

**STATEMENT OF
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OF THE
DISABLED AMERICAN VETERANS
BEFORE THE
HOUSE VETERANS' AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HEALTH
JUNE 13, 2002**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to present the views of the Disabled American Veterans (DAV) on legislation to extend Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) health care benefits to certain members of Filipino military units that fought along side the United States Armed Forces during World War II.

Since 1946, the United States Congress has limited the range of VA benefits for veterans of the Commonwealth Army of the Philippines, recognized guerrillas units, and New Philippine Scouts. We appreciate the Subcommittee's concern that many of these Filipino veterans are now elderly and in need of hospital care and medical services. The Health Care for Filipino World War II Veterans Act would, in part, authorize VA to provide hospital and nursing home care and medical services to Commonwealth Army veterans or new Philippine Scouts who reside in the United States and are citizens or lawfully admitted to the United States for permanent residence, in the same manner and subject to the same terms and conditions as apply to eligible United States veterans.

This legislation would thereby expand eligibility and provide equity of access to VA health care for this deserving group of Filipino veterans. Although DAV does not have a resolution from our membership in support of this issue, we recognize the historic contributions made by Filipino veterans during World War II as members of the United States Armed Forces. Measured in these terms, we believe Filipino veterans of World War II should be granted access to the VA health care system, and that additional resources be provided to VA to deliver those services.

As the Subcommittee is aware, VA is currently having difficulty providing treatment to all veterans seeking health care, including service-connected disabled veterans. The extension of health care benefits to an additional group of veterans places further stress on an already overburdened and under-funded system. Year after year federal funding has failed to keep pace with medical care inflation and the mounting financial burden for veterans health care caused by rising costs and increasing demand for medical services. The cumulative effects of years of unpredictable and inadequate funding have had a devastating and irreversible impact on the VA medical system and resulted in rationing of care. This has severely hampered timely access to quality health care for our nation's sick and disabled veterans, including our most severely disabled service-connected veterans. We believe this situation has reached a critical point and we ask the Subcommittee to carefully consider our proposal to shift VA medical care from a

discretionary to a mandatory funding program. Making veterans' health care funding mandatory would eliminate the year-to-year uncertainty about funding levels that has prevented VA from being able to adequately plan for and meet the demands of veterans seeking treatment.

If veterans' health care were a mandatory program, the government would have to provide sufficient funding for the VA to treat those enrolled veterans who meet the statutory requirements for care. Veterans would not have to fight for adequate funding in the budget and appropriations process every year as they do now. The DAV will continue working with members of Congress and others to build support for our efforts to ensure a reliable, adequate level of funding for VA medical services which is essential to fulfilling our nation's moral obligation to care for America's sick and disabled veterans.

We thank the Subcommittee for holding this hearing today and providing DAV the opportunity to express our views on this measure to extend VA health care benefits to members of Filipino military units that fought along side the United States Armed Forces during World War II. We appreciate your efforts to ensure that this unique group of veterans receives the recognition they rightfully deserve.