

WASHINGTON, DC – US Rep. Mike Honda (D-CA), Chair of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus (CAPAC), today hosted a forum to highlight the ongoing fight for equality and justice waged for decades by Filipino veterans of World War II.

The forum focused on the “Filipino Veterans Equity Act,” legislation making certain Filipino veterans of WWII eligible for the veterans’ benefits they earned, were promised by the U.S. government, and have waited to receive.

Congress broke its promise more than 50 years ago by rescinding Filipino soldiers’ right to access the veterans’ benefits they earned fighting side-by-side with American troops during World War II,” Honda said. “As we honor the sacrifice of Americans who died in Pearl Harbor, let us also honor the sacrifice of these brave Filipino veterans, and honor the commitment our government made to them so long ago.”

In 1934, Congress passed a law requiring the Commonwealth Army of the Philippines to answer the U.S. President’s request for troops. In 1941, the Commonwealth Army of the Philippines, responding to orders by President Roosevelt, joined troops from the U.S. Army. In 1945, after recruiting 50,000 “new” Philippine Scouts, the U.S. government promised that all members of the Commonwealth Army who fought under the Stars and Stripes would be treated as U.S. veterans for the purposes of their benefits.

Congress rescinded this promise in 1946. While some Filipino veterans now receive partial veterans’ benefits, many others are still waiting for the Congress to do the right thing, and fully restore the benefits that were promised to them nearly six decades ago.

The Filipino Veterans Equity Act would amend the 1946 Rescission Act so that Filipino soldiers during WW II are rightfully eligible to qualify for U.S. veterans’ benefits. This would allow the Filipino veterans, many of whom who are now elderly and in failing health, access to quality medical care at Veterans Administration facilities in the United States.

“These brave veterans are aging rapidly, with estimates indicated that they will have all passed on by 2015, so we must act right away to do the right thing,” Honda said. “The U.S. government promised these men that they would be treated as U.S. veterans for the purposes of benefits, and it is time we fulfill that promise.”