

By JOSEPH G. LARIOS

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CHICAGO (*jGLi*) – United States Sen. Dean A. Heller (R-NV) introduced Wednesday (Sept. 12) the Filipino Veterans Fairness Act (S. 3530) in the Senate that “would establish a process for Filipinos who fought alongside the U.S. military during World War II and have documentation to work with military historians so they can receive proper benefits for their service.”

In a press release sent out by his press staff Stewart Bybee, Senator Heller said:

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“The United States must make every effort to ensure that Filipinos who served during World War II are properly recognized for their contributions to our nation. This legislation will provide the opportunity for individuals in the Filipino community to prove their service and obtain the compensation they are owed.

"Any individual denied veteran benefits should be allowed to have their story heard, especially those in the Filipino community. This bill will ensure that Filipinos who claim veteran status are treated with dignity and respect.”

The measure revives the flickering hope of about 24,000 Filipino veterans, who have yet to receive their Filipino Veterans Equity Compensation (FEVC) granted as a one-time lump sum of \$15,000 for U.S. Citizens and \$9,000 for non-U.S. citizens because their names could not be located in the National Personnel Records Center in St. Louis, Missouri. The lump sum payment was a rider in the American Recovery and

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Reinvestment Act signed by President Obama in 2009.

The filing of the bill by Heller drew strong endorsement from an officer of The Filipino-American Families of America in Politics in Las Vegas Nevada. The officer, Luke Perry, pledged to support the campaign of Heller, who is trying to keep his Senate seat in the coming Nov. 6, 2012 election.

According to the *Las Vegas Review Journal*, Mr. Perry, vice chairman of the group and an advocate for recognition and benefit of his father-in-law, who is an "unrecognized" Filipino veteran, Mr. Perry and his group will be "endorsing Heller on Saturday afternoon at Ray's Asian Cuisine, a Filipino-owned Las Vegas restaurant."

HELLER UP FOR ELECTION

The junior Nevada senator, who was appointed to the Senate seat by Nevada Gov. Brian Sandoval following the resignation of Sen. John Ensign last year, is up for election against seven-term U.S. Rep. Shelley Berkley (D-Nev.), who is a co-sponsor of the pending Filipino Fairness Act of 2011 introduced in the House by Rep. Jackie Speier (D-Ca-12).

The newspaper quoted Mr. Perry as saying, "The president (Obama) has been here seven times (this year) and never addressed this issue." Perry ... saw Berkley last weekend and she didn't offer any more help on the compensation matter.

"She didn't say one word to any of us about our veterans. No word from the Democrats on this at all. We've been working with all of them to try and get help for many years, including for

a 100-year-old veteran who's now in a nursing home dying."

Berkley campaign spokeswoman Xochitl Hinojosa was quoted by the *Journal* as saying the congresswoman has supported Filipino veterans.

"While Senator Heller is the only candidate in this race who voted against extending compensation for WWII Filipino veterans, Congresswoman Shelley Berkley has been one of their strongest advocates - not only co-sponsoring the Filipino Veterans Equity Act, but voting for legislation providing compensation for thousands of Filipino veterans who served America bravely," Hinojosa said in a statement reacting to Perry's endorsement.

"We're not supposed to be endorsing (politicians)," said Bernie

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Benito, a member of another nonpartisan educational group of Filipino-American veterans that has been working on the issue for years, according to the *Journal*. "It's not fair to the veterans group."

HELLER'S LETTER TO PANETTA

Last July 18, Senator Heller sent a [letter](#) to U.S. Defense Secretary Leon Panetta, urging him to work with Filipinos denied veteran benefits. Senator Heller has yet to receive a response from Secretary Panetta and therefore has moved forward by introducing the Filipino Veterans Fairness Act. Mr. Heller asked Mr. Panetta to "respond to me by August 2012."

In his letter to Mr. Panetta, Mr. Heller said, "Filipino soldiers served honorably in the Commonwealth Army of the Philippines

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, Recognized Guerilla Forces, and New Philippine Scouts
alongside

U.S.

troops during World War II. Many of these individuals were included on what is known as the “Missouri List,” which was created at the end of the war to document Filipinos who served alongside the United States

“Unfortunately, it has come to my attention that some individuals who served alongside the U.S. military may not have been included on this list. Because the Department of Veterans Affairs relies solely on this list to determine service, I am concerned that there may be Filipinos unfairly excluded from benefits they earned during World War II.

“The United States must make every effort to ensure that those individuals who served are properly recognized for their contributions to our nation. That is why I am respectfully asking the Department of Defense in coordination with military

historians to establish a process to open the Missouri List to give Filipinos the opportunity to prove their service.

“It is my belief that in working with military historians, you can establish standards for documentation to support whether or not an individual had served during World War II in the Philippines for veterans benefit purposes.

ENTITLED TO FAIR AND COMPLETE EXAMINATION

“Filipino veterans are a respected part of the Nevada community. They are entitled to a fair and complete examination of their record and we must be certain that all eligible Filipino veterans receive compensation they are entitled to for their service to the United States

during World War II.”

By filing the Filipino Veterans Fairness Act (S. 3530), Senator Heller will be complimenting Rep. Speier’s Filipino Fairness Act of 2011 in the House. This bill, which has gained 96 co-sponsors in the House, will seek full benefits that were denied to the the Filipino veterans following the adoption of the Rescission Act of 1946, which stripped Filipino World War II veterans of full benefits and recognition.

It also seeks to recognize the U.S. military service of the Filipino veterans, whose eligibility can be based not only on the “Missouri List,” the official record of the U.S. Army personnel, but also on all military records that would reference to their heroic military service during the war. # # #

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