

Bill to expedite visa process for families of Filipino vets

By Deborah Manog
Honolulu Star-Advertiser

HONOLULU (AP) — Deep wrinkles crease Artemio Caleda’s face as he brushes his hand against a scar on the left side of his chin. He calls it a souvenir — picked up during World War II while dodging a cascade of explosive particles while taking part in the rescue of an American pilot. Although the shrapnel scar is now seven decades old and faint, it serves as a stinging reminder that Caleda is still fighting a battle: to have his three grown sons join him in the United States. “We have waited for 20 long years and no visa has been issued,” said Caleda, who served as an intelligence officer of the U.S. Army’s 11th Infantry Regiment, part of the Filipino Organized Guerrillas.

In an effort to address the matter, U.S. senators Mazie Hirono (D-Hawai’i) and Harry Reid (D-Nevada) reintroduced legislation that aims to expedite the visa process for sons and daughters of Filipino World War II veterans. Co-sponsored by U.S. senator Brian Schatz (D-Hawai’i) and two senators from Alaska and California, the Filipino Veterans Family Reunification Act would exempt Filipino veterans’ children, about 20,000 individuals, from a cap on immigrant visas. Because of annual limits on how many green cards are issued, the wait for an adult child’s visa can continue for decades. Petitions that Caleda and his wife filed on behalf of their sons in 1995 have yet to be processed.

As a former president of Fil-Am WWII Veterans of Hawai’i, Caleda has participated in rallies in Washington, D.C., and attended hearings for similar bills introduced by Democratic lawmakers. All of the past bills have failed to move through congress. Caleda recalled fellow veteran Rizal



Agbayani, whom he said died from exhaustion shortly after returning to Hawai’i from a five-day rally in Washington, D.C., in 1997. “I remember him seated on my left side in the taxicab, he was complaining, ‘I feel so weak,’” Caleda said. “When he was home, he collapsed, did not recover.” Hirono told the *Honolulu Star-Advertiser* in a statement that ending the immigration backlog for Filipino World War II veterans has long been a priority for the Hawai’i delegation. Previously, she pushed for a measure to end that backlog as part of comprehensive immigration reform. That bill passed in the senate with an overwhelmingly bipartisan vote but the legislation was killed by the leadership in the House of Representatives. “I am continuing to look for every avenue, that we can end the backlog for these veterans,” Hirono said. “Time is running out.” The Filipino veterans who served in World War II, including survivors of the

Bataan Death March, were offered U.S. citizenship under the 1990 naturalization act signed by President George H.W. Bush. Some veterans immigrated immediately with their spouses and young children, but legislation excluded adult children Reid said in a statement: “Over 260,000 brave Filipino veterans made a great sacrifice and answered America’s call to serve in World War II.” He continued, “No service member should be prevented from reuniting with their families because of our antiquated immigration system.” Caleda and his wife, Luz, moved to Royal Kunia in 1992. At age 91, he worries that the green card applications filed on behalf of his sons will die with him. His gaze fell to a portrait of his late wife situated next to a fresh flower bouquet and a dozen birthday cupcakes. Luz Caleda, who died last spring, would have turned 85 this month. Two applications for family-sponsored visas were filed under Luz Caleda’s name, but Emmanuel Guerrero, a local attorney, said a humanitarian policy allows Artemio

DECADES-LONG PROCESS. *Filipino World War II veteran Artemio Caleda shows a family photo at his home in Ewa Beach, Hawai’i. Although the shrapnel scar Caleda picked up during World War II is now seven decades old and faint, it serves as a stinging reminder that Caleda is still fighting a battle: to have his three grown sons join him in the United States. (AP Photo/Honolulu Star-Advertiser, Dennis Oda)* Caleda to stand in place of his wife as the petitioner without penalty. The couple’s three daughters secured student visas to study in the U.S. and now live on Oahu. Contemplating the dimming prospects of his three sons receiving their green cards, Caleda shakes his head. “My eldest is going to be 61 years old, the next is 58, and the other one is 54 — there’s no justice on the matter,” he said. The applications of Caleda’s sons and those of many of his World War II comrades’ children fall into the family third-preference category. The U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services is currently processing petitions of this category dating back to 1993, according to the latest Visa Bulletin from the Department of State’s Bureau of Consular Affairs. The Philippines is second only to Mexico in the length of its waiting list for family-sponsored visas with a queue of 399,061 applicants as of November, according to an annual report compiled by the National Visa Center. The worldwide queue stands at 4,331,750 applicants. Earlier this year, U.S. representative Mark Takai (D-Hawai’i) introduced a bill — his first as congressman — identical to Hirono’s. While grateful for the support shown to the Filipino veterans, Caleda is anxious about the proposal’s chances of succeeding. “Are we moving forward, backward, sideward, or upward?” Caleda asked. “Time is of the essence.”

Vietnamese move commemoration after flag barred from base

WESTMINSTER, Calif. (AP) — Vietnamese Americans scrapped plans to mark the 40th anniversary of the fall of a Saigon at a Southern California Marine base after learning they could not fly the South Vietnamese flag. The commemoration expected to draw thousands on April 25 will be moved to a new location in Orange County’s Little Saigon, where community members can use the yellow-and-red-striped flag and play the South Vietnamese anthem, said Sophie Tran, an event spokeswoman. “We know without those two things, our event would completely lose its meaning,” Tran said. “The event is for the community and we need to think about them first.” The shift comes as the country’s 1.7 million Vietnamese Americans prepare to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the fall of South Vietnam to communist rule. Thousands fled the country for the United States, with many arriving at a refugee camp erected at Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton in Southern California.

The flag that belonged to South Vietnam before it fell to the communists is still widely used by Vietnamese immigrants at community celebrations in the region. Jason Johnston, a Camp Pendleton spokesman, said officials at Marine headquarters told the base that the flag cannot be flown at federal installations because the U.S. government can only recognize the current government of Vietnam. “We at Camp Pendleton certainly understand their concerns, but ultimately we have to rely on our rules and regulations,” he said.

Non-native fish discovered in California’s San Joaquin River

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — Biologists warn that a small fish native to China discovered in the San Joaquin River could be the latest invasive species to have colonized California. *The Sacramento Bee* reports the non-native fish belonging to the loach family was discovered in October in Madera County. It could take months to determine the exact species, but wildlife officials say scientists are certain the fish did not previously live in any river in California or North America. It likely ended up in the river when someone dumped it from a home aquarium. Ron Smith with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service says until the species is fully identified, it will be difficult to predict its invasive potential. However if it is particularly invasive, Smith says, the fish could be difficult to eradicate because of the size of the San Joaquin.

Defense contractor admits illegally exporting blueprints

TRENTON, N.J. (AP) — The former owner of two New Jersey defense contracting firms has admitted she conspired to send sensitive military blueprints to India. Forty-nine-year-old Hannah Robert of North Brunswick pleaded guilty in federal court to conspiracy to violate the Arms Export Control Act by sending to India technical drawings without approval from the State Department. Robert faces up to five years in prison when she is sentenced in June. Under terms of a plea agreement, she must pay more than \$181,000 to the Defense Department and forfeit nearly \$78,000. Prosecutors say the exported technical drawings included parts used in the torpedo systems for nuclear submarines, in military attack helicopters, and in F-15 fighter aircraft.

Prosecutors seek custody of \$100M in Asian, Indian artifacts

NEW YORK (AP) — New York City prosecutors have asked a judge for custody of more than 2,500 artifacts seized during raids of storage facilities affiliated with an imprisoned art dealer. The antiquities valued at \$100 million were looted from India and other southern Asian countries and smuggled by Subhash Kapoor, according to court documents. *The New York Times* reported that the complaint accused Kapoor of hiding the objects in the city. Prosecutors claim the items were seized during raids between 2012 and last year. They’ve asked the court for custody of the stolen artifacts so they can be returned to their countries of origin. Authorities also hope to prosecute Kapoor in the U.S. He’s currently awaiting trial in India on charges of plundering archaeological sites. He has denied any wrongdoing.

Backlash cancels auction of Japanese internment camp items

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Protests by Japanese-American groups and others have led a U.S. auction house to cancel a sale of 450 photos and artifacts from World War II internment camps. The *San Jose Mercury News* and others reported that thousands of Japanese Americans, groups, and sympathizers posted their opposition to the sale on social media and the auction house’s Facebook page. The Rago Auction House in New Jersey has declined to identify the owner of the collection or say how it came into that person’s possession. The collection includes 63 photos of people of Japanese descent who were imprisoned over fears they were spies and dozens of arts and crafts they made. Democratic representative Mike Honda of San Jose, California, who was interned in a camp, says the artifacts belong with the families or in museums.

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