

Brazil Congress's Special Session Will Give 310 Legislators Money for Doing Nothing

Contributed by Iolando Lourenço
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The president of Brazil's Chamber of Deputies, Aldo Rebelo from the São Paulo PCdoB (Partido Comunista do Brasil - Brazil's Communist Party), said that it was necessary to call the National Congress into special session.

The session will run from today to February 14, 2006, in order to vote next year's budget and continue the investigations underway in the parliamentary investigatory commissions and the Ethics Council.

In the first phase of the session, through January 14, there will be neither floor sessions nor votes on bills. Votes on the floor will be held in the latter part of January and the first two weeks of February.

The special sessions will cost close to US\$ 43 million (100 million reais) to the federal government. Brazil has 513 House Representatives and 81 senators, but 310 House members will get their money without working since until January 13 the only congressmen working will be those involved with the CPIs (Parliamentary Inquiry Commissions), the Ethic Council and the Budget Committee.

According to Rebelo, the bills that will be slated for floor votes beginning January 15 include the Constitutional amendment bill (PEC) creating the Fundeb (Basic Education Fund), the PEC reducing the period of Congressional recess and eliminating pay bonuses for attending special sessions, and the bill instituting the General Law for Micro and Small Enterprise.

Rebelo said that placing the PEC to reduce the period of Congressional recess on the agenda was a personal commitment, based on his understanding that it is something society expects and that it is needed to put an end to so many special sessions.

"I believe that shortening the recess is a requirement for the House to function better. And, if there is so much embarrassment over being paid to attend the special sessions, it is natural for this payment to be ended," the deputy affirmed.

He advised deputies not to be absent at the special session, lest they suffer the sanctions stipulated in the Rules of the House and the Constitution.

According to the Rules, Rebelo explained, deputies who miss sessions forfeit their pay. Deputies who miss a third or more of the sessions are liable to political punishment, that is, the loss of their mandate. "That's in the Constitution," he said.

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