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Omnibus bill has perils

"The simmering frustrations of Filipinos overseas can possibly translate from disenchantment and further isolation from Philippine concerns to some form of civil disobedience should the Philippine Congress fail to enact the proposed Omnibus Filipinos Overseas Act."

This was stressed by lawyer Reuben Seguritan, a noted Filipino American lawyer, before some 100 Filipinos from the tri-state area who attended the forum on the Omnibus Filipinos Overseas Act sponsored by the Filipinos Overseas for Reform and Empowerment Movement (FOREM) last March 31 at the Kalayaan Hall of the Philippine Center.

According to Seguritan, efforts have been initiated by overseas Filipinos in the last several years to get the Philippine government to ensure them some rights and political empowerment, paramount among them is the right to vote and have their interests represented in the government.

"But nothing substantive has come out of it," said Seguritan, "partly because of the consistently lukluster interest in the issue within the Filipino American community."

"But what we can see now is pressure mounting, overseas Filipinos emerging to reclaim their political rights as taxpayers to the government and the result is the omnibus bill," he added.

The forum is only the first in a series of meetings to coordinate and refine the efforts from Filipinos overseas to promote the passage of the act or portions extracted from the omnibus

version and assigned to different lawmakers for their individual sponsorship.

Other panelists included Luisa M. Howard, Mel Capinpin, Celia Zenaida Aboro, Sonny Lerum and Eric Mortensen.

The Omnibus Filipinos Overseas Act is a comprehensive bill that seeks to provide for Filipino overseas certain rights normally reserved for citizens residing in the Philippines. If passed, the bill will give overseas Filipinos the right to vote (absentee voting), right to dual citizenship, right to own urban land, right to sectoral representation to Congress and right to be exempted from taxation of non-resident Filipino citizens whose incomes are earned abroad,



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among other things.

The bill is now in Congress where it is being deliberated in both houses. For more information, call Luisa Howard (914) 679-2761, Mel Capinpin (212) 575-7920, Claire Melendrez (212) 838-3992 or Celia Aborro (201) 433-5497.