Written by Senator Pimentel's Press Office
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Senate President Manuel Villar and Minority Leader Aquilino "Nene" Q. Pimentel, Jr. (PDP-Laban) have introduced a bill that seeks to correct the flaws in the Overseas Absentee Act of 2003 (Republic Act 9189), especially in the areas of registration, voting and disqualification of voters, and enable more Filipinos abroad to exercise their right of suffrage.

Senate Bill 2333, authored by Senate President Villar and Mr. Pimentel, provides that qualified Overseas Filipinos, including seafarers, will have the option to vote either personally or by mail or by any other means as may be allowed by law.

 They can vote for President, Vice President, senators and party-list representatives, as well as in all national referenda and plebiscites.

 The bill prescribes the procedures and requirements by which absentee voting right can be exercised by Filipinos who are citizens of other countries but who have reacquired Filipino citizenship by availing of the Citizenship Retention and Reacquisition Act (RA 9226).

 The enthusiasm of Overseas Filipinos over their absentee voting right was reflected in the 2004 elections when 65 percent or 233,092 of the 365,000 registered voters cast their votes. While the turnout was high, the number of registrants was lower than expected – an indication of some problems not only in implementation but also in the law itself.

 But in the 2007 elections, only 21 percent or a mere 81,732 of the 503,896 registered overseas absentee voters cast their votes. The principal reason for the low turnout given by the Department of Foreign Affairs, civil society organizations advocates of electoral reforms was that it was a mid-term election and there was less interest among the Overseas Filipinos to exercise their voting right because the presidency was not at stake.

The bill calls for the creation of a Resident Election Registration Board to process, approve or disapprove all applications for registration or certification of overseas-absentee voters.Senate Bill 2333 provides that registration and certification as an overseas-absentee voter shall be done in person at any post abroad or at designated registration centers in the Philippines approved by the Commission on Elections.

Villar and Pimentel File Bill to Correct Flaws in Overseas-Absentee Voting - MabuhayRadio

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Field and mobile registration centers shall be set up by the Philippine embassies or consulates concerned to ensure accessibility by the overseas-absentee voters. Pre-departure registration shall likewise be conducted in accredited government agencies or facilities to be determined by the COMELEC.

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An overseas-absentee voter opting for voting by mail shall file his request with the Philippine embassy, consulate or foreign-service establishment that has jurisdiction over the country where he/she temporarily resides at least 120 days before the day of the election. Only those who applied for a postal vote shall be given mailed ballots. They may mail or personally deliver their duly-accomplished ballots to the embassy or consulate concerned ensuring that the same will be received by the Special Ballot Reception and Custody Group (SBRCG) concerned on or before the close of voting on the day of the elections.

The SBRCG is the group deputized by the COMELEC to receive and take custody of all accountable and non-accountable election forms, supplies and paraphernalia.

Overseas Filipinos are given a maximum period of 30 days, including the day of elections and established holidays in the Philippines and in the host countries, within which to cast their votes. # # #

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