

Credit Grabber Disrupts FilVets' Lobby - MabuhayRadio

Written by Col. Romy Monteyro (Ret.)

Friday, 27 July 2007 02:49 - Last Updated Monday, 05 November 2007 14:59

Congressman Bob Filner correctly predicted that Eric Lachica would claim sole credit for "shepherding" the Filipino Veterans Equity Bill in the United States Congress. Mr. Filner is the chairman of the House Veterans Affairs Committee (VAC) and his prediction came during our pre-hearing meeting at his Congressional office in Washington, DC, on Feb. 14, 2007. Lachica is the self-appointed "lobbyist" and self-styled, self-anointed executive director of the American Coalition of Filipino Veterans (ACFV).

Lachica's high visibility in the fight for Filipino veterans' equity, brought about by his obnoxious behavior, cannot be denied. But it is unfair – to say the least – that he alone was responsible for bringing the Equity issue to the attention of Congress and for keeping it alive all these years.

More than grossly unfair is his shameless claim that the current gains of the Equity movement, more specifically the twin victories in the Senate and House Veterans Affairs Committee, should be credited to his supposedly "relentless lobbying"!

Lobbying Started in 1946

Long before Lachica or the ACFV got involved in the campaign, the Veterans Federation of the Philippines (VFP) has been lobbying Congress for the repeal or amendment of the Rescission Act of 1946, which took away all the benefits previously granted by Congress to the Filipino WWII veterans under the GI Bill of Rights. The VFP lobbying campaign was led by Col. Emmanuel de Ocampo, Col. Simeon Medalla, Brig. Gen. Marcos Agustin (more popularly known as Marking of the famed guerrilla unit he founded and led), Col. Ernesto Golez and Col. Francisco Quesada, and of course, Col. Edwin Ramsey. They started the campaign to repeal the Rescission Act as soon as it was signed into law in 1946.

There are various veterans' advocacy groups. Among them is San Diego's very own Filipino WWII Veterans Federation of San Diego County, founded by the late Resty Supnet, its first commander. He was succeeded by Manuel Braga, who has been involved in the veterans' equity movement since 1969. There is the National Network for Veterans Equity, headed by San Francisco lawyer Lourdes Tancinco. There is also the Veterans Equity Center, chaired by Luisa Antonio. And recently organized is the National Alliance for Veterans Equity (NAFVE), a conglomeration of organizations whose only goal is the passage of the Equity Bill. The NAFVE was a spin off of the Summit called by Philippine Ambassador to the U.S. Willy Gaa on Dec.

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6-7, 2006, in Washington, DC.

All the previous Philippine ambassadors to the United States – from the legendary Carlos P. Romulo to the present – have also been involved in the veterans' lobby. More lobbying was done by the past and present chiefs of the Office of Veterans Affairs who worked in the Philippine Embassy. One of the most-prominent among them is retired Brig. Gen. Tagumpay Nanadiego, a Battle of Bataan and Death March survivor.

Lachica admits and even boasts of his unconventional approach to lobbying such as picketing the White House and chaining the veterans to the White House fence. He interrupted the House VAC hearing being conducted by then chair, Congressman Bob Gilman, by parading a group of Filipino veterans whose mouths were duct-taped with Gilman's name written on the tape. He led recently a picket in San Francisco that called for the resignation of USVA Secretary Jim Nicholson. On the other hand, Lachica vehemently denies that his loud call for reduced benefits for the veterans which reverberated in the halls of Congress gave the Republican Congressmen and Senators the perfect cover to seek benefits for the FilVets at the barest minimum, or in the case of Congressman Steve Buyer, nothing at all!

To claim that he has kept the campaign for full equity alive is another lie. No amount of campaigning can keep a Congressional Bill alive without the necessary sponsors in both Chambers of Congress.

Where Credit Is Due

Credit to that goes to the Filipino veterans champions in Congress, Senators Daniel Akaka and Daniel Inouye; and Congressmen Bob Filner, Darrel Issa (and even the disgraced Randy Cunningham before him), Mike Honda and a number of others who have consistently filed and refilled the Equity Bill!

One cannot help but wonder aloud what victory Lachica is claiming when his toxic agenda was soundly defeated. He and the ACFV have consistently proposed the much lower benefits of only \$200 for the RP-based veterans and a flat rate of \$800 for those who reside in the U.S. which were never even seriously considered by both Committees.

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What we in the legitimate lobby have been able to obtain for the Filipino veterans is full equity (at par with their American counterparts) for those who reside in the U.S. and \$300 for those in the Philippines in the Senate version, and full equity and \$500 for US and RP based Filipino veterans respectively, in the House version. Add to that the widows' benefits and also burial benefits that Lachica never advocated.

The issue he must resolve is his lack of transparency in accounting for money he has been collecting from the members of the ACFV and outside donors, which he maintains is not the business of anyone else but him.

Lachica puts forth the very lame excuse that he is not responsible to the public at large but only to the ACFV members, which he has converted into a large group of robots who move at his every direction and whim. He identifies the ACFV as an open organization and not a charitable institution, whatever that means!

Marquez's Interview with Mr. Filner

On July 5, 2007, Rep. Bob Filner was interviewed by journalist Romy Marquez, in the presence of three other witnesses namely Manuel Braga, Amy Pond, one of Filner's staff assistants, and this writer. Representative Filner denounced Lachica's toxic agenda, blaming him for the defeat in the Senate VAC of full equity for all Filipino veterans.

In the same interview Representative Filner also raised the question of transparency in accounting for his collection of money from the members of the ACFV.

But if reports now going the rounds from sources sympathetic to Lachica are to be believed, Lachica claims Representative Filner denied he ever said those words.

I witnessed the interview and heard what was said. I say with finality on my word as an officer and a gentleman that Marquez' account of it was 100% accurate. Representative Filner has not told me of his alleged denial and until I hear from him personally, I'll never believe he did such a thing. I believe I know him too well to say that he would never allow himself to be used as tool

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by Lachica.

Manny Braga and I have worked with Congressman Bob Filner on the Equity Bill campaign for no less than nine years and all those years we've known him as someone who is definitely not an admirer of Eric Lachica. I cannot believe therefore, that Representative Filner would stake his reputation and put his credibility on the line by making a liar out of me, Manuel Braga, Amy Pond and Romy Marquez.

If he did, how he would look in the eyes of Amy Pond, his own staff member I dare not say. Both Manny Braga and I would react with great disbelief and shock.

It is said that a politician's word must always be taken with a grain of salt. But Rep. Bob Filner is not just a politician to me. He is a close friend. And if those reports turn out to be true, I will not only be dismayed. I will definitely feel betrayed.

Eric Lachica, the Boy Wonder of veterans' equity, the Wizard of Washington, DC, and "lobbyist" par excellence, etc., will continue to go his merry ways and claim over and over every credit for something he never achieved but rather, almost destroyed. But that is his nature. We Filipinos call someone like him as matapang ang apog.

General Taguba's View of Lachica

Retired Filipino-American U.S. Army Maj. Gen. Antonio Taguba views Lachica's rather unorthodox way of getting attention as a great "a tactical mistake," especially in reference to the picket line in San Francisco, where Lachica, a megaphone in hand, loudly demanded the resignation of Secretary Jim Nicholson. General Taguba earned his fame in the Abu Ghraib prison-scandal investigation in the Iraq War.

The general added that, that uncalled for act "did not advance the cause of the Filipino veterans." But Lachica remains unmoved, being what he is, even amidst criticisms from such a high-profile, very-credible personality as General Taguba.

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And since Secretary Nicholson recently announced his resignation, I can assure the good general, Lachica will take credit for that too!

To quote Jerry Adevosio, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo's Presidential Assistant on Veterans Affairs in reaction to Lachica's shameless claims, "What a great display of gall!"; # # #

Comments from Colonel Quesada:

Colonel Monteyro's piece was a stinging rebuke after having compiled evidences about his being systematically precluded from the truth, isolated from identity of his toil, and having been a victim of, an alleged credit- grabbing, or by elimination of those who are vulnerable to boding evil in our fragile society. He finally said farewell to his detractors and rejoined our consultative group like a robin's return in spring.

Life could be bitter to the bone when one is made a victim of depravity. You perhaps saw me who shied from that outfit because I have seen with my own eyes uncultivated feral characters within.

I truly know exactly how it feels to be a victim of evil wrought by want of wicked thought, and disrespect for us, fading veterans wasted by a poisoned pen. Life on this brave new world, we can not escape the weariness, the fever, and the fret. Before we pass the Gate, we looked at life as an empty dream, recalling today which seemed too late, albeit, only the wise lived yesterday, someone said.

"Honi soit qui mal pense"; (evil more accurately: shame on him whom evil thinks). As an old fading war-veteran, I have witnessed much retribution. "Though mills of the Creator grind slowly, they grind exceedingly small."; Best Wishes.

Col. (Ret. US) Frank B. Quesada, World War-II POW

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