

# Ambassador Gaa urges Filipinos in US to register for the 2010 elections in the Philippines

AMBASSADOR Willy C. Gaa is urging Filipinos in the United States to exercise their right to vote for the political leadership of the Philippines in the upcoming national elections in June 2010.

"One of the hallmarks of a democracy is the right accorded to its citizenry to be able to choose their leaders in free and open elections. As one of the oldest democracies in Asia, the Philippines will be conducting national elections in May 2010 and I call on Filipinos in the United States to take advantage of the opportunity provided by the Overseas Absentee Voting Act to participate in the democratic processes of our country and take part in the shaping of its destiny," Ambassador Gaa stated.

"I urge first time voters and those registered absentee voters who failed to vote in the elections of 2007 to register for overseas absentee voting at the Philippine Embassy or at the nearest Philippine

Consulate General in the United States. Registration for overseas absentee voting will be conducted until the 31st of August of this year," he added.

According to Ambassador Gaa, Philippine Foreign Service Posts in the US have topped the list in numbers of new registrations worldwide by having registered 11,353 absentee voters in the US during the period of February 1 to April 30, 2009, which is 23 percent of the total 61,895 registrations achieved worldwide during this period. In the United States, the Consulate General in Los Angeles had the most number of registrations at 4,290 followed by the Consulate General in New York (2,000) and the Philippine Embassy in Washington DC(1,801).

Information on the requirements and procedures for registering for overseas absentee voting can be found at the Philippine Embassy website at [www.philippineembassy-usa.org](http://www.philippineembassy-usa.org). ■

# Fil-Am thanks Jersey City voters

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votes equivalent to 24.52% of the total votes cast.

"Thank you for all your votes, hard work, your contributions, your sacrifices, your words of kindness, your patience, your understanding, and all other things you did that I or anyone else may or may not know," Lavarro wrote earlier this week.

A Graduate of Jersey City State and the prestigious NYU Leonard Stern School of Business, Lavarro began his career working for the World Education Services. He is currently the Assistant Director for the Office of Grants and Sponsored Programs at New Jersey City University. His work at NJCU was recently highlighted by the Jersey Journal for securing \$7.2M in grants for science and math.

He is looking forward to the next three weeks.

"Certainly, the task and journey was and still is challenging, but we are all eager and even more determined to reach our ultimate goal and destination," he said.

Lavarro also acknowledged the "historic achievement" that his team and the community have achieved and accomplished.

"This current councilman couldn't convince the voters that he is the right person for the job. But we convinced voters that they have hope, a choice, an opportunity to make a difference, and an

opportunity to elect a councilman that truly cares about them and will fight for them in City Hall. We spoke with and listened to people, one voter at a time. My very worn out shoes tell the tale of how hard we walked the streets and neighborhoods," Lavarro shared.

The son of immigrant doctors from the Philippines, Lavarro was at the forefront of helping immigrants and foreign students in Jersey City make the transition to the United States by providing evaluations of foreign academic credentials for nearly a decade.

In 1999, he co-founded Sumisibol, a non-profit organization promoting Filipino American culture via social and educational programs to teenagers and their families. He served as the Executive Director for the Philippine American Friendship Committee-Community Development Center (PAFCOM-CDC), as President of the Filipino Cultural Association at Jersey City State College. He also amassed thousands of signatures to help pass the Filipino World War II Veterans Equity bill.

Lavarro is calling on the community once again for support.

"There is more work to do with very little time. We need your votes, support, contributions, volunteer time. Let's continue this journey together until Tuesday, June 9. Our road to victory is

# CDC seeing more regular flu cases now

UNITED States health officials are seeing a surprisingly high number of cases of ordinary, seasonal flu at a time when the flu season typically peters out.

About half of people recently testing positive for the flu have the new swine flu virus, Dr. Daniel Jernigan of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta said May 15.

The rest have seasonal flu, which is still causing widespread or regional illness in about two dozen states, "something that we would not expect at this time," he said. "We would be expecting the season to be slowing down or almost completely stopped."

The higher numbers of seasonal flu cases do not seem to be just because health officials are looking harder this year because of worries about swine flu, Jernigan said. A network of doctors who track how many patients are coming in with flu-like symptoms, plus evidence from school outbreaks and lab testing, points to more flu—not just more reporting, he said.

In the US, there are now more than 4,700 probable and confirmed cases of swine flu, and 173 hospitalizations and four deaths, Jernigan said. The tally doesn't include a fifth death that Texas officials said May 15 was

due to swine flu.

"The H1N1 virus is not going away," Jernigan said. The virus "appears to be expanding throughout the United States" and poses "an ongoing public health threat," he said.

Swine flu continues to affect more younger people—those ages 5 to 24—and CDC is still seeing relatively few cases in older people.

"That may be just a matter of time" until the virus spreads to that population, or it may prove to be a difference in the virus or its effect on various groups, he said.

Officials are still monitoring the situation in Mexico, where the outbreak began. However, the CDC's quarantine chief, Dr. Martin Cetron, said the agency was downgrading its warnings about travel to Mexico. The CDC had urged people to avoid nonessential travel to that country, but that was changed May 15 to just a precaution for people at high risk of flu complications.

The fifth US death attributed to swine flu was reported May 15 in a 33-year-old Texas man who died May 5 or May 6 after becoming sick a few days earlier. Corpus Christi-Nueces County Health District's Dr. William Burgin Jr. said the man had medical conditions, including heart prob-

lems, that made it tougher for him to fight a viral illness. The victim's name was not released.

It was the third swine flu death in Texas. Other deaths occurred in Washington and Arizona.

In New York City, three public schools in the borough of Queens were closed after hundreds of children were sent home sick this week, and a city official said May 15 that three more schools would be shut down after students developed flu symptoms. At one school, Susan B. Anthony middle school, there were five confirmed cases of swine flu, including a 55-year-old assistant principal hospitalized in critical condition.

Outgoing City Health Commis-

sioner Dr. Thomas Frieden said May 15 that the large clusters of apparent swine flu cases at the schools were "a little surprising," but added: "So far it doesn't appear to be causing more severe illness than seasonal influenza."

"We don't know how far it will spread, how wide it will spread, how long it will spread," said Frieden, who on May 15 was named director of the CDC.

As he spoke, maintenance workers at the schools scrubbed desks, floors and door handles May 15. At one middle school, where 241 children were out with flu-like symptoms May 14, a worker in a mask was seen mopping down the cafeteria. (AP)

# All praises for FASO

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city at the exact time the FASO was being cheered, rooted and applauded for its unforgettable debut performance.

May 17 was an unprecedented date for the Fil-Am community. Roger and Cora Oriel, together with Lito Cruz, were being congratulated by one and all for having the vision and the passion to form America's first Fil-Am symphony orchestra. Maestro Bob Shroder and his over 50-member orchestra truly gave a most outstanding performance proving to the world that the Filipino is truly world-class in its musical and artistic ability. Adding to the majestic performance of FASO was the superb singing of Joey Albert, Stephanie Reese, Pete Avendano and Kit Navarro, plus the unbelievable power and grace of Ruby Karen. No one came out of the theatre who wasn't totally impressed and proud to be a Filipino.

The people who trooped to the Saban Theatre to watch the Filipino American Symphony Orchestra gala concert were all one in heaping praises for the evening's historical performance. Here are some special quotes from some special people:

"The concert more than met my expectations. They truly make us proud to be a Filipino. They've given added honor again to the Filipino American community here in Southern California. Not only in Southern California but throughout the United States because they are the first and only Filipino American Symphony Orchestra. So, I encourage everyone to come and support their future performances. It's a treat. Invite your friends here in the US to come and witness their great performance."—Philippine Consul General Mary Jo Aragon, Los Angeles Consulate

"This is so phenomenal. I just think it's about time we have this. I'm so proud to be a part of this evening."—Jennifer Paz, formerly of *Miss Saigon*

"It was great and I'm so happy and proud that Roger and Cora had the FASO to show the world and the rest of the US that we have it too and to make use of our local talents and not have to import talents from the Philippines to do things here in the US."—Celia Defato, Kultura Philippines Folk Arts

"The orchestra was amazing. This one is specifically special because it's really showing the

culture of the Philippines. I've never seen anything like it. I've seen people cry in the event. It's so emotional. I'm organizing an event with the Los Angeles mayor to get exposure for this orchestra. This is an amazing event."—Hogan Lee, Asian Professional Exchange

"I think this is the best thing the Filipinos have ever done and I'd like to say congratulations to Roger and Cora because I think this is going to be a nostalgic but very historical event."—Eddie Sotiangco, Chairman, Sotiangco Group of Companies

"The concert is awesome. It's outstanding and right now, I'm speechless. FASO, you guys are like off the charts right now. I mean that!"—Edsel Godwin Sotiangco

"This is fantastic. You made history. You made the Filipino community very, very proud. This is immeasurable. Great show!"—Errol Santos, Business Development Consultant, Hollywood Presbyterian Center

"It's amazing how Filipinos are coming out and showing what we're really made of. It's so exciting. Filipinos are starting to show their talents and making it known to the rest of the world."—Rich Cabael, CEO, VuQo Inc.

"Very passionate. Very exciting. First of many, I hope."—David Benoit, Composer, Pianist, Conductor

"This is actually the first time I'm watching an orchestra and I'm actually speechless. It's just a very exciting thing. I love it."—R. Santos, Los Angeles

"I think it's awesome. It's really, really nice."—Mary Ann Pagsibigan-Pimenta, Bander Law Firm

"We enjoyed it very much. Very good work!"—Dan Manuel/ Glen Treibitz, Hollywood Piano

"I'm so happy this evening. Dreams really do come true, you know. Roger and Lito, congratulations! We keep doing big things for the Filipino. Yay!"—Cecilia Ramos, president of Historic Filipinotown Neighborhood Council

"I think it's been an amazing performance. It's a pride and a pleasure to watch so many talented people of all ages perform. It's so great to be here."—Catherine Banales, Los Angeles County Music Center

"Quite exciting! Hopefully, there'll be many, many more concerts to see."—John Claude Gummo, The Cascades. ■



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