

FROM THE FRONT PAGE

Filipinos...

PAGE A1 ◀ according to court papers. The FBI and US Dept. of Health Services began investigating the Medicare Plus Home Health Providers after parents of the disabled children began complaining to authorities about the "nurses" lack of skill. "We had one instance in which a child with a tracheotomy tube that was hooked up to a ventilator that helped him breathe, came out and the nurse simply didn't know what to do, didn't know how to handle it," said Mrozek. "Fortunately, the mother was there to get the tube back into place or else this child might have died." In another case, an imposter nurse simply fled a medical situation when she apparently was unable to provide assistance, he added. "The nearly four dozen people associated with this fraud ring not only cheated taxpayers, they endangered the lives of young people they promised to protect

and care for," said O'Brien. The mastermind of the fraud ring, Priscilla Villabroza of Placentia, pleaded guilty to five counts of health care fraud last year. She's facing more than 50 years in federal prison. According to court documents, Villabroza and others hired individuals to provide care to disabled Medi-Cal patients, many of whom were children and young adults served under a program called Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnosis, and Treatment (EPSDT) Supplemental Services. The indictment alleges that from August 2004 through the end of 2007, Villabroza and others hired unlicensed individuals to provide services to the disabled Medi-Cal patients and billed Medi-Cal as if they were licensed vocational nurses (LVNs). Some of the unlicensed individuals had foreign training, but never passed a nursing exam here. Some of them had no medical training at all. Her assistant Susan Bendigo - who was also indicted last year - fled during the investigation. Authorities believe she's hiding

out in the Philippines. Another key member of the fraud ring, 45-year-old Evelyn Briones Tisoy of Rowland Heights, was arrested Thursday morning. A KTLA news report said Tisoy was the administrator who sent out the fake nurses to unsuspecting homes. "Villabroza and her associates concocted a clever rip-off where they hired untrained and unlicensed nurses to provide care to children with serious health conditions," California Attorney General Edmund G. Brown Jr. said. "At a time of budgetary crisis, they cheated California's welfare system and pocketed millions of dollars in unauthorized state reimbursements." In total, more than 42 will be arraigned and charged with fraud. Mrozek says about 80 percent of those are Filipinos. Thursday's arrest marks the end of the FBI's two-year investigation into this matter. All 42-suspects will be arraigned sometime next week. All are charged with conspiracy to commit health fraud, a felony, that if found guilty, can land them in jail for the next 10 years. ■

House...

PAGE A3 ◀ million in annual income are still being determined, said the aide. Both officials spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss private deliberations. House Democrats had hoped to release a final bill Friday, but that was before a group of moderates and conservatives, known as Blue Dog Democrats, voiced their objections. House leaders are now promising a bill Monday with committee votes later in the week. The Blue Dogs want a greater focus on cost containment within the health care system, such as reducing overpayments. They are also concerned about impact on small businesses and disparities in care in rural areas.

Blue Dog members said Friday that House Democratic leaders were beginning to hear their concerns but that more attention was needed. "Addressed? Obviously we'll wait and see," Rep. Heath Shuler, D-N.C., said after meeting with House leaders. Several Blue Dog members voiced concerns about new taxes, and it's unclear whether the Senate would go along with the House on a tax on high earners. Republican senators have said revenues for health overhaul should be related to health care in some way. A health insurance benefits tax that got shot down in the Senate this week was related to health care, since many economists say it would help hold down costs by forcing people to switch to more frugal coverage. Asked Thursday if the Senate could support a "millionaire's tax" to pay for health care, Bud-

get Committee Chairman Kent Conrad, D-N.D., answered: "I don't know." Whatever the final plan, Obama's political machine is stepping up efforts to gin up support. Organizing for America is asking supporters to join door-to-door canvasses on upcoming weekends to ask their neighbors to support the president on health care. Ways and Means members said that an earlier proposal to tax soda was unlikely, but a new coalition of beverage and food producers and marketers, joined by some conservative groups, was taking no chances. The group will begin running ads in Washington area newspapers this Sunday opposing proposals to tax sugary drinks. The ad shows a smiling couple sitting outside a lakeside tent with the headline, "In: Budget Vacations. Out: Beverage Taxes." ■

It's final: Automated...

PAGE A1 ◀ nal requirement before the bidder could sign the contract with Comelec. Special Bids and Awards Committee (SBAC) chairman Ferdinand Rafanan said Roque had mixed up his figures on the machine error rate of 0.0005 and the bidder's rate of machine breakdown of two percent. Rafanan said the SBAC technical committee tested the poll

machines and found that it had 100 percent accuracy in reading ballot marks - surpassing the 99.9995 percent requirement of Comelec. This means that the equipment should not misread over two of the 20,000 ballot marks during the testing. This would be critical because voters would only shade or mark ovals beside the candidate's name to indicate a vote instead of writing names as done in

manual voting, said Rafanan. Melo allayed fears that the delayed contract signing would cut short the voters' education and training of Comelec personnel on the use of the poll machines. The first batch of the system will be shipped to the country on November in preparation for the mock elections, public demonstration and personnel training on operation of the machine from December onward. "We are committed to deliver the machines on schedule and there is enough time based on our projection to manufacture the 82,200 PCOS machines," said Smartmatic international sales director Cesar Flores. Flores added that the Department of Foreign Affairs on Thursday issued a confirmation that the Philippine embassy in Washington DC has consular jurisdiction over Barbados and thus, authenticated bid documents of multinational Smartmatic based in the region. Flores said he was hoping this clarified allegations by Senator Francis Escudero who said the embassy in Caracas, Venezuela had jurisdiction over the firm. The P7.2 billion contract provides for 82,200 precinct count optical scan (PCOS) machines that would automate the counting of votes and transmission of consolidated voting results, paving way for the proclamation of winners 24 to 48 hours after the closing of polls. ■

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