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Monday, 27 February 2012 17:32 -

The News UpFront: (TOP STORY) as of Monday, February 27, 2012

A San Diego, California, lawmaker has expressed his full support to an ongoing online petition to bestow the Congressional Gold medal, its highest civilian award, on Filipino and American defenders of Bataan who were forced by the Japanese in the infamous Death March in 1942. The petition, launched in December, has so far attracted at least 230 signatories.

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CONGRESSIONAL GOLD MEDAL

Online Petition to Recognize Filipino Veterans Wins Support

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By ROMEO P. MARQUEZ

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TORONTO – An online petition to grant the US Congressional Gold Medal, its highest civilian award, collectively to Filipino and American defenders of Bataan has received the endorsement of a United States lawmaker who is closely identified with Filipino issues and concerns.

"Congressman Bob Filner expressed his gratitude to American and Filipino

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prisoners of war by recently supporting legislation to award a congressional gold medal to those who were forced to participate in the Bataan Death March during World War II," his office in Washington told The Filipino Web Channel on Monday.

The San Diego-based Filner (D- 51st District) is perhaps the first congressional leader to openly show his support for the online initiative begun in December and has won at least 230 signatories. Two-thirds of members of the House and the Senate are required to co-sponsor before their committees would look into it.

Maria Elizabeth Embry, a volunteer lobbyist who started the petition, considers the initiative an "an uphill battle, but it is doable." She said the award is a recognition of the sacrifices by American and Filipino forces in fighting Japanese aggression.

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

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Nearly 80,000 Filipino and American prisoners of war were forced by the Japanese to join in the infamous 80-mile Bataan Death March in April 1942 without food or water.

"The Bataan Death March resulted in the death of thousands of POWs, and forever affected the lives of those who survived this dark episode of war," says Filner. "American and Filipino soldiers showed extraordinary courage as they were subjected to unspeakable atrocities, and deserve our undying honor and respect."

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 honour 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.

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"The reason I started this," explains Ms. Embry in earlier 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.

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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