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**The Honorable Jerry Moran
Chairman, Subcommittee on Health
House of Representatives Veterans Affairs Committee
335 Cannon Building
Washington DC 20515**

A Testimony Before the VA House Subcommittee on Health

**By Patrick G. Ganio, Sr.
National President American Coalition for Filipino Veterans**

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Members of this Committee, Fellow Veterans, Ladies and Gentlemen, Good afternoon.

My name is Patrick G. Ganio, Sr., National President of the American Coalition for Filipino Veterans. I am a WWII Veteran, a survivor of Bataan and Corregidor, a former Prisoner of War, a recognized guerrilla. I received a Purple Heart medal for a wound in combat during the liberation campaign of the Philippines in 1945.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity given me to testify before your Committee on the issue of "whether or not Filipino WWII Veterans are to be extended healthcare benefits here in the United States and in the Philippines." It is my great honor to be invited. In speaking before this honorable committee, I represent over 4,000 of my members across the US and those in the Philippines.

Outright, Mr. Chairman, it is my view that healthcare must to be extended to our veterans wherever they choose to live. Under the public policy "to care for those who bore the battle, their widows, and their orphans," our government is morally and duty bound to provide. But notwithstanding this policy, our Filipino veterans benefit claims have been by-passed by the Rescission Act, which I have, no doubt the members of this Committee are familiar with.

The legislative history of the Act began when the Finance Committee was dealing with surplus appropriations in 1946. The motive was to limit the benefits to Filipino veterans was obvious. More so the VA report of \$3.2-B compensation benefits to Filipinos was a huge amount to provide.

This estimate was made by the VA Study Committee to make the military service status on equal footing with the United States Forces based on two previous opinions of the Attorney General In one, Filipino servicemen are entitled to benefits from the National Service Life Insurance for serving in the US military (VA Case 491, March 1941). The other was that Filipinos taken prisoners of war or were missing in action during the war were

entitled to benefits under the Missing Persons Act of 1942 because they were in the service of the US military.

Mr. Chairman, as the Senate Finance Committee used the VA report to make the proper legislation to meet the obligation, Congress endeavored to find the rationale to justify their intent to limit the benefits. Thus, Congress decided to give \$200-M benefits only for service connected disability, death and survivors benefits. In our view the controversial provision of the Rescission Act became the legal excuse to deny or limit Filipino Veterans claims that require considerable cost.

The 1990 naturalization law for Filipino WWII veterans was approved for our military service because there was no appropriation required. The Special Veterans Benefits (SVB) was approved because it saved 25% from the Social Security Income budget. There was no new or additional expense required. Many did not qualify because they were not residing in the United States at the time of the passage of the SVB Act on December 14, 1999, another savings. They were subject to the means test and many did not qualify, hence more savings to the Federal Government. This is in addition to the billions of dollars worth of savings in the years that we did not receive any benefits.

How much more sacrifice do you want us to make before Congress decides to give us the benefits that we deserve? How many of us would have to die to save America's dollars?

When we stood our ground in the battles of Bataan and Corregidor without America's aid and support that was promised but never came. We accomplished our delaying mission that saved billions of dollars and thousands of American lives. What do these savings mean to us 60 years later today when as we as war veterans we could not be given palliative benefits?

Mr. Chairman, when our war on terrorism came to pass, billions and billions of dollars poured to foreign aid but not to Filipino veterans. What we are now asking Congress is to fund our healthcare and pension benefits. This budget will be comparable to a drop in the bucket of Federal savings during the years we did not receive equitable benefits.

Pardon me for asking these questions. We deeply appreciate your patience to listen given us the opportunity to be heard in this forum, a process we cannot find in any other political system.

Otherwise, we can but find solace from the tribute of great men like Prime Minister Winston Churchill of England and General Douglas MacArthur, who said, after our epic defense in the battles in Bataan and Corregidor, "No army in the world has done so much with so little."

Why? Outnumbered 4 to 1, without America's promised aid that never came, with antiquated weapons of the first world war vintage, ill-trained, ill-equipped, ill-fed, no medicines, we fought with incredible endurance against both the enemy and malaria. During the days and sleepless nights of jungle fighting in the rugged mountains of Bataan, our spirit was our only strength.

Our courage, faith and devotion to duty, honor, and country was the foundation of our determined efforts that delayed and broke the enemy's time table of 50 days to conquer the Philippines. Our resistance extended to 150 days of uncommon valor.

Our defense was a feat in US military history and in MacArthur's view saved the United States billions of dollars and thousands of American lives. And in a more profound tribute to us the fighting bastards of Bataan, he said: "I do not know the glory of their birth. What I do know is the glory of their death. Their faith in their hearts and on their lips, the hope that we will go on to victory."

Mr. Chairman, Notwithstanding the discrimination of the Rescission Act, the validity of our military service for the purposes of rights, privileges, or benefits for service connected disabilities, death, and survivors benefits is recognized

To us this is not the real issue. The issue is whether or not our government, the Congress and the Administration of this great nation can in conscience have the moral and political will to give us what we deserve in the light of what our country stands for.

Mr. Chairman and the honorable members of this Committee: I appeal for your support to pass our health care bill with a modest pension. You may call the pension a medical allowance of \$100 a month that could meet the emergent needs of our veterans in the Philippines for medicines and travel expense to hospitals. This if done will be a triumph of justice and equity.

I wish to point out that of the surviving eligible Filipino veterans, some 25% will no longer qualify because of the means test. Before these benefits we seek are finally implemented, increased old age mortality being factor, unfortunately, the funding will be much lower than reported by the CBO.

Mr. Chairman: We trust in your leadership. We trust in the leadership of our President. We remember what our former President George Bush, Sr. begun with his approval of our naturalization law in 1990. I was indeed privileged to witness in the signing ceremony at the White House.

We hope and pray that under the leadership of his son, now our President George W. Bush, Jr., our long-standing issue of our veterans' claims will be over.

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We thank leadership of this Congress and the efforts of Secretary Anthony Principi of the Department of Veterans Affairs to get justice done at last.

