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FILIPINO WORLD WAR II VETERANS: INFORMATION FOR THE PRESIDENTIAL TRANSITION TEAM

The National Alliance for Filipino Veterans Equity (NAFVE) is pleased to be able to provide this informational guide to the Presidential Transition Team for the incoming Obama-Biden Administration on Filipino World War II veterans and their ongoing quest for full U.S. veteran status. In the 110th Congress, equity legislation for Filipino WWII veterans moved further than ever before and was part of the emergence of a mobilized, politically aware and engaged Filipino American community. President-Elect Obama's support for this legislation- as a cosponsor in the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, as a candidate in public forums and in the Blue Print for AAPIs- is clear to us and we look forward to working with the new Administration on behalf of our veterans.

The Senate took the historic step of passing Filipino WWII Veterans Equity legislation when it was passed as part of the Veterans Benefits Enhancement Act (S. 1315) on April 24, 2008. Unfortunately, the House was unable to pass its own version without stripping out Filipino WWII veterans provisions. House Veterans Affairs Committee Chairman Bob Filner (D-CA) introduced alternative legislation that will provide a one-time payment for Filipino veterans both in the U.S. in the amount of \$15,000.00 and \$9,000.00 for veterans in the Philippines. This bill was passed in the House on September 23, 2008.

Senator Daniel Inouye (D-HI) created improved legislation that not only provides a one-time payment, but contains additional language for spouses and ensuring continued eligibility for Social Security and other benefits. Currently, this legislation is part of the Senate's economic stimulus package, and is a critical component of financial security to an extremely vulnerable population. Additionally, with Senator Inouye's support, the House continuing resolution bill created an appropriation of \$198 million to create a "Filipino WWII Veterans Compensation Fund."

Near-Term Goals:

With authorizing language part of an economic stimulus package that is a priority for Congressional leadership, and appropriations already secured, NAFVE hopes that President-Elect Obama will work with the 111th Congress to quickly pass this legislation to provide immediate support for Filipino WWII veterans. Additionally, we look forward to working with Veterans Affairs Secretary Designate Eric Shinseki to identify high level personnel and policies that will support Filipino WWII veterans.

Long-Term Goals:

NAFVE and its members will continue to push for the restoration of full U.S. veteran status for Filipino WWII veterans. It will also continue to push for legislation that will support these veterans in their twilight years, including: improved access to health care, expedited processing of backlogged family petitions to allow for family reunification, and specific funds and resources to support culturally competent and community-based care.



FILIPINO WWII VETERANS LEGISLATION IN THE 110th CONGRESS: SUMMARY

The Filipino WWII Veterans Equity Act was introduced in the Senate in the opening days of the 110th Congress (S. 57) by Senator Daniel Inouye (D-HI). The House version (HR 760) followed suit quickly afterwards and was introduced by a bipartisan group of Representatives, led by House Veterans Affairs Committee Chair Bob Filner (D-CA). The bills moved quickly forward with hearings in both the House (February 15, 2007) and Senate (April 9, 2007).

The Senate included Filipino WWII veterans equity legislation in the broader Veterans Benefits Enhancement Act (S. 1315) and reported the bill out of committee on June 27, 2007. The bill provided Filipino WWII veterans in the U.S. full equity and a flat rate monthly pension of \$300.00/ month for Filipino WWII veterans in the Philippines. The House marked up a similar version as a stand-alone bill (HR 760) with a higher flat pension rate for Filipino WWII veterans in the Philippines at \$500.00/ month.

In the Senate, opposition to the bill focused on the flat rate pension for the non-citizen veterans in the Philippines. When the bill was scheduled for a floor vote in April 2008, Senator Richard Burr (R-NC) offered an amendment to zero out the pension for Filipino WWII veterans in the Philippines. After a successful defeat of the amendment (56-41), on April 24, 2008 the Senate took the historic step of passing Filipino WWII veterans equity legislation.

In the House of Representatives, opposition to the bill focused on the budget offset identified to pay for the bill. House Veterans Affairs Committee Ranking Member Steve Buyer (R-IN) argued that the offset took money away from U.S. veterans and sent it abroad, when in fact, the offset only corrected eligibility standards for a special monthly pension for certain classes of disabled veterans and would not take a dime away from any veteran, disabled or otherwise. With veterans service organizations poised to oppose the bill, the House was only able to pass its own version of S. 1315 by stripping out the Filipino WWII veterans provisions.

Veterans Affairs Committee Chairman Bob Filner introduced HR 6897, which proposed a one-time payment of \$15,000.00 to U.S. based Filipino WWII veterans and \$9,000.00 for Filipino WWII veterans in the Philippines. HR 6897 was passed in the House in September 23, 2008 by the vote of 392-23. In the Senate, Senator Daniel Inouye introduced an enhanced version of HR 6897 that included provisions for spouses as well as recognition of Filipino WWII veterans service as that of U.S. veterans for purposes of the legislation. The bill is currently included in the Senate's Unemployment Compensation Extension Act- S. 3688.

The final positive news for Filipino WWII veterans legislation in the 110th is that the House continuing resolution to keep the government running until March 2009 includes an appropriation for Filipino WWII veterans. The Filipino WWII Veterans Compensation Fund is in the amount of \$198 million dollars, the budgeted amount for Senator Inouye's and Chairman Filner's legislation, but is awaiting authorizing legislation.