

## **ON DUTY**

**By: Senator Robert S. Jaworski**

### **THE ABSENTEE VOTING MEASURE: WHAT ABOUT THE NEXT GENERATION?**

The imminent passage into law of the Absentee Voting Measure is indeed an answer to a 15 year clamor of our “Kababayans” to afford them a voice in the country’s political exercise and governance.

The patience to wait this long only proves they still want to preserve what they believe is a constitutional and inherent right to have a say on the government’s affairs. And their yearning for such a privilege is quite understandable. They want a good government to provide the well deserved basic commodities of their relatives living in the country. After all, these “kamag-anaks” abroad help the government stir the economy through the spending of their remittances by their relatives in their daily expenses and possibly even in long or short-term investments.

To date, the measure is still undergoing reconciliation from the Bicameral Conference Committee, the legislative body composed of members of the Senate and House of Representatives.

It is tasked to come up with a “joint” version of their differing measures each chamber passed. Once they hammer out their differences and draw the final measure, it is ready to be signed into law by the President.

They have several concerns to work on. But perhaps the single biggest difference is the House version’s provision allowing the absentee voting exercise to be implemented only on the 2004 national elections. The Senate, on the other hand, wants it to be applied in all future elections.

If the Senate version on this particular provision is adopted, then I post one question: What happens to the next generation’s right to vote if dual citizenship is no longer allowed in their country?

Take for instance, a Filipina who gets another citizenship by naturalization. Under existing laws, she can enjoy dual citizenship and therefore be able to vote under the Absentee Voting Measure. But once she gives birth to a child, the child automatically becomes a citizen of that country, thereby losing his or her privilege to vote in the Absentee Voting Measure.

Perhaps I’m thinking too far ahead, but maybe I am not. What about grown up children of these naturalized citizens who also want to vote? How would authorities address this as soon as possible?

I suggest that authorities should look at the Dual Citizenship Law and a second look into this Absentee Voting Measure to discuss and put in place amendments or remedies to avert the surfacing of this potential problem.

If these next generation citizens do not show any interest in our elections, then this concern may not be a big deal. But if they want to carry on their parents' right to vote on our elections, then a careful study on my suggestion should be started as soon as possible.

This concern may also lead to the settlement of another difference between the Senate and the House versions on who can vote: the Senate version grants green card holders the right to vote while the House version does not.

While both houses are researching

Meanwhile, here are the other concerns the bicameral conference committee will be working on:

- The Senate version allows voters to vote for President, Vice President, Senators and part-list representatives while the House version limits those can be voted to President and Vice President.
- The Senate versions allows personal registration or by mail, while the House version limits it to personal registration in place of residence.
- The House version allows that a copy of the registry of absentee voters be sent to immigration authorities of host countries, but the Senate version does not allow this.
- The House version bans personal campaigning abroad but the Senate version allows this.
- Representatives of overseas Filipinos are to be named in the special board of election inspectors under the Senate version, but the House version does not provide for this.
- The Senate version allows the appointment of representatives of Filipinos overseas, organizations to the special board of canvassers, but the House does not allow this.
- The House version allows the congressional oversight committee to be formed the implementation of the absentee voting law but the Senate version only requires consultations.
- And the Senate version, provides that overseas Filipino organizations will assist in the implementation of the law while the House version does not have this.

We should take a closer look at these provisions, and should bear in mind that our utmost concern should be the will and voice of the people.