

**STATEMENT OF
SUSAN ESPIRITU MAQUINDANG
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HEALTH
OF THE
VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
OF THE UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
JUNE 13, 2002**

Good Afternoon! First of all, I would like to thank the Veteran's Affairs Subcommittee on Health, Chairman Jerry Moran, and the honorable member, Congressman Bob Filner, and your staff for allowing me to testify today.

My name is Susan Espiritu Maquindang, a daughter of a Filipino World War II veteran. I am the Executive Director of Filipino American Service Group Inc. (FASGI), a non-profit community-based agency that provides social services to low-income and homeless individuals from the Asian Pacific Islanders (API) population in Los Angeles County. FASGI started in October 1981, when a homeless Filipino World War II veteran with mental health problem, was found sleeping in the garage at the home of Mrs. Remedios Geaga, one of the founding members of our agency. Since then, FASGI has assisted thousands of Filipino American World War II veterans in various services such as temporary shelter,

health and mental health referrals, case management, client advocacy, food distribution, information and referral, and adult education classes. In 1995, FASGI opened it's transitional housing for homeless seniors, and has provided transition services to independent living for more than three hundred World War II veterans.

I am concerned that my presentation will, in part, be perceived as a complaint against those who have actually tried to correct a wrong committed over half a century ago. It is my impression that this subcommittee, and indeed most member of the current Congress, have tried to correct the wrongs created by the Recession Act of 1946.

That puts me in the awkward position of asking for a morally necessary solution to a problem, which has festered for five (5) decades. Worse still, I am here asking that some of the reforms you instituted be altered because they have consequences no one intended.

Please bear with me. I trust your good intentions and your good faith.

The problem is that you cannot restore health to people who have lived 55 years without adequate medical care. When the US turned its back on the Filipino-American Veterans in the late 40's, that decision had health consequences on the men who were left without care.

Cognizant of this reality, the Filipino-American Service Group, Inc. (FASGI) obtained a grant from California Endowment and California Wellness Foundation, to study the health of a sample population of Filipino-American Veterans who are still alive and living in Los Angeles.

The result is the study which I sent you last week, and which I am again offering for your information.

This is the only study of its kind, and it documents several unique issues.

First, there is a very high rate of depression and an even more alarming instance of suicidal thoughts. While such psychological dysfunctions are common among all older people, the rates among Filipino-American Veterans are much higher.

Unfortunately, the diagnosis is almost as painful as the disorder.

In an effort to create some, minimal care for the Filipino-American Veterans of World War II, Congress enabled that population to immigrate to the US and to obtain citizenship. In doing so, each emigrating Veteran is also eligible for Medicare and for other welfare benefits. This was far less than they were promised in 1942, but better than nothing at all. Unfortunately, requiring them to come to the US dislocates them from friends, family and culture. The results are depression and, even, suicide.

The problems is that each of these men, now all in their late 70's and early 80's, find themselves having to make a terrible choice:

- They can get competent medical care, while living in the US, which is a foreign culture to them. The cultural adjustment is painful, and imposes stress and depression on their daily lives.**
- Alternatively, they can return to the Philippines and live in a society they understand and know, and have the comfort of lifelong friends**

and relatives. In doing so, however, they give up most of the medical care they need.

Requiring such a choice of men who have been repeatedly denied their lawful entitlements is cruel and unnecessary. Those wishing to return to their homes should be provided with medical care in the Philippines. That may be a difficult pill to swallow, but it is the only realistic choice for a major proportion of the World War II Veterans.

Second, many of these men have medical problems, which would not be nearly as severe if they had been treated earlier. Had they received the benefits they were promised, they would have gotten earlier medical diagnosis and intervention, and their blood pressure, diabetes, arthritis, and other diseases would not be as serious today.

In short, they now need more care than would otherwise be necessary.

Again, this issue needs to be addressed.

Finally, there is very little time left to act.

Most World War II Veterans now between 75 and 90, and over 2,500 die each year. If Congress does not act soon, there will be no one left. Phrased another way, each day this remedy is delayed, nearly 10 more Filipino-American Veterans slip beyond the reach of your assistance. This is your last chance to correct a wrong, which is now half a century old. I believe you are men of good intention, and now it is time for those intentions to be converted into law.

Thank you.