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New one-time WWII benefits only for eligible veterans, widows who applied before their deaths -- U.S

Monday, 23 November 2009

New one-time WWII benefits only for eligible veterans, widows who applied before their deaths -- U.S. EmbassyMANILA, Nov. 22 (PNA) — The United States Embassy in Manila has clarified that the new one-time benefits under a veterans' compensation program signed by President Barack Obama are available only to eligible veterans or widows of eligible veterans who have filed claims before their deaths.

The embassy issued the clarification before Rep. Bob Filner, chairman of the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Veterans Affairs, called on President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo at Malacanang Monday morning.

Filner was among the hardworking U.S. congressmen who helped push the legislation to success "in order to honor Filipino war veterans and correct a historical injustice."

"Any change in the law to provide these additional benefits to other survivors would require new legislation in the U.S. Congress," the embassy reiterated.

Therefore, the embassy said, all veterans who feel they may be eligible are encouraged to apply now.

As of November 20, nearly half of the approximate P5.8 billion paid out so far by the Manila-based U.S. Veterans Affairs Office was to Filipino claimants — who are among the more than 10,000 total applicants that also included Americans and other non-Americans. Some 17,000 WWII veterans are said to be still alive and eligible to apply.

The payments are authorized by the 2009 Filipino Veterans Equity Compensation Law, which was signed by Obama in February this year.

As the U.S. Embassy announced this development, it also reminded that all claims for this benefit must be filed by the February 16, 2010 deadline. The claims will be adjudicated, and "every application handled expeditiously so that qualified veterans receive their payments as quickly as possible," the embassy said.

The embassy emphasized that there is no so-called "master list" of eligible veterans for this new, one-time benefit and each claim is unique and decided on its own merits.

The application process is free and simple, and there is no need to pay anyone to assist in completing the form, which can be mailed to the U.S. Embassy. Additional outreach activities will be conducted around the country to ensure that all eligible veterans have an opportunity to apply.

The new benefits are in addition to previous and continuing payments for these same veterans, and many others, including family members, the embassy clarified.

Overall, the embassy's Veterans Affairs Office pays more than P800 million per month in benefits to veterans in the Philippines. Nearly half of that goes to Filipino WWII veterans or their survivors -- separate from the one-time benefits provided for eligible veterans.

Application instructions for the one-time benefits are on the U.S. Embassy website: <http://manila.usembassy.gov>. (PNA)