

By JOSEPH G. LARIOS A

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CHICAGO (*jGLi*) – More than 13,000 undocumented immigrants turned up Wednesday (Aug. 15) at the Navy Pier in Chicago, Illinois and about 11,000 were processed while more than two thousands were turned away as they applied for the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program of the Obama administration that would give them protection from deportation and would let them apply for driver’s licenses and work permits.

The 13,000 are part of between 75,000 to 90,000 young residents of Illinois who are expected to sign up for the

immigration relief. Some 3,000 to 5,000 among them are Filipinos. And they are among the 1.2- up to 1.7-million, who will be applying for this immigration reform program nation wide.

Filipino-American Lawrence Benito, chief executive officer of the Chicago-based Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (ICIRR), said the ICIRR did not expect 13,000 to come to Navy Pier as his organization prepared only 7,5000 application packets. He said ICIRR welcomed 800 volunteers and 60 volunteer lawyers. The Milwaukee, Wisconsin-born Benito said 9,000 students pre-registered at the icirr.org website the night before.

“We will try very hard to accommodate all the applicants, including those, who were turned away for lack of enough application packets. We will continue to hold future workshops which are listed in our website,” according to the 42-year-old son of parents from Cabugao, Ilocos Sur in the Philippines.

“But for those applicants who have complicated issues,” Mr. Benito added, “they would need to talk to qualified attorneys.”

Another Filipino-American Jerry Clarito, executive officer of Chicago-based Alliance of Filipinos for Immigrant Rights and Empowerment (AFIRE), one of the affiliates of ICIRR, who has advanced training in New American Initiatives (NAI), acted as supervisor to go over some applications. He reviewed complicated applications and also acted as tour guide in the processing of applications in Navy Pier.

Another Filipino-American volunteer, Katherine Rivera, who was in the Navy Pier as early as 7 a.m. helping process applications like Mr. Clarito, said she processed 800 applications.

Dr. Juanita Salvador-Burris, former president of AFIRE, quoted Dr. Theresa Mah, policy consultant of the Coalition for a Better Chinese American Community, that the first applicant she processed was that of a young Filipino resident.

SLEPT OVERNIGHT TO BE AHEAD OF THE LINE

Laura Garcia, outgoing ICIRR NAI Director, said as early as 5 p.m.

on Tuesday (Aug. 14) while they were preparing the place at Navy Pier for the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals they already saw applicants starting to form the lines. Ms. Garcia is going to be replaced by Mr. Rudy Lozano.

“They formed the line as if they were watching a movie premiere” or about to buy a new Apple product as the

applicants slept overnight to be ahead in line.

Another prominent Filipino, who came at Navy Pier, was Jose Antonio Vargas, the Pulitzer Prize winning journalist, who was invited to join the stage at the Dream Relief Rally at Navy Pier. But Mr. Vargas, of DefineAmerican.com, came by not as an advocate but as a journalist, covering the event for *Time Magazine*.

A young girl told this reporter that she started joining the line at about 5 a.m. on Wednesday. The 17-year-old girl, who did not want to be identified and who said she came to the U.S.

at the age of two from Mexico

, said she was in line after several hours when the “line was cut off. I am with friend, Kay, who is very supportive. I will just get application online.”

In his welcome remarks during the Dream Relief Rally in Navy Pier auditorium, Mr. Benito, 42, said, “I came to the United States from the Philippines

so my parents can give me a better life. Now I have four kids. I want to give them a better life. That’s the American Dream. Since 2001, when Sen. Dick Durbin had fought for that Dream Act with Rep. Luis V. Gutierrez as the defender, the mayor of Chicago (Rahm Emanuel), the governor of Illinois (Pat Quinn) have also fought for this Dream. Our universities, our unions have been fighting for this Dream and now our President (Barack Obama) is also helping the 1-2-million youth get that dream. Those Dreamers, who fought and struggled to get this dream will be working hard until we passed the comprehensive immigration reform. Over 11,000 are now lining up, 13,000 (in total) with friends, boyfriends, relatives; Jewish, Muslims, etc. regardless of all races.”

Also on hand to speak was Senator Durbin, who told the story of Theresa Lee, living in an apartment, and stopped from pursuing her studies (by immigration agents) because she was undocumented. Mr. Durbin paid tribute to his North Star, America’s voice of immigration, Rep. Gutierrez; Mayor

Written by
Saturday, 18 August 2012 11:40 -

Emanuel, who will transform Chicago as most friendly city in America for undocumented immigrants, (never forgetting Emanuel’s roots from Eastern Europe), and (his own grandparents from Lithuania), and the courage of those who turned up in Navy Pier against the advice of those who discouraged them.

“Your courage to step up will not be denied. You are right to come today. Your courage has been repeated by the courage of those, who came before you. Those, who left behind their homelands, without even knowing how to even speak the (English) language. This is a historic moment. I was brought here by my grandparents. That is my story. That is your story. Be strong and embrace diversity. I will dedicate this day to my mother’s family and to those who came to America before us.

The idea has come today,

August 15, 2012

, in

America

. Seeing you in

Washington

,

D.C.

, wearing your caps and gowns at the Senate gallery with tears in your eyes flowing when the U.S. Senate rejected the DREAM Act (with a 55-41 vote).

“DON’T GIVE UP; WE WILL NOT GIVE UP ON YOU”

“Graduates don’t give up. America will be a greater nation. I am not giving up on you. Don’t give up on me. It’s the day in Navy Pier. We have seen a great moment. Dreams came true out of a shadow that makes us a great nation.”

Representative Gutierrez, for his part, paid tribute to the young men and women for their courage, strength and unity that "defy history. We did pass the DREAM Act 216-208 vote in (2010 in the House of Representatives). But every time there was glitch and I was in a Democratic Caucus, I would pull out Sen. Durbin from the Senate Caucus or from the Senate floor, and Senator Durbin was there to give me advice every step of the way. Give credit, where credit is due. Give Sen. Durbin credit for helping me pass the DREAM Act in the House. He also paid tribute to

Mayor Emanuel and Sen. John Cullerton, president of the Illinois Senate, for passing the Illinois Dream Act.

“When I thought of the millions of immigrants who came to Ellis Island

, the boat, the water, the great City of

New York

, today, I think of the City of

Chicago

. Today, we begin the 1.5-million to 2-million, who will be legalized. We will work tirelessly. We need every dreamer. Let me tell you they are bright and wonderful because of their Moms and Dads. Now, we will not rest until the 12-million will have a pathway to citizenship.

“Lastly, I want to give heartfelt thanks to someone I have butted heads with and had fundamental disagreements. I cannot be more proud to have President Barack Obama. Thank you for allowing so many let them get out of their shadows. We should have these dreamers here, not deported.”

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Saturday, 18 August 2012 11:40 -

Mayor Emanuel also announced a \$250,000 scholarship for the Dreamers. Other officers of ICIRR who spoke at the rally were Board President Alie Kabba, executive director of United African Organization, and Vice President Maria Pesqueira, executive director of Mujeres Latinas en Accion. # # #

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