

In its inaugural year, the House of Representatives' Filipino Caucus is eager to serve as the Filipino community's conduit at the Capitol. Chaired by Representative Michael Y. Magaoay, the 17 member caucus is comprised of Representatives who meet one of three criteria: being of Filipino descent, representing a district with a large Filipino population, or having been born in the Philippines. Current membership includes: Chair Michael Y. Magaoay, and Representatives: Dela Au Belatti, Lyla B. Berg, Ph.D, Rida T.R. Cabanilla, Jerry L. Chang, Corinne W.L. Ching, Lynn Finnegan, Robert N. Herkes, Jon Riki Karamatsu, Joey Manahan, John Mizuno, Kymberly Marcos Pine, Roland D. Sagum, III, Alex M. Sonson, James Kunane Tokioka, Glenn Wakai, and Clift Tsuji.

The Filipino Caucus' first meeting with Filipino community leaders was held on February 28th at the State Capitol. Chair Magaoay welcomed the community leaders with open arms. "This is your floor and the more you reach out, the more successful we can be," he stated. "We have to work cordially and set our priorities, because when we work together as one, we can really turn heads."

One of the critical issues facing the Filipino community is the battle for Filipino veterans' benefits. An estimated 200,000 Filipinos served in World War II, with the promise of citizenship and benefits by President Franklin D. Roosevelt. This promise was later broken by Congress with the Rescission Act of 1946. For more than 60 years now, the Filipino veterans have been seeking what was promised and the struggle continues.

Aside from the full pension benefits that these veterans are seeking, there is something that may be even more pertinent to them in their senior years: **family reunification**. U.S. Senators Dan Akaka and Daniel Inouye recently introduced **Senate Bill 671** regarding family reunification. This measure seeks to grant special immigrant status to the children of naturalized Filipino veterans. With the visa backlog, some families have been waiting nearly 20 years to enter the U.S. It is morally imperative that these veterans are reunited with their families, and this measure is designed to expedite the process.

On the state level, the Filipino Caucus is working with their fellow legislators to fight for veterans' benefits. There are several measures regarding Filipino veteran issues going through the process this session. **House Bill 831** and **Senate Bill 31** are measures dealing with Veteran Burial Grants. The current policy of the Office of Veterans' Services requires the families of the deceased to present a **paid invoice** before they can be reimbursed. The high costs of funeral services are too much for some families to pay up front, and therefore they are unable to utilize the service. These two bills seek to remove this stumbling block by allowing families to present an **unpaid invoice** to the Office of Veterans' Services to receive the grant.

In addition, resolutions are being considered in the House and Senate requesting the enactment of **S. 671, "Filipino Family Reunification"** and **H.R.760/S. 57, "Filipino American Veterans Equity Act of 2007"**.

The Filipino Caucus intends to work with our legislators here and those in Washington, as well as Filipino community leaders, to ensure that Filipino veterans finally receive what they are due.