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FOR PROGRESS

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KAYA: Filipino Americans for Progress Applauds Obama Administration's Plan to Expedite Immigration for Families of Filipino American World War II Veterans

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WASHINGTON, D.C. -- KAYA: Filipino Americans for Progress applauds the Obama Administration's recommendation Wednesday that the family members of Filipino American World War II veterans be granted entry into the United States to care for aging veteran relatives currently residing in the United States.

With the recommendation made in the report issued by the Visa Modernization Task Force, family members will be eligible to request parole, which would allow them to come to the United States to care for their elderly Filipino American veteran relatives.

"This program is long overdue," said Genevieve Jopanda, Co-Chairperson of KAYA: Filipino Americans for Progress. "Frustration is an understatement to describe what these veterans have had to go through despite all they have done for their country. With this program, Filipino American World War II veterans will finally be reunited with their family members, some of whom have been waiting for as long as 23 years."

"We appreciate President Obama's recommendations and it is now Congress' turn to act," said Romeo Ymalay, Co-Chairperson of KAYA: Filipino Americans for Progress. "Congress should extend full veteran benefits and privileges to these brave men and finally modernize our immigration system."

On Capitol Hill, Senator Mazie Hirono (D-HI) applauded the decision, stating that this "action is the right thing to do for these brave people who served our country." Senator Hirono has been one of the most vocal Congressional supporters for Filipino American World War II veterans. In addition to sponsoring measures to address immigration backlogs, Senator Hirono is spearheading efforts to

recognize Filipino American World War II veterans with the Congressional Gold Medal for their service during the war.

During World War II, more than 260,000 Filipinos answered President Roosevelt's call and enlisted in the United States military. Despite their heroism, Congress passed the Rescission Act in 1946, which reduced the veteran status of these men to "reserve forces." This legislation effectively barred Filipino American veterans from claiming benefits that the government provided to all active duty veterans after the war, including the ability to apply for an American citizenship.

It was not until legislation was passed in 1990, nearly 50 years after the war, that these veterans finally became eligible for American citizenship. This meant that these veterans were finally eligible to file immigration petitions for their families. However, due to family visa backlogs, many of the veterans are still waiting to be reunited with their family members.

This recognition of the sacrifices that Filipino American World War II veterans have given to our country is long overdue, but we continue to urge President Obama and Congress to grant these veterans full recognition and to fix the broken immigration system that separated—and continues to separate— them from their families for decades.

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About KAYA: Filipino Americans for Progress

KAYA: Filipino Americans for Progress was founded in 2009 to build a political infrastructure to ensure that the Filipino American community is represented in the electoral process and governance. KAYA's mission is to mobilize the Filipino American community and build partnerships to increase Filipino American electoral power, advocate for policies that affect the Filipino American community and develop leaders to represent Filipino Americans at every level of government.