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The figures were all provided by NaFFAA. Up to this writing, 97 people have authorized their names to be included in a precedent-setting manifesto intended to show support for the NaFFAA and its current leaders. If the NaFFAA's claimed membership of 500 is correct, then 97 – assuming they represent organizations and not individual members – is dismally low. It represents a little less than 20-percent. That could mean a big thumbs-down for the leadership headed by Greg B. Macabenta. Twenty-percent is hardly a mandate. It could be a symptom that something's really ailing in the organization that appoints itself as the "voice" for Filipinos and Filipino Americans. In these times of dwindling funds and shrinking membership, the numbers are easily a warning to NaFFAA to be more open, accountable and inclusive.

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**WITH ONLY 97 SIGNATORIES OUT OF 500 MEMBERS**

**Support for NaFFAA and its Officers at a Dismal Low, Manifesto Shows**

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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 manifesto intended to show wide support for the National Federation of Filipino American Associations (NaFFAA) and its leaders appears to give very little encouragement as its allies and members across the United States either withheld or hesitated to express their confidence in its missions and the people who would implement them.

NaFFAA's top leadership, in an unprecedented move that practically amounted to a referendum, had sought approval amidst accusations of high-level improprieties involving

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money grants estimated at between \$450,000 to over one-million dollars.

"The Manifesto is intended to be an expression of confidence in this mission of NaFFAA and in the leaders who x x x have been unfairly and falsely accused by critics of alleged financial irregularities," declared Jon Melegrito, NaFFAA's communications director.

The number of signatories to the manifesto has so far been only 97, according to Melegrito, since it was issued on August 27 after a board meeting through teleconference, to counter the growing unfavorable publicity generated by the release of NaFFAA financial statements which had been kept secret for seven years.

The financial report, among others, showed that NaFFAA had paid the couple Alex Esclamado (founding chair and now retired) and Lourdes M. Esclamado (incumbent assistant national treasurer) a total of \$103,500 representing stipends, commissions, compensations and reimbursements.

The same report also indicated that the advertising company owned by Greg Macabenta, incumbent chair, had been paid by NaFFAA at least \$1,000 for services -- apparently belying Macabenta's earlier claim that he had not received any amount from the organization.

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The 97 signatories, when pitted against a claimed membership of more than 500, is dismally low -- less than 20 percent -- and could be an indication that Macabenta and his group do not enjoy popular support.

**Editor's Note:** The Los-Angeles basin is home to the biggest Filipino community in the world – outside of the Philippines. According to Bobby Reyes, “there are more remaining fingers and toes in a double amputee than the number of Filipino-American associations in Los Angeles that has joined the NaFFAA.”

Los Angeles-based journalist Bobby Reyes, NaFFAA's arch critic and whistleblower, has suggested that Macabenta quit the organization because of widespread allegations of wrongdoing, which Macabenta has vigorously denied.

"The(se) accusations have been proven false," said Melegrito, citing statements previously reported in the *Philippine Village Voice's* Breaking News, which practically cleared Macabenta of any links with the \$300,000 money grant from Wells Fargo Bank and Wells Fargo Foundation.

Melegrito said Macabenta's business dealings with Wells Fargo antedated his involvement with NaFFAA by two years. Such dealings earned for Macabenta a tidy sum, which he did not

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disclose, though he made a big boast of it.

In the 12 years of NaFFAA's existence, the issuance of a manifesto as an instrument to express members' sentiments was a first. That could indicate how badly public and corporate support has eroded in more than a decade.

Melegrito explained it differently, however. He said: "The Manifesto has reenergized the NaFFAA leadership and membership and has strengthened their resolve to continue pursuing NaFFAA's mission in spite of unfair and unfounded criticism and attacks".

Macabenta has earlier warned NaFFAA members of the dire predicament it is in. "Our funds have begun to run very low for a number of reasons, not the least of which is the scarcity of corporate funds," he stressed.

NaFFAA's self-appointed role was to be the "voice" for the entire Filipino community in the United States  
. It maintains an office in  
Washington  
,  
DC  
, to support its lobbying efforts.

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"More than anything, the Manifesto is intended to refocus our resources and energies on the mission of the NaFFAA and the many tasks at hand that need to be addressed by the NaFFAA, its leaders and its members," Melegrito added. # # #

This "Breaking News" was sent by Romeo P. Marquez, editor, ***Philippine Village Voice***, San Diego, California. Mailing address: P.O. Box 2118, La Jolla, CA 92038.

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