

Written by

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The News UpFront: (TOP STORY) as of Tuesday, August 25, 2009

Estimates ranging from a minimum of \$450,000 to a high of more-than one-million dollars may have been "stolen" from the National Federation of Filipino-American Associations (NaFFAA) in the last 12 years, according to a knowledgeable official and a stern critic of the federation. The alleged improprieties are now beginning to come out in the open. Meanwhile, another NaFFAA official in the East Coast has proposed creating a five-member board of inquiry to probe deep into the organization and conduct fact-finding among all NaFFAA officials. Documents made available to the media showed payments to a company owned by the incumbent chair. The wife of the NaFFAA co-founder also got at least \$45,000 for unspecified "professional services".

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CREATION OF A BOARD OF INQUIRY PROPOSED:

Alleged \$450K to \$1-M 'Stolen' from NaFFAA; Lawyer Seeks Probe

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By ROMEO P. MARQUEZ

The author is a member, Investigative Reporters and Editors (IRE) and the Asian-American Journalists Association (AAJA)

SAN DIEGO – A regional official of the National Federation of Filipino American Associations (NaFFAA) is proposing the creation of an independent and fully-autonomous board of inquiry to look into widespread allegations of fraud in the handling of a \$.3-million donation by Wells Fargo Bank and Wells Fargo Foundation.

The squeeze on NaFFAA, the self-ordained "voice" of America's Filipino communities, further tightened as one of its co-founders, Ernesto Gange of Philadelphia, disclosed on Monday (Aug. 24) that the amount of money "stolen" from the

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federation had reached \$450,000.

Los Angeles-based journalist Bobby Reyes, however, estimated a much-bigger amount – upwards of one-million dollars or more.

Dr. Joy Bruce, the Florida-based spokesperson for NaFFAA chair Greg Macabenta, promptly questioned Gange's claim, and asked for proof. Macabenta himself did not say anything about the latest revelation.

An audited financial report released on Monday (Aug. 24) by Dr. Bruce showed that the Macabenta-owned advertising agency Minority Media Services Inc. had been paid at least \$1,000.

The wife of NaFFAA co-founder Alex Esclamado, Lourdes M. Esclamado, had been compensated twice -- \$18,000 in 2002 and 27,500 in 2001 -- for unspecified "professional services".

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Then NaFFAA chair himself, Alex Esclamado, had received "stipends" in the amount of \$38,000 in 2002 and \$20,000 in 2001. He has now retired.

{xtypo_quote} What is at stake is no less than the 'dream that is NaFFAA' and the hopes and aspirations of the larger Filipino-American community it represents as well the tireless and selfless contributions of countless and anonymous NaFFAA volunteers who toil to make this dream come true – J. T. S. Mallonga {/xtypo_quote}

The five-member board of inquiry, as envisioned by its proponent, J.T.S. Mallonga, Esq., chair of NaFFAA Region One, will be purely fact-finding with the authority to require any and all NaFFAA officers and members, past and present, to provide evidence or testimonies.

" x x x we owe it to the public, the community at large, and to our NaFFAA members to once and for all put this issue at rest," Mallonga said in a letter on Monday (Aug. 24) addressed to NaFFAA officials, one of whom furnished this reporter with an email copy.

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"What is at stake," he stressed, "is no less than the 'dream that is NaFFAA' and the hopes and aspirations of the larger Filipino-American community it represents as well the tireless and selfless contributions of countless and anonymous NaFFAA volunteers who toil to make this dream come true".

Mallonga has recommended Dr. Joy Bruce to chair the board. For members, he proposed three community representatives, namely: lawyers Ian Purugganan of Seattle, Washington; Arlene Matcheta of Texas; and another to be nominated; and one representative from the media who is not involved in the current controversy.

The top officials of NaFFAA were silent on Mallonga's proposal. Except for Dr. Bruce's, the rest of NaFFAA also did not respond, as usual, to request for comments on Gange's and Reyes' allegations.

Reyes volunteered to provide notarized true copies of his formal complaints lodged with the Internal Revenue Service, the Attorney General of California and the US Department of Justice.

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Dr. Bruce explained that data contained in the statements "is based on copies of receipts, checks and other documents that were carefully examined by a professional external auditor unrelated to NaFFAA".

She cautioned against "smoking guns", which are actually documents culled by Reyes and labeled as such, because they may, she said, turn out to be nothing but smoke".

"Anyone who has a copy of the audited financial statement that I have, and who is observant, astute, and sensible enough to examine, not just at the contribution or income, but also on the expenses incurred for that year -- will see where the money went. There is nothing to hide," Dr. Bruce explained. #
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