

Testimony Before The House and Senate

By Fritz Friedman

Ladies and Gentlemen of the Veterans Affairs Committee:

I would like to thank you for giving me the opportunity to address you today. After months of working on this bill and a full day of testimonies, I don't think that you need to hear more facts and so I won't bother with them. Instead, I thought that you might want to hear one American's opinion on this Veteran's issue.

The first time I heard about this veteran's issue was about 5 years ago when I read a Los Angeles Times piece on these Filipino American veterans. Frankly, I couldn't believe what I was reading. After having read the facts, it seemed so clear to me that a promise had been made to a group of people and that promise was subsequently rescinded on what seemed to me to be convenient and unreasonable premises.

Mulling the situation over, I frankly became angry. I had to do something and so, I subsequently founded an organization – The Assembly For Justice – made up for people who wanted to help in this fight. My contribution was to apply some of the skills, which I have cultivated in my day job as a publicist to try to bring the issue to a more mainstream level of awareness. I also wanted to use my relationship with actors to help raise the profile of this cause. Thanks greatly to friends like actors such as Lou Diamond Phillips, Rob Schneider, and Tia Carrerre and producer Dean Devlin – all of whom are of Filipino heritage – we did succeed in bringing awareness up a few notches. But that still wasn't enough. I believe that we have moved in the right direction in terms of giving these veterans of Filipino descent their rightful benefits.

My purpose in coming to Washington, DC, is to personally thank those of you who have supported the bi-partisan decision to fulfill the promise of President Roosevelt to these men whose contributions were critical in this country's successful victory over our adversaries.

Fabled battles in which they fought such as Bataan and Corregidor are certainly in the same league as Normandy and Guadalcanal. Without the participation of these Filipino veterans, one could only imagine what the outcome could have been for the world. So thank you to the more than 200 Senators and Congressmen and women of both parties who have acknowledged the need to make good on a promise.

I would also like to remind those who have not come out in support of this veterans bill that to many people, their unwillingness to give funding to these old men and women is totally perplexing. And the burden of proof rests on their shoulders to deny these benefits to these men.

As an American, I am appalled that the very crystal clear importance of keeping one's word –either as an individual or as a country - is what is at the core of this issue. Ignoring a promise made to any group without a clear and substantial reason goes against anything that I have come to believe is at the essence of this country - freedom, equality and integrity. Many of us are befuddled trying figure out what logical reason exists to deny these veterans benefits, which are so clearly theirs, and no such rational explanation seems to exist.

I am fond of repeating an amusing aphorism when dealing with the truth - And that is “You can't put lipstick on a pig and pass it off as Catherine Deneuve.” That there are some instances when the truth is so obvious that the only thing that happens when you spin that story is that people get dizzy. On the whole, smart people know when something isn't quite right.

In this instance it is clear to many Americans that it is our duty to keep our country's word – to insure that these veterans are treated honorably and fairly. The integrity of our nation in the minds of millions of people are dependent on this act of good faith and goodwill.

The passage of this bill and, hopefully, HR 491 next year would be a wonderful first step towards resolving this issue.

Thank you.

