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Congresswoman Maxine Waters
Subcommittee on Health
House Committee on Veteran's Affairs
Thursday, June 13, 2002

Throughout my career, I have worked hard to ensure that those who bravely fought to defend our nation received medical care and other benefits they need and deserve. Beginning in 1941, millions of individuals put their lives on hold and served bravely in World War Two to protect the United States from its enemies. After war ended, many returned home; they attended college on the GI bill, received medical care and other benefits they were entitled to as veterans.

However, the Filipinos who fought alongside of our troops did not receive the same treatment. Thousands joined the war effort and they fought bravely and greatly contributed to the war effort. They assumed that when their service was over, they would receive the same benefits as other veterans. Unfortunately, this turned out to be a false assumption.

Legislation passed by Congress in 1946 specifically excluded Filipinos from receiving full veterans benefits. While some Filipino veterans became eligible for disability benefits when they were injured, they often received half of what was provided for American veterans. And, even though there is a large population of Filipino veterans living in the United States, the practice of providing reduced benefits continue. This puts a significant strain on our nation's health system and is just plain unfair.

To address this problem, I cosponsored H.R. 491, the Filipino Veterans Equity Act. This bill, sponsored by Representative Gilman, would allow these veterans to become eligible for benefits under the Department of Veterans' Affairs. The legislation would help thousands of individuals receive the benefits they deserve and ensure that they are cared for.

I am pleased that this subcommittee is working on another bill, *The Health Care for Filipino World War II Veterans Act*. I commend Representative Filner and the rest of this subcommittee for recognizing the importance of this issue and working to address it. This bill will go a long way in helping Filipino veterans living in the United States. They will have access to the quality health care that the VA provides, a great relief for many.

Veterans have fought hard to protect our freedom and way of life and we should do everything possible to ensure that they are taken care of. This is just one step in addressing the many needs of our veterans, but it is a crucial step. I urge this committee to continue their important work and provide the assistance our veterans deserve.