Albay Rep. Joey S. Salceda has filed in Congress House Bill 4581, which aims to boost the country’s scientific innovations and inventions, research and development (R&D) toward social progress and global competitiveness. The measure projects a budget that could reach P672 billion by 2022.

Salceda said the measure, titled Science for Change Program (S4CP) Act, gives special focus on “science- and-technology education, training, and services,” and supports “indigenous, appropriate and self-reliant scientific and technological capabilities, and their application to the country’s productive systems and national life.”

S4CP is Salceda’s fourth bill that seeks to pursue a strong science and technology (S&T) drive in the country, as an “essential tool for national development and progress”. The three other bills involve the creation of a nuclear commission, revival of the Balik Scientist Program and the creation of metrology institute, to modernizes and standardize the country’s measurement system. He had also filed an earlier bill that seeks to create the country’s space agency.

Salceda said S4CP seeks to enhance and achieve a higher standard of S&T in the country to “contribute to the development of the economy and society and toward the improvement of the nation’s welfare by prescribing the basic policy requirements for the promotion of S&T, and comprehensively and systematically promoting policies for progress.”

He said S4CP consists of four components: Program Expansion in seven areas; New Programs in six areas; Grand Plan for Science and Technology; Human Resource Development; and Accelerated R&D Program for Capacity Building of Research and Development Institutions and Industrial Competitiveness.

The projected total R&D budget for 2017 is P5.8 billion. The bill proposes and estimates the R&D budget starting at P21 billion this year, doubling yearly over the five-year period, and will reach P672 billion in 2022.

In the last six years, Salceda pointed out, the Philippines’s scientific and technological indicators have improved significantly, based on the benchmark of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Unesco).

The Unesco prescribes that for a developing country, there should be 380 researchers, scientists and engineers (RSEs) per million population, and the percentage of the GDP expenditure on research and development (GERD) should be 1 percent at least. The number of RSEs in the country has increased from 180 in 2009 to 270 in 2013, while the budget of the Department of Science and Technology (DOST) has increased from P5.7 billion in 2009 to P20.8 billion in 2017, with R&D budget allocation increasing from P1 billion in 2009 to P5.8 billion in 2017.

Salceda noted that for the DOST HRD, the Philippine Science High School (PSHS) and the Science Education Institute (SEI) have significantly contributed to the RSEs. The PSHS increased the number of regional campuses from 11 in 2010 to 16 in 2016, with now one PSHS campus per region.

The number of students in PSHS has increased from 1,840 in 2009 to 8,083 in 2017, and is projected to hit 9,500 in 2021. The SEIs have, likewise, increased its freshman scholars intake, from 1,250 in 2010 to 5,590 in 2015. It has crafted the Grand Plan for S&T Human Resource Development that aims to enable the Philippines to achieve 380 RSEs by 2022, he added.

The DOST, Salceda said, must endeavor to significantly accelerate S&T and Innovation in the country through massive increase in investment on S&T HRD and R&D through the S4CP.
The program, he stressed, must be provided sufficient budget to underwrite all R&D efforts for the five-year period, as follows: 1) Niche Centers in the Regions for R&D (NICER), P3.2 billion; 2) R&D Leadership Program (RDLead), P6 billion; 3) Collaborative R&D to Leverage PH Economy (CRADLE) for RDIs and Industry, P3.2 billion; 4) Business Innovation through S&T (BIST) for Industry, P14.25 billion (25 industry sectors, at P50 million to P100 million per sector x 75); and 5) S&T HRD (STRAND, STAR, SRCUR).