

OAV registration at 2nd annual business, education and career expo

LOS ANGELES – The Philippine Consulate General in Los Angeles will open an OAV registration counter on Sunday, August 30, from 10am until 4pm during the 2nd Annual Business, Education, and Career Expo to be organized by the Filipino American Chamber of Commerce of San Fernando Valley (FACC-SFV). It will be held at the Beverly Garland Holiday Inn located at 4222 Vineland Blvd., North Hollywood CA 91602.

Those who are interested to register are requested to bring with them a copy of proof of Philippine citizenship (e.g. valid Philippine pass-

port or Dual Citizenship documents). Documentary requirements and forms could be downloaded from the Consulate website at www.philippineconsulatela.org. Personal appearance is required.

With the registration period coming to an end on 31 August 2009, the Philippine Consulate General in Los Angeles appeals to all qualified overseas Filipinos to exercise their right to participate in the Philippine national elections on 10 May 2010 by registering as Overseas Absentee Voter as early as possible. ■

Miriam sets Visiting Forces Agreement review on Aug. 27

by AUREA CALICA
Philstar.com

THE Senate hearing on the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) between the Philippines and the United States is set on Thursday as Sen. Miriam Defensor-Santiago questioned the apparent overstaying of American forces helping the military fight terrorists in the south.

Santiago said she would invite the secretaries of the departments of foreign affairs and defense along with the representatives of other government agencies and concerned sectors to attend the public hearing.

“We will have the leftists and student organizations vocal against VFA,” she said.

Santiago, chair of the Senate committee on foreign relations and the Legislative Oversight Committee on the VFA, said she called for a hearing because “we want to hear why they (US troops) should (still) be here when the VFA itself says in its title that it’s a mere Visiting Forces Agreement.”

“They are overstaying their welcome. We all know if you’re a visitor in a house you should not stay more than a few days because your host will lose patience with you and you will become dependent on them. We say in international relations we are in effect surrendering our capacity to control the presence in our territory of foreigners because it appears in the interpretation of the administration and the US administration that VFA is open ended, it can go on to infinity,” Santiago said.

Santiago said the accord should be called “Permanent Visiting Agreement” that would in effect be a violation of the constitutional prohibition against foreign military bases in the country.

“If we in the Senate had known they would stay like this I think I would have changed my vote. I voted at that time for a VFA not knowing that after 10 years they would stay here. Plus the mere fact they’re extending their stay in itself a concession of failure

on their part. That means we’ve not trained our soldiers well because until now we still have that problem of insurrection in Mindanao, that was why they came here in the first place,” Santiago said. ■

Migrants...

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pointed” with the poll body’s “snail-paced” approval of OAV registrants. It said that only 17,000 out of the 162,356 OAV applications have been approved so far.

“The Comelec’s snail paced approval of OAV registrants is unforgivable. We are afraid that, because of this sad development, OFWs might deem the Comelec insincere in its mandate to ensure our hard fought right to vote,” Gary Martinez, Migrant spokesman, said in a statement.

Martinez said that since the start of the OAV registration period last February, the RERBs have convened only twice, in March and in April this year.

“Migrante mobilized all of its chapters and members overseas to encourage Filipinos abroad to register, only to find out that the Comelec has been sluggish in approving OAV applications,” he said.



BEAUTIES. Miss Philippines Bianca Manalo (right) and Miss Colombia Michelle Rouillard, center, walk with other Miss Universe contestants through the Atlantis resort the morning of the Miss Universe beauty pageant in Nassau, Bahamas, Sunday, Aug. 23. Behind left is Miss Guam Racine Manley. AP Photo by Brennan Linsley

Martinez disclosed that Comelec Chairman Jose Melo wrote them a letter last month asking for help from Migrante chapters worldwide in the promotion of OAV registration.

The group proposed that Comelec conduct more field registrations and information campaign and step up the approval of pending OAV applications for registration. ■

Millions face shrinking Social Security...

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which often are deducted from Social Security payments, are scheduled to go up slightly.

“I will promise you, they count on that COLA,” said Barbara Kennelly, a former Democratic congresswoman from Connecticut who now heads the National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare. “To some people, it might not be a big deal. But to seniors, especially with their health care costs, it is a big deal.”

Cost of living adjustments are pegged to inflation, which has been negative this year, largely because energy prices are below 2008 levels.

Advocates say older people still face higher prices because they spend a disproportionate amount of their income on health care, where costs rise faster than inflation. Many also have suffered from declining home values and shrinking stock portfolios just as they are relying on those assets for income.

“For many elderly, they don’t feel that inflation is low because their expenses are still going up,” said David Certner, legislative policy director for AARP. “Anyone who has savings and investments has seen some serious losses.”

About 50 million retired and

disabled Americans receive Social Security benefits. The average monthly benefit for retirees is \$1,153 this year. All beneficiaries received a 5.8 percent increase in January, the largest since 1982.

More than 32 million people are in the Medicare prescription drug program. Average monthly premiums are set to go from \$28 this year to \$30 next year, though they vary by plan. About 6 million people in the program have premiums deducted from their monthly Social Security payments, according to the Social Security Administration.

Millions of people with Medicare Part B coverage for doctors’ visits also have their premiums deducted from Social Security payments. Part B premiums are expected to rise as well. But under the law, the increase cannot be larger than the increase in Social Security benefits for most recipients.

There is no such hold-harmless provision for drug premiums.

Kennelly’s group wants Congress to increase Social Security benefits next year, even though the formula doesn’t call for it. She would like to see either a 1 percent increase in monthly payments or a one-time payment of \$150.

The cost of a one-time payment, a little less than \$8 billion, could be covered by increasing the amount of income subjected to Social Security taxes, Kennelly said. Workers only pay Social Security taxes on the first \$106,800 of income, a limit that rises each year with the average national wage.

But the limit only increases if monthly benefits increase.

Critics argue that Social Security recipients shouldn’t get an increase when inflation is negative. They note that recipients got a big increase in January — after energy prices had started to fall. They also note that Social Security recipients received one-time \$250 payments in the spring as part of the government’s economic stimulus package.

Consumer prices are down from 2008 levels, giving Social Security recipients more purchasing power, even if their benefits stay the same, said Andrew G. Biggs, a resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, a Washington think tank.

“Seniors may perceive that they are being hurt because there is no COLA, but they are in fact not getting hurt,” Biggs said. “Congress has to be able to tell people they are not getting everything they want.”

Social Security is also facing

long-term financial problems. The retirement program is projected to start paying out more money than it receives in 2016. Without changes, the retirement fund will be depleted in 2037, according to the Social Security trustees’ annual report this year.

President Barack Obama has said he would like to tackle Social Security next year, after Congress finishes work on health care, climate change and new financial regulations.

Lawmakers are preoccupied by health care, making it difficult to address other tough issues. Advocates for older people hope their efforts will get a boost in October, when the Social Security Administration officially announces that there will not be an increase in benefits next year.

“I think a lot of seniors do not know what’s coming down the pike, and I believe that when they hear that, they’re going to be upset,” said Sen. Bernie Sanders, an independent from Vermont who is working on a proposal for one-time payments for Social Security recipients.

“It is my view that seniors are going to need help this year, and it would not be acceptable for Congress to simply turn its back,” he said. (Stephen Ohlemacher/AP)

Republicans offer seniors...

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older Americans in particular, still have significant concerns about Democratic health care proposals.

“Under the Democrats’ plan, senior citizens will pay a steeper price and will have their treatment options reduced or rationed,” RNC Chairman Michael Steele wrote in an op-ed in the Washington Post outlining the “bill of rights.”

The GOP principles also in-

clude preventing government from “interfering with end-of-life care discussions.” That is a reference to a provision in a bill by House Democrats that would allow Medicare to pay for voluntary counseling sessions about living wills and other issues. After critics seized on the provision and charged it could lead to “death panels” and euthanasia, administration officials said it would not likely be included in any final bill. (AP)



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