

# Fil-Ams Protest GMA's Visit

by JOSEPH PIMENTEL  
AJPress

LOS ANGELES – Their chants from the street could be heard from inside the Sheraton Hotel. Philippine President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo made a brief visit to Los Angeles and held a breakfast event at the Sheraton Hotel last Saturday.

And demonstrators from across Southern California made their voices heard.

Chanting, "What do you really want? What do you really, really want? Justice!" a group of about 20 Filipinos gathered outside the Sheraton protesting the president's visit.

"We came here today to tell Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo that we don't approve of her con- ass (Constituent Assembly) and human rights violations," said Kuusela Hilo, vice chairperson

for Bayan USA.

"It's important for us to be here because we part of the Filipino people even though we are overseas," she added. "We support the country's economy but most importantly, we support the country and the movement to keep the country a national democracy. We don't want charter change."

A few weeks ago, the Philippine House of Representatives passed a controversial resolution 1109, a Charter change measure seeking to convene Congress into a constituent assembly.

Senate and House leaders are planning to vote on the issue next month.

Meanwhile, other groups have set a Manila-wide protest rally on June 30 to start the countdown to President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo's last year in office, according to Inquirer.net. ■

# Moderate quake shakes central California

PASO ROBLES – A moderate earthquake has jolted part of central California's San Luis Obispo County.

County Sgt. Steve Himmelfrich says several people called and reported alarms going off after the quake shook the area early Saturday.

But he said there were no reports of damage or injury.

The US Geological Survey said preliminary reports estimated the quake at magnitude 4.6.

The USGS said the quake was centered about 15 miles west of the city of Paso Robles. (AP)

# Elmore First Pinay Member of BC Legislature

CANADA – Mable Elmore made history when she became the first Filipino elected to the British Columbia Legislative Assembly last month. Earlier this month, she was sworn in.

"I am so very proud to be the first Filipino-Canadian MLA in British Columbia history," posted Elmore on her personal website. "But this isn't a personal accomplishment, it's a testament to the hard work and sacrifice of so many amazing people, from Vancouver-Kensington and beyond."

She will represent Vancouver-Kensington.

"I will fight for the people of Vancouver-Kensington. For equality and equity, for better transit, for supporting our seniors, and for making our communities safe and healthy, and sustainable," she wrote.

Prior to being elected, Elmore took a strong role in the Canadian Auto Workers Local 111 union and a long-standing community activist. She has also worked as a transit operator for 10 years.

According to her biography, Elmore is a second generation Filipino-Canadian. She has long been active in the peace movement and on immigrant, social justice, women's and gay, lesbian and transgendered issues.



She has lived in Vancouver the past 20 years. Her mother is originally from Cebu, Philippines. During the May 12 provincial election, Elmore captured 9,930 votes. Her nearest competitor garnered 7,678 votes. ■

# Obama, citing his smoking woes, signs...

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acco products, to make public the ingredients and to prohibit marketing campaigns geared toward children.

But he didn't say how his own struggle was coming since he moved into the White House. And aides were no more forthcoming.

As senator, candidate and now president, Obama has veered between frank and cagey about his personal battle with smoking.

He promised his wife, Michelle, more than two years ago that he would quit if she let him seek the White House.

He has often acknowledged since that he has "fallen off the wagon." But he hardly ever provides specifics. And though White House aides pack nicotine gum in their jackets to help him resist, they also refuse to give a clear answer to the question of whether the president still sneaks a smoke now and again.

"I hate it," Michelle Obama told CBS' "60 Minutes" during the presidential campaign's early days. "That's why he doesn't do it anymore, I'm proud to say. I outed him – I'm the one who outed him on the smoking. That was one of my prerequisites for, you know, entering this race is that, you know, he couldn't be a smoking president."

Well, not exactly.

During Obama's two-year



Pres. Barack Obama AP Photo

break this habit when it's been with you for a long time."

And then he went back to the merits of the bill and the shortcomings of the tobacco industry, which he accused of targeting young people. One key provision in the new law bans candy-flavored cigarettes and the use of other flavored smokes that might appeal to teenagers. Ads aimed at young people also are banned.

Aides refused to elaborate on his own situation.

White House press secretary Robert Gibbs said he hadn't asked Obama about his smoking and made plain that he didn't plan to. The presidential spokesman stuck to vague language that left the impression Obama still occasionally falls off the wagon, but he did not say so directly.

"I don't, honestly, see the need to get a whole lot more specific than the fact that it's a continuing struggle," Gibbs said. "He struggles with it every day."

Still, it's not as if Obama was ever even a pack-a-day puffer.

"I've never been a heavy smoker," Obama told The Chicago Tribune in 2007. "I've quit periodically over the last several years. I've got an ironclad demand from my wife that in the stresses of the campaign I don't succumb. I've been chewing Nicorette strenuously." (AP)

White House bid, he was known to occasionally bum a cigarette from a staff member — while also making sure to emphasize his efforts to stop for good and his progress from his onetime five-smoke-a-day average.

During Monday's bill signing, Obama focused on how the new law would help keep future generations of kids away from the dangerous habit. The president mentioned his own experience very briefly — just 30 words.

Almost 90 percent of people who smoke began at 18 or younger, he said.

"I know. I was one of these teenagers," he said. "And so I know how difficult it can be to

# Immigration agency says backlog...

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routine checks for possible criminal backgrounds and national security questions. But now, nearly all name check requests submitted to the FBI are being answered within 30 days. The remaining 2 percent are finished within 90 days, USCIS officials said.

"The FBI has made great strides ... and shown it's capable of sustaining that service level," Michael Aytes, acting deputy director of Citizenship and Immigration Services, told The Associated Press.

Petitions that require more evaluation or interaction with other agencies are not included in the FBI name check backlog count, immigration officials said.

Currently, some 6,000 cases are pending with Citizenship and Immigration Services, including some in which the application was filed several years ago, Aytes said.

"They are being looked at, they don't just sit on a shelf," said Gregory Smith, the agency's assistant director for national security and records verification directorate.

The volume of pending FBI name checks peaked in November 2007 when there were about 350,000 pending cases. At the time, more than half had been waiting for more than three months and a large number had been pending for more than a year, Aytes said.

In April 2008, the two agen-

cies established milestones and priorities for the name checks. The goals required processing all name checks pending more than three years by May 2008, those pending more than two years by July 2008, and requests pending more than one year by November 2008.

A government audit issued in June 2008 found the FBI had been using old technology and workers without enough training to do security checks.

That same month, a group of Muslim immigrants seeking US citizenship in Missouri filed a federal class-action lawsuit claiming they had been made to wait for months or years because of slow background checks. (AP)



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