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The honorable way out of the scandal that a NaFFAA top official has suddenly found himself in is being suggested by well-meaning individuals: resign or jump off the Golden Gate Bridge. Perhaps the idea was thrown in in a moment of pique. Slowly, however, more allegations of improprieties are unfolding even as the NaFFAA chair – instead of explaining why a \$300,000 grant from Wells Fargo Bank was not accounted properly – demands proof that he got the money. Another \$50,000 was also unreported by NaFFAA, according to a respected community leader. Who are the members of a "secret gang" responsible for bleeding the federation which is supposed to be the "voice" of Filipinos in the United States?

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RESIGN OR JUMP OFF GOLDEN GATE BRIDGE: NaFFAA in Disarray Over the Unreported \$.3-M Grant from Bank

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By ROMEO P. MARQUEZ

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

S AN DIEGO – The news that the National Federation of Filipino-American Associations (NaFFAA) is in deep financial trouble sparked more accusations of irregularities and suggestions for its top officials to resign or jump off San Francisco's Golden Gate bridge.

The paper-giant sought to calm frayed nerves after the *Philippine Village Voice* published an

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online story revealing the near-bankrupt status of what was supposed to be the top umbrella federation of Filipino organizations in the United States

NaFFAA chair Greg Macabenta has denied receiving more than a quarter-million dollars from Wells Fargo Bank, calling such allegations as an "outright lie". He also demanded to see evidence of the deal.

Macabenta privately asked journalist Joseph G. Lariosa of Chicago "to get to the bottom of this".

"If they (meaning, this reporter and Los Angeles-based journalist Bobby Reyes) cannot prove their accusations, can I also ask you to reprove them publicly and ask them to apologize or retract? x x x I hope you will rise up to this occasion," Macabenta told Lariosa.

But Reyes said Macabenta is again "caught lying" by his own words. He suggested to Macabenta to resign, saying he "cannot be effective if he is

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under a cloud of suspicion".

Reyes referred Macabenta to the financial statements (Form 990) that NaFFAA had submitted for the fiscal year 2002 to the Internal Revenue Service, which reported the \$300,000 that Wells Fargo Bank had granted NaFFAA when Macabenta was still a national executive officer. But apparently the NaFFAA could not account how it spent the grant.

"xxx the Wells Fargo Foundation gave the NaFFAA \$300,000 in 2002. The grant was secured by Greg Macabenta, xxx whose company, the Minority Media, was paid commissions that were not reflected in the NaFFAA financial statement for 2002," Reyes said.

Asked by this reporter if he had used part of that money to acquire Filipinas Magazine and put up his own "Ang Panahon" newspaper in San Francisco, assuming he took the money plus commissions, Macabenta did not respond.

Dr. Joy Bruce, a former NaFFAA regional chair in Florida, questioned Macabenta on another \$50,000 that community organizer Ben Menor had allocated for the NaFFAA conference in San Jose in

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Northern California

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Menor had pleaded no contest – the effect is the same as a guilty plea – to a felony charge of filing a false-financial statement. He also entered the same plea to another charge that he overstated his work hours at a senior housing program in San Jose.

Menor agreed to pay restitution totaling \$51,000 to the city of San Jose, paving the way for the dropping of two grand-theft felony charges.

Said Dr. Bruce in an email: "I know that the \$50K (from Ben Menor's nonprofit entity) that was spent for NaFFAA's conference in 2004(?) and which became one of the issues in the San Jose scandal – was not reported in NaFFAA's financials (I saw all the records and could not reconcile). But NaFFAA decided to keep mum on this because they did not want to go against Ben."

Macabenta's advertising solicitor for his magazine, Lorna Dietz, who says

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she's NaFFAA online coordinator, berated the well-respected Dr. Bruce for her comments. "Joy,' Dietz said, "you might think you are doing the right thing – but you are not."

Dietz warned her to "cease and desist" from any discussions about NaFFAA, saying "these discussions are very subjective, one-sided, and untrue. Please take these discussions off-line."

Philadelphia-based NaFFAA co-founder Ernesto Gange felt offended by Dietz tirades against Dr. Bruce, calling her behavior "despicable."

"You have exhibited gross disrespect to Dr. Joy Bruce," Gange yelled back, "and I will not allow you or anybody in NaFFAA to abuse Joy or anybody for that matter, do you understand?"

"You have no right to tell Joy, Ernie Ramos and me to shut up, you are nobody, and I will not allow any of you to tell me what to say or write in this forum," Gange said.

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"You are all beholden to Ben Menor, and you must be ashamed of yourselves. It was Ben Menor and your secret gang that destroyed NaFFAA. How long can you keep the secret on Ben Menor and everybody is aware of it," Gange said.

He suggested to Dietz and the "secret gang" in the NaFFAA: "Why don't you jump off the Golden Gate Bridge?"

Dietz said the earlier *PhilVoiceNews* story was "very damaging". She also demanded proof that Macabenta indeed received the money and got commissions from the transaction.

"If this were true," Dietz wrote in her 'cease and desist' email, "then NaFFAA wouldn't have had any financial problems and neither would *Filipinas Magazine*."

In previous stories about NaFFAA, no mention was made of *Filipinas*

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Magazine, the San Francisco-based monthly publication previously owned by Mona Lisa Yuchengco and bought by Macabenta for an undisclosed sum. Why Dietz referenced it in the discussion was not clear.

"I want both Romy Marquez and Bobby Reyes to give proof about their accusation because what they do online reeks of them (are they called pseudo-journalists?) trying to get high Google rankings for their attacks on NaFFAA," Dietz said.

"If there's no proof," she continued, "Bobby Reyes and Romy Marquez need to retract their op-eds and apologize – and make sure that every Internet article bearing this retraction gets the high Google rankings. Is this clear?"

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