

# It's Time We Honor Our Commitment

By U.S. Senator Brian Schatz D-Hawaii

[The Fil-Am Courier](#)

In 1941, America made a promise, but when the time came to follow through, we didn't honor that commitment.

More than 250,000 Filipino soldiers answered President Franklin Roosevelt's call to fight under the American flag during the Second World War. From Bataan to Corregidor, these soldiers wrestled against tyranny to protect their loved ones from a ruthless enemy. They fought with the promise that America would grant them citizenship and all the benefits owed to an American service member. Many paid the ultimate price before that promise could be fulfilled. It is these Filipino soldiers that ultimately helped bring the war in the Pacific to an end. The American and Philippine governments recognized them as "strategically indispensable." And in 1946, President Harry Truman commended Filipino soldiers and guerillas, stating that, "They fought with gallantry and courage under the most difficult conditions" and that it was "a moral obligation of the United States, to look after the welfare of the Filipino Army Veterans."

But America has yet to fulfill that moral obligation. In 1946, Congress passed the Rescission Act, rescinding the benefits owed to most Filipino World War II veterans for their service to the United States.

Thanks to the leadership of Senator Daniel K. Inouye, and others, there has been some progress to correct this injustice. Some Filipino veterans received special naturalization in the early 1990s. In 2009, President Obama signed into law a bill that created an Equity Compensation Fund, which provided for a one-time payment of \$15,000 to eligible Filipino

veterans who were U.S. citizens; \$9,000 for non-U.S. citizens. While these are important remedies, it is time for Congress to finally give Filipino veterans the full recognition and benefits they deserve.

That is why I have introduced the Filipino Veterans Fairness Act with Senator Lisa Murkowski of Alaska.

First, we must eliminate the distinction between Filipino veteran groups and allow every veteran to be equally eligible for benefits. Currently, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) distinguishes between the Regular or “Old” Philippine Scouts and three other veterans groups: the Commonwealth Army of the Philippines, Recognized Guerrilla Forces, and New Philippine Scouts. These groups are provided unequal benefits even though they all served under General Douglas MacArthur’s command. We know they were all indispensable to bringing the war to an end.

Second, Filipino veterans must be allowed to use alternative documentation to prove their military service. Today, in order for these veterans to be eligible for benefits, they must be on the Approved Revised Reconstructed Guerilla Roster of 1948. While there is no doubt the Army made a good faith effort to include every soldier that fought when it put its list together, many were left off. We know today that many veterans never came forward for their own reasons at the time, and others who fought used aliases to protect their families or because they served in intelligence roles. We cannot afford to deny anyone recognition for their service to the United States.

Third, Filipino veterans who received a one-time payment under the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act must be granted eligibility for veterans benefits. Those veterans who accepted payment were required to release the U.S. government from any obligation for future veteran’s benefits. We would not ask this of any other group of veterans that went unrecognized for so long and that may need long-term care. It is just wrong.

Finally, we cannot forget about the spouses and children that were separated from their loved ones during time of war. We have a

responsibility to take care of them after their loved one has passed, and this bill helps to do that.

As we celebrate Memorial Day, we remember the sacrifices of the thousands of Filipino veterans who gave their lives to protect their loved ones and to defend freedom. We must continue to carry their story forward, and the story of every Filipino soldier who waits to be recognized as a veteran. Their days of waiting are over. It is time for Congress to act now.