from various groups and personalities as to when the SSL 2015 proposal would be submitted. But the work was inspiring because I knew that once completed, this round of compensation adjustment would benefit 1.5 million government employees.

It was a proposal that was not easy to "sell." Yes, the proposal was meant to raise government pay. We were introducing a new round of increases in basic salary over the next four years, and institutionalizing the grant of a Mid-Year Bonus equivalent to one month's salary and an enhanced PBB. How was it hard to sell then, right?

By Jessica D. Pedro¹

Unexpectedly, the proposal was met with criticisms, if not opposition. Some people looked at the proposal solely based on the Salary Schedule, which only referred to the monthly basic salary. They focused only on the P500-increase per month and not on the additional one-month bonus. They compared what a higher-ranking official would get over the entry-level employee. While their observations might have been valid, presenting them in social media without the proper context painted the wrong picture. We were not increasing salaries for the singular purpose of doing so, but more important, we were adopting a compensation strategy that would address gaps in the current system, one of which was that managers and executives in the government were paid much less than their private sector counterparts.

Getting the President's approval was a major milestone. As if the journey before the presentation to the House was not gruelling enough, the way to the Senate took a different turn.

Receiving feedback that the compensation adjustment was "*abuloy* (alms)" and "*barya* (loose change)," and seeing a tarpaulin that said "oppose SSL 2015" was disheartening, to say the least. However, comments, such as, "This is a good proposal," "This is very much needed," and "We are excited for this to happen" brought me comfort and affirmation.

Despite discouragements and the negativity, I always tell myself that while we cannot please everybody, I know that I am part of an undertaking that will benefit all government employees and ultimately the rest of the country.

And, for me, that is what matters.

I believe that overall, the SSL 2015 was a success for the Philippine bureaucracy because it meant steering government compensation toward competitiveness. We should continue to strive for a more competitive and rewarding compensation system for the hardworking and dedicated public servants, which would lead to a more inspired bureaucracy, with a renewed spirit to be of greater service to the Filipino people.

¹ As of this publication, Pedro is an Executive Assistant III of the Office of Asec. Chua.