

**Congresswoman Juanita Millender-McDonald  
Committee on Veterans' Affairs  
Testimony before the Subcommittee on Health**

**Thursday, June 13, 2002  
Cannon HOB 334**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to publicly thank Chairman Moran and Ranking Member Filner for the invitation to address the subcommittee on Filipino veterans benefits. It is also important for me to recognize the strong bipartisan work performed by this subcommittee on behalf of our nation's veterans. As a constituency our nation's veterans are far too often ignored and to a degree marginalized when we should be extolling the work and sacrifices that they have made for this nation.

Two years into our new century, we reflect with great pride on all that our nation has accomplished in the 224 years since we first declared our independence. Today, we are in the midst of a war on terrorism, but, as it has for generations, America shines as a beacon of democracy, freedom, and opportunity for peoples around the world.

The blessings we rejoice in today were won at great cost. Millions of young men and women who stepped forward in times of crisis and conflict to defend our nation and uphold our values

around the world sacrificed their lives. The 20<sup>th</sup> century will forever be known as the American century, not only because of our economic strength, military might, and technological prowess, but also because of the character, determination, and indomitable spirit our people demonstrated time and again.

Filipino Americans, who fought and died on the same battlefields of World War II, joined America's sons and daughters in these great struggles. They brought honor and pride to our Nation and are proud to be called veterans of World War II. The issue now, Mr. Chairman, is not their willingness to serve, to fight, and to die, but, rather, is America willing to bring fairness and equity to those who serve this nation.

As you may recall, President Franklin Roosevelt ordered Filipino Americans to service in 1941. More than 140,000 Filipino soldiers fought, suffered, and in many instances, died in the same manner and under the same conditions as other members of the United States Armed Forces during World War II. In the years following the war, many of these veterans were denied health care, pension benefits, and in some cases a proper military funeral.

I am honored that as many as 600 Filipino veterans live within my Congressional District and have repeatedly brought attention to the plight of these veterans. I have called on my colleagues to support a House Resolution that I introduced that recognizes the contributions of Filipino veterans and urges that they receive due diligence for their many sacrifices. In addition, I am a proud cosponsor of H.R. 491, the Filipino Veterans Equity Act of 2001, which would also extend benefits to members of the Philippine Commonwealth Army and the Special Philippine Scouts who served during World War II or performed occupation duty in the Pacific after the war ended.

Last week, I was delighted to cosponsor the bill offered by my colleague from California, Rep. Filner. This bill will focus on VA medical care for Filipino World War veterans who live in the United States. In addition, this new legislation has the support of Secretary Principi and the Department of Veterans' Affairs. Secretary Principi has been extremely helpful meeting with me in Washington about this issue and then appearing at a town hall in my district to discuss this topic with my constituents, and I am pleased that he is committed to addressing this overlooked group of veterans.

Our agreement or disagreement with political policy and economic pressures should never diminish our love and profound respect for the men and women who chose duty over personal safety and went into battle-torn areas carrying our flag. We should have resources to take care of those Filipino veterans who have sacrificed on behalf of our nation.

It was President Lincoln who called on all Americans “to care for him who shall have borne the battle.” I urge the subcommittee to right the wrong visited upon these Americans, because when this nation called on them these men answered that call. It is an absolute disgrace that our country has waited so long to give them what they have earned. I will not stop until they get what they rightfully deserve.