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An online initiative has been started in California to get signatories to support two bills in US Congress that would authorize the award of US Congressional Gold Medal on Filipino and American troops who fought the Japanese in Bataan during the Second World War.

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US CONGRESSIONAL GOLD MEDAL

Petition Seeks Award for Bataan Defenders

By ROMEO P. MARQUEZ

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TORONTO - The United States Congress is being asked to bestow the Congressional Gold Medal, its highest civilian award, on troops who defended Bataan Peninsula in the Philippines during the Second World War.

Proponents in California see some difficulty in getting lawmakers to endorse the grant as rules require two-thirds of members of the House and the Senate to co-sponsor before their committees would look into it.

"It is an uphill battle, but it is doable," says Maria Elizabeth Embry, a volunteer lobbyist, who is spearheading an online campaign to get people to sign a petition urging the award as a recognition of the sacrifices by American and Filipino forces in fighting Japanese aggression.

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(The petition is at: <http://www.change.org/petitions/us-senate-house-of-representative-members-co-sponsor-the-congressional-gold-medal-bills-for-the-defenders-of-bataan>).

The gold medal is not meant to be worn and is largely symbolic as only one would be created by the US Mint and kept on permanent display, like a trophy, at the Smithsonian. Bronze replicas would be produced and sold to the public to recover cost estimated not to exceed \$30,000.

Initially intended to honor individuals for their outstanding deeds as in the case of its very first recipient in 1776, George Washington, then a general, the Congressional Gold Medal is now awarded to groups of persons like President Ronald Reagan and first lady Nancy Reagan in July 2000 or the Navajo Code Talkers in December 2000.

"The reason I started this," explains Ms. Embry in email interviews, "is that even non-US citizens and non-US residents can sign the petition since we are all beneficiaries of the freedom that our soldiers fought for".

"It's just fitting and proper that these troops should be honored together for they fought for the same cause and died for the same idealism," she adds.

Two bills have been filed in mid-December in the House and the Senate which would authorize the grant of the gold medal. The bills recognized that "The veterans of Bataan represented the best of America and the Philip pines

. They hailed from diverse locales across both countries and represented a true diversity of Americans . . . The people of the US and the Philippines are forever indebted to them".

For Filipinos, the medal is especially significant since it would rectify the many mistakes committed by the US government against Filipino veterans and others who served under the US flag during the war.

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"It is high time that the World War II Filipino veterans get the proper acknowledgment for their sacrifices. They truly deserve this Congressional Gold medal for fighting shoulder to shoulder with the Americans in WWII," says California-based journalist Malou Mariano in an e-mail. # # #

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