

Still No Equity Bill, President Arroyo's US Visit a Spoiler? - MabuhayRadio

Written by Arturo P. Garcia

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Los Angeles- In an emergency meeting last night, the Justice for Filipino-American Veterans (JFAV) steering committee was informed that the equity bill was not discussed last Wednesday, June 25. The information from ACFV said the bill would be voted on the U.S. House of Representatives floor on Wednesday, June 25. But it was not the case.

Instead, the legislative visit or the lobby by President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo took precedence in the House of Representatives. She awarded the "order of the golden" heart in behalf of her government for US representatives even if the US lower house did not act upon the bill and discussed it on the floor.

The JFAV believes that PGMA did what all politicians do. Grab and claim the credit from the fruits of Filipino World War II veteran's advocacy. She said this is one of her major agenda in visiting the U.S.

But it seems she is duplicating what President Fidel Ramos did in 1997, which is to preempt the passage of the equity bill, claim credit for its victory and in the process jeopardize its approval.

The House in 1997 was poised to pass (with only 10 votes lacking) the equity bill when President Ramos and Alex Esclamado of the NaFFAA asked for the deal with the President Clinton. The deal was to ask Congress and grant the veterans \$ 20,000 lump-sum payment just like what the US Congress granted the Japanese detainees during World War II.

The rest was history. The equity bill was not passed. It was later buried with the Monica Lewinsky Scandal, Clinton impeachment, squabbling with the "all or nothing" stand of the other groups and then the Iraq War came.

Hereunder are excerpts from an article in the Manila Times that say it all.

The JFAV hopes for the best, expects the worst and are prepared to continue the struggle. There is no other avenue but to rely on the Filipino Community and its allies to lobby for the passage of the equity bill and fight racism at the same time.

We cannot rely on politicians like PGMA, the so called other "champions of equity," who kept promising us the equity bill would be passed but nothing has happened at all.

Veterans Bill Will Pass Before US Polls

216 American congressmen support passage of the long-awaited legislative measure
By Angelo S. Samonte, Reporter

American legislators have assured President Gloria Arroyo that the Veterans Equity bill would be passed by the House of Representatives before the US presidential elections in November this year.

"We will fix the loopholes. We will iron out the system and give due benefits to the Filipino veterans," said Congressman Bob Filner of California, one of the founders of the bi-partisan caucus which always supports Philippine interests.

Filner said funding for the \$300 monthly pension of Filipino veterans living in the Philippines, would come from the "fixing of the loopholes."

The so-called loophole refers to the claims of many American veterans that they must be disabled in order to be qualified to collect money claims.

Representative Filner said there were 218 members of the US House of Representatives support the bill. However, for the bill to be passed, it has to get two-third votes of the House or 290 votes. "We could do that. We will pass the bill," Filner said.

An appeal to the US House
Before leaving Washington DC, President Arroyo appealed to the members of the US House of Representatives to pass the Veterans Equity bill as a way of honoring the thousands of Filipino soldiers who fought side-by-side with the American soldiers during World War II.

The President issued her strong call when she visited Wednesday the Veterans Committee Hearing Room at the Cannon House Office Building of the US Capitol Complex.

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"It is time we honor the past as we build our future," the President told the RP-US Friendship Caucus, a group of some 90 members of the US House of Representatives supportive of Philippine interests, especially the Veterans Equity bill.

The President noted that the US Senate overwhelmingly voted for the passage of the bill and that she expects the House of Representatives to do the same.

"It is time to come here and tell you and press for the passage, for your support," the President said.

Mrs. Arroyo said that "when President Franklin Delano Roosevelt called on the Filipinos to serve in the US Armed Forces after [the attack on] Pearl Harbor, our fathers of the greatest generation heeded the call."

"The President of the US was our commander-in-chief. Filipinos fought as US soldiers side-by-side with Americans and died under the banner of the stars and stripes," she said. "They suffered from some of the most brutal acts during the last war, including the notorious Bataan Death March."

"Filipino war veterans brought freedom and human dignity back to Asia and the world," President Arroyo said, stressing that it is not too late "to honor the service of all our fathers—Americans and Filipinos." Meanwhile, President Arroyo already arrived in New York Wednesday night after a three-day working visit in Washington DC.

The President arrived at the Newark Liberty International Airport at exactly 10:15 p.m. She was scheduled to visit the New York Stock Exchange Thursday and the Bellevue Hospital for a brief tour and interaction with Filipinos working there.

Mrs. Arroyo will also lobby for Sen. Miriam Defensor-Santiago's appointment to the International Court of Justice, and will host a reception for that purpose. # # #

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