

## Senator Inouye Parts With Filipino Veterans - MabuhayRadio

Written by Joseph G. Lariosa

Wednesday, 04 April 2012 16:22 - Last Updated Wednesday, 04 April 2012 16:39

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By JOSEPH G. LARIOSA

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CHICAGO (jGLi) – At the 70th anniversary this week of the Fall of Bataan, a Republican congressman from Las Vegas, Nevada is pulling out all the stops to keep the H.R. 210, the Filipino Veterans Fairness Act of 2011, from disintegrating.

The bill that Rep. Joe Heck (R-NV) has co-sponsored will overturn the Rescission Act of 1946. It has collected 90 co-sponsors in the House but has yet to attract a single Senator to come up with a companion Senate version.

Thanks to the clout of Sen. Daniel K. Inouye (D-HI), chair of the powerful Senate appropriations committee, who was reportedly openly opposing the measure, nobody from the U.S. Senate from either side of the aisle would touch the money measure with a ten-foot pole.

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But what is surprising is that Mr. Inouye early last year filed a related bill, S. 63, that requires the Secretary of the Army to “determine the validity of the claims of certain Filipinos that they performed military service on behalf of the U.S. during World War II,” perhaps after learning that many claims (as many as 24,000) were rejected by the U.S. Veterans Affairs because their names are not listed in the National Personnel Record Center (NPRC) in St. Louie, Missouri.

The bill asks the Secretary of the Army to consider “all information and evidence that is available to the Secretary, including information and evidence submitted by the applicant, if any.”

But because the senior Hawaii senator has recently made known his opposition to help the Filipino veterans, no other Senator has come forward to co-sponsor S. 63.

Advocates for Filipino veterans, among them, Luke Perry, son-in-law of a Filipino veteran, are still in shock over a letter Sen. Inouye wrote to a Filipino American constituent in Hawaii, Commander Francisco Obina, saying that although he was able to help push for the passage of the Filipino Veterans Equity Compensation Fund (FVEC) as rider in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009, “introduction of a full recognition bill would give false hopes to the Filipino World War II veterans.”

The letter, which was confirmed by this reporter from Sen. Inouye's press spokesman Peter Boylan, said the FVEC's "lump sum payment was and still is the best benefit we could achieve ... and represents a small token of acknowledgement and appreciation to the remaining Filipino World War II veterans for their sacrifices and contributions made in defense of our nation."

## **PERSONAL LETTER OF APOLOGY BY THE PRESIDENT SUGGESTED**

In rejecting the "full equity," Mr. Inouye said, "no compensation measure can ever be enough. Such was the case with the redress for Japanese Americans, who lost their liberty, property, and equal protection with due process of law."

But the senior Senator stopped short of saying that the Japanese American interns, who were given a lump sum pay of \$20,000 each in 1990 were each given a personal letter of apology from the first U.S. President Bush, which was lacking from the much smaller token compartmentalized amounts of \$15,000 for American citizens and \$9,000 for non-Americans given to Filipino veterans.

In parting, Mr. Inouye told Mr. Obina, "My position should not preclude any member of Congress

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or my colleagues in the Senate from authoring such legislation. I wish you all the best.”

Advocates believe that if the Filipino veterans were given a personal letter of apology each from the President with a pledge that never again will America conscript Filipinos without giving them equal compensation and benefits with their American counterparts, they will stop further advocating for full recognition.

Despite these adversities, Rep. Joe Heck has written Rep. Jeff Miller (R-FL-01), chair of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, requesting the Committee to hold a “hearing on the administration” of the FVEC, and the “challenges the Veterans Administration faces in verifying the service records of the Filipino Veterans.”

Mr. Heck said the ARRA authorized a one-time payment from the FVEC to Filipino veterans, who served in the Commonwealth Army of the Philippines, Recognized Guerilla Forces, and New Philippine Scouts prior to July 1, 1946

While over 18,500 deserving Filipino veterans of WW II have received payments under FVEC, the Veterans Administration has denied over 24,000 claims.

Heck said that while he appreciates the Veterans Administration diligence in processing these claims, “I am concerned that many legitimate claims may have been unjustly denied because of inaccurate military service records.”

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He said while VA relies on the National Personnel Records Center (NPRC) in St. Louis, Missouri, to assist the Filipino veterans in verifying their service records, the “incomplete nature of the NPRC’s service records is well documented.” He cited NPRC’s own website estimates that a 1973 fire destroyed 10-12-million Official Military Personnel Files, including 80 percent of the U.S. Department of the Army’s personnel records of veterans discharged between Nov. 1, 1912 and Jan. 1, 1960.

Mr. Heck wants the Committee on Veterans’ Affairs to hold a hearing to “identify options for correcting this injustice.”

For his part, Chairman Miller tasked the Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs subcommittee staff to “investigate this matter and to specifically look into” the “methods and resources utilized by the VA to verify claims submitted by Filipino veterans under FVEC” and “asses findings and determine the appropriate actions necessary, and a hearing will most certainly be among the options to be considered.” # # #

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