

Elvira Rodriguez

From: wdcpecul@aol.com
Sent: Friday, November 11, 2005 8:25 AM
To: Elvira Rodriguez
Cc: RPembAmb@aol.com; jocbatgar@aol.com; mfydc@aol.com
Subject: Another one, Elvira. Thanks! (ADR's Remarks in Madison, WI)

REMARKS OF H.E. ALBERT DEL ROSARIO
AMBASSADOR OF THE PHILIPPINES TO THE UNITED STATES
DURING HIS VISIT TO THE
FILIPINO COMMUNITY IN WISCONSIN
Madison, Wisconsin
16 November 2005

Ms. Elizabeth Ramos-Reyes, President of the Philippine American Association of Madison and Neighboring Areas (PAMANA);

Officers and Members of the Filipino-American National Historical Society (FANHS); the Filipino-American Association of Wisconsin (FAAWIS); and Wisconsin Women of Color Network (WWOCN)

Honored Guests; Friends;

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am honored to greet all of you and to congratulate you for organizing this special gathering. I am grateful that through your efforts, I am able to meet the members of the various Filipino organizations in Madison and its neighboring areas. Thank you for the kind arrangements that you made for this event.

It is truly a pleasure to see so many of our kababayans from this part of the United States. Every time I visit our communities around this great country, I become ever more inspired by how strong the Filipino presence has become in the United States. Through you and your community activities, our friendship with the United States is continually reaffirmed and enhanced.

The Philippine Embassy in Washington, D.C. warmly welcomes the rising visibility and the increasing empowerment of the Filipino-American community. I commend you all for remaining proud of your Filipino heritage and for wanting to be involved in promoting closer ties between your adopted and mother countries.

Let me now provide an overview of key developments in the Philippines that would be of interest to you.

In the political arena, there are broad expectations that President Arroyo, having overcome an impeachment attempt, will now focus on delivering basic economic reforms. If she can do so, she will rally our people and strengthen the foundations of our long-term national stability.

In addition, the national debate on constitutional change, or CHA-CHA, has clearly begun. We must see which way discussions will go, but the debate by itself is a tribute to the flexibility and self-healing capacities of Philippine democracy. These capacities, together with the progressive implementation of reforms, will be the salvation of our country over the long run.

On the economic side, the fundamentals of the Philippine economy remain sound. For example, our GDP has been growing for the sixth straight year following the devastation of the 1998 Asian regional financial crisis.

Last year, our GDP grew 6.1 percent, from 4.7 percent in 2003. This was one of our highest growth rates over the past 15 years. The National Economic Development Authority or NEDA is reasonably confident that we will attain the targeted GDP growth rate of some 5.3 percent this year.

Corruption continues to burden the country but we are addressing the problem frontally.

We have set up the Revenue Integrity Protection Service, or RIPS. The RIPS investigates corruption within the Bureau of Internal Revenue and the Bureau of Customs through lifestyle checks. Its investigations will lead to corruption charges filed at the Ombudsman. We are also moving against smugglers and tax-evaders with greater resolve and efficiency.

We realize that the deficit is a major problem. Here, again, we are making progress. Our Supreme Court gave the green light for the new Expanded VAT Law, the centerpiece legislation of our fiscal management program.

Earlier, the Supreme Court allowed foreign investment under our Philippine Mining Law. We expect this will generate \$6.5 billion in foreign direct investments, in addition to \$3.4 billion in annual sale.

The greatest short-term prospect in terms of foreign investment is in the information and communications technology (ICT) field. Just recently, we mounted major ICT promotional events in New York, in Washington, D.C., and in Cebu City.

In all these cities, we highlighted the unique advantages of the Philippines in various ICT sectors. We showed that we can meet the diverse needs of investors in call centers, in medical/legal transcriptions, and in BPO operations.

The ICT sector holds enormous potential for expanding Philippine-American business ties, which will hopefully involve Filipino Americans in your area as well. Top American companies are already in the Philippines for BPO and other global sourcing activities. These include Accenture, AMEX, AIG, Barnes and Noble Online, Caltex, Citibank and Proctor and Gamble. This is eloquent testimony of our competitiveness as an ICT center for the world.

Other sectors with promise are in labor and in exports. The United States has growing labor shortages in the teaching, health, including health services for seniors, and ICT professions.

The Philippines is ready to cover shortages in these three fields. The expansion of associated businesses in training, education and recruitment of these skilled workers will follow suit.

Overseas Filipinos contribute major resources through remittances. Vast remittance flows to the Philippines, which range anywhere from \$8 to \$15 billion a year, involving both formal banking and informal padala channels, dwarf our annual foreign direct investments and foreign assistance inflows. Again, there are business opportunities associated with remittances waiting to be developed.

A final area where I encourage your full participation is in private voluntary and NGO work to support development and humanitarian causes back home. One terrific example is Gawad Kalinga, a community-based global effort of Filipinos all over the world to help build housing for communities in the Philippines. We also encourage you to explore the opportunities in the areas of retirement and medical tourism.

I know you are active or would like to be active in similar endeavors. To increase your involvement in projects empowering Filipinos here and helping Filipinos back home, I strongly recommend that you expand your networking among yourselves and with like-minded Filipino associations elsewhere. If you work with others and extend your reach, you could do more to advance your community objectives.

Before I conclude my remarks, I wish to emphasize that the human bond between the Philippines and the United States is vital, dynamic, and diverse. Between 2.5 and 3 million Filipinos and Americans of Filipino descent live in the United States, while some 100,000 U.S. citizens are in the Philippines.

As the Filipino presence in America comes of age, you have shown that you have latent political strength that can be brought to bear to promote both your empowerment as a community and stronger Philippine-American relations.

A Philippine Friendship Caucus has been formed in the U.S. House of Representatives. Currently numbering some seventy members, the Caucus is the first body of its kind ever to be organized on the Hill for the Philippines. It also reflects the rising visibility of the Filipino community.

Filipinos have done well in the United States. Surveys show that Filipinos in America are very productive, with a 75 percent labor force participation rate, higher than the American average of 65 percent. Of this number, 28 percent occupy managerial or professional positions, while 36 percent hold technical positions. Indeed, in America, a nation of immigrant achievers, Filipino immigrants like you have made tremendous achievements. With hard work, a Filipino can aspire to any achievement in this country. Glass ceilings and closed doors are no more.

In closing, let me say that we are looking forward to the Centennial of Filipino Immigration to the United States next year. This will be a celebration, spearheaded by the Smithsonian, of the Filipino-American journey to America.

Looking back, that journey has been impressive. In 1906, the first significant numbers of Filipino immigrants arrived in Hawaii to work on the island's sugar plantations. Until 1935, many more came as migrant laborers to West Coast farms and Alaskan canneries.

After World War II, some 7,000 Filipino soldiers received U.S. citizenship and, in 1945, the War brides Act permitted Filipino wives of U.S. military to immigrate.

The 1965 Immigration Act paved the way for Filipino professionals to enter the United States, many of them in the medical field. Today, Filipino-Americans

constitute the second largest Asian-Pacific American group overall, second to Chinese-Americans, according to the 2000 U.S. Census.

Indeed, the Centennial of Filipino Immigration will be a fitting tribute to your special legacy, a legacy that would give pride to your children and to future generations.

On this note, I thank you once again for inviting me and for the privilege of meeting you. Thank you and good evening.