

Speech/Filipino Chamber of Commerce

Senator Daniel K. Akaka Papers

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CONGRESSMAN DANIEL K. AKAKA
SPEECH/FILIPINO CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
SATURDAY, OCTOBER 25, 1980

Thank you very much.

I am both pleased and deeply honored to be with you here today. Certainly I welcome the opportunity to share my thoughts with you.

Each one of you in this room today is living proof that people who come to this country can meet with success in their efforts to better their lives. Since the very first Filipinos arrived here many years ago, Americans of Filipino ancestry have made valuable contributions to the cultural enrichment and economic development of this nation.

As all of you no doubt know, things were certainly not easy for the first Filipinos to set foot on Hawaiian soil. In 1906, fourteen Ilocano men and a teenage boy clutching a fighting cock in his arms walked down the gangplank of the S. S. Doric. That day was December 20th. These men were carefully selected Filipinos----selected by an agent for the Hawaii Sugar Planters' Association to work on the sugar plantations.

By the end of 1907, 188 more men, 20 women, and two children came from the Philippines to join the workforce. Gradually, the word spread in the Philippines that there was plenty of work in Hawaii. Between 1906 and 1946, about 109,000 male Filipinos came to Hawaii to find work.

The story of the Filipino in Hawaii is really the story of a people's fight for social, economic and political freedom. 1906 marked the beginning of that struggle.

As many of you may know, life on the plantations was not easy in the early 1900's. Hours were long and the work was hard. The cane workers were often up at 3:30 in the morning, when they went to cook breakfast and lunch in the community kitchens. They had to pack their lunches for the day's work and were often in the fields by 6 a.m. At 7:45, they were given 15 minutes for breakfast; at 11 a.m., they ate lunch and were back to work by 11:30. For the rest of the day, they cut cane or carried bundles of cane up a plank propped against the side of a railroad car. Often, they worked a full 12 hours a day and for very little money. During the harvesting season, they were always covered with soot and ashes from burnt cane leaves. Saying that life was hard for the first Filipinos who came to Hawaii is probably an understatement.

As the years went by, the Filipino began to realize that he did not have to spend the rest of his life in the cane fields. Gradually, the children of cane workers became important parts of their communities. And, as the years passed, American-born Filipino youngsters began winning their rightful places in the larger island community.

Today, there are over 95,000 American-Filipinos living in Hawaii. They have careers in almost every walk of life. American-Filipinos are members of the State Legislature, doctors, lawyers, circuit court judges, school superintendents and policemen. In 1974, an American of Filipino ancestry was named to the Hawaii Supreme Court and another was a circuit court judge on the island of Kauai.

In 1978, he was named a federal judge in the Marianas Islands. Another is mayor of Kauai County, and from all reports, he has indeed served his people well.

Recognition of outstanding Filipino men and women is not limited to Hawaii, however. In August 1973, twelve Filipino generals were included in the Allied Officer Hall of Fame at the United States Army Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. (The Hall of Fame displayed graduates of the United States Army's top professional schools.) Indeed, there are so many outstanding American-Filipinos in this country that it would be impossible to name them all.

I think you will agree with me when I say that Americans of Filipino ancestry have come a long way since that day in December 1906, through education, multicultural understanding, societal acceptance, and community involvement. And yet, I predict that the future holds still more for Filipino Americans.

Of all the ethnic groups in Hawaii, the Filipino group is certainly the (most united and the) most politically active. Filipinos have banded together and have formed one of the most effective lobbies in this state. I want you to know that I wholeheartedly support this effort. The best way to accomplish your goals is to make certain that your voices are heard, loudly and clearly.

It is my firm belief that the next Congress, the 97th Congress, holds much in store for Filipino interests.

I have instructed my staff to prepare several bills for

inclusion in the next session of Congress. First, and obviously the most controversial, is the Philippine Scout bill. This bill is different from the bill introduced by Representative Panetta in the course of the last Congress. The new bill is a bill which provides full benefits not only for the Philippine Scouts who served our country so valiantly during World War II, but would also provide equal coverage for their counterparts at sea---the members of the Philippine Navy Insular Force. I have asked the library archivists at the Library of Congress to determine who might be able to qualify for these adjusted benefits. If you think that you qualify, or if you know of someone who does, please let my office in Washington, D.C. know. As we develop this legislation, I want to make sure tht everyone who served with U.S. Troops in the Philippines knows that he may be eligible for further benefits.

During the course of the 97th Congress, I also intend to sponsor legislation which would grant automatic immigration visas to those Filipinos who served the United States during World War II. I firmly believe that any man who was willing to lay down his life for America in the Philippines during World War II, and who fought alongside American troops, should certainly have the right to decide if he wants to hold American citizenship. This legislation will make it easier for those who want to come to America to do so.

The other two bills I intend to sponsor concern reauthorization funding for the Veteran's Memorial Center in

the Philippines and the reauthorization of funding for the office of Veteran's affairs also in the Philippines. Both of these projects aim at making sure that all Filipino Veterans of World War II get the gratitude and care that they so richly deserve.

These are some of the bills I intend to work on in the next Congress. I hope that, should you see other areas in which legislation is urgently needed, you will certainly let me know. For if not, I have no sure way of knowing which interests I am to represent.

I also want to take this opportunity to urge each one of you to remain politically active. I urge you to make sure that you have every opportunity to determine the shape of your future. This can best be accomplished by making sure that you are actively involved in the development and implementation of legislation and matters of public policy.

There is not a person in the room who would not excel as a leader in his or her community. Some of you already are leaders. Others of you will become leaders in the years to come. But all of you, I'm sure, know the ultimate value of serving Filipino interests by exerting an influence in matters of public policy.

In closing, let me add that it is my hope that we can, by working together in the years to come, make sure that all members of our community have fair and equitable representation in the United States Congress. To that end, I urge you to continue to make your voices heard on issues of concern to you and to your families. You can be sure

that you have my full support as you do so.

Thank you very much.