



**SERVING
WITH
PRIDE**

TESTIMONY

of

**RICHARD JONES
AMVETS NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE DIRECTOR**

before the

**COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HEALTH,
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

on

**DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS HEALTH CARE FOR
FILIPINO WORLD WAR II VETERANS**



**Thursday, June 13, 2002
Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515**

A M V E T S

NATIONAL
HEADQUARTERS
4647 Forbes Boulevard
Lanham, Maryland
20706-4380
TELEPHONE: 301-459-9600
FAX: 301-459-7924
E-MAIL: amvets@amvets.org

MR. CHAIRMAN AND MEMBERS OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE:

On behalf of AMVETS National Commander Joseph W. Lipowski, I am pleased to submit written testimony on providing the same level of health care benefits to certain Filipino World War II veterans residing in the Philippines as those received by veterans who reside in the United States.

We are certainly mindful of the brave and historic contributions made by Filipino nationals during World War II. Their actions as part of the allied effort are legendary. Measured in these terms, we believe Filipino veterans of World War II certainly deserve our grateful appreciation for their heroic contributions they made during the war effort, regardless of where they may reside. And, in a fiscally unconstrained environment, AMVETS would most assuredly support allowing these individuals access to appropriate veterans health care.

However, as the members of this Subcommittee fully appreciate, VA funding for the current year is extraordinarily tight. A case in point is the fiscal year 2002 VA appropriation. Shortfalls in VA's medical care budget of nearly \$400 million have already forced the Department to the brink of curtailing services affecting American veterans. Only a last minute call from White House Chief of Staff Andrew Card to VA Secretary Anthony Principi avoided a scheduled December announcement to bar new enrollments of veterans from the healthcare system.

Although we certainly value the contributions and sacrifices made by our Filipino comrades in arms during World War II, we believe the interests of American veterans must continue to come first. We would certainly prefer a fiscal climate where both the interests of Filipino and American veterans could be satisfactorily accommodated.

It appears to us, however, that providing health care benefits to Filipino veterans would use resources that might otherwise be available to support American veterans. We recognize the difficult choices with which you must deal.

However, without additional funding, we believe that our longstanding commitments to our own veterans should take priority in a choice between expanding benefits to Filipino veterans or restoring funding support to American veterans' programs.

AMVETS supports the goal of providing health care benefits to Filipino World War II veterans. We want every veteran who has an injury or illness incurred in the defense of America to receive appropriate, world-class health care. Our veterans deserve no less.

AMVETS remains concerned, however, about the resources currently available to the VA health care system. The challenges faced by VA and the veterans served are not easy. Clearly, the health care system is in dire need of additional funding caused by years of inadequate budget proposals. With current year appropriations already determined to be less than required to meet the challenges that face the system, it is difficult to see a positive effect on our veterans by extending benefits to Filipino veterans, at this time.

Mr. Chairman, the common theme in efforts to provide appropriate health care for our veterans today and into the future is that our veterans are indeed special. They are a unique national resource to whom we owe an enormous debt of gratitude for their service, their sacrifice, their patriotism and their unswerving dedication to America.

In sum, AMVETS firmly believes, as stated in *The Independent Budget*, that adequate funding remains the central issue challenging the future of the VA healthcare system.

This concludes our statement. Again, thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important issue, and thank you, as well, for your support of veterans.

###